

4-16-2012

Scenes from the Canadian Militia, 1866–1907: The Sir William Dillon Otter Albums

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Recommended Citation

Pulsifer, Cameron (2005) "Scenes from the Canadian Militia, 1866–1907: The Sir William Dillon Otter Albums," *Canadian Military History*: Vol. 14: Iss. 4, Article 5.
Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol14/iss4/5>

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Scenes from the Canadian Militia, 1866-1907

the Sir William Dillon Otter Albums

After joining the Victoria Rifles (a predecessor of the Queen's Own Rifles) in Toronto, in 1861, William Dillon Otter (1843-1929), remained at the heart of the Canadian Militia until his retirement in 1920. He was a young captain at the Battle of Ridgeway in 1866, and, after joining the Permanent Force in 1883, occupied the post of first Commandant of the Infantry School in Toronto. In May 1885 he saw action while in charge of a column of troops at Cut Knife Hill in the Northwest Uprising. Later, from November 1899 to December 1900, he commanded the 2nd Special Service Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment of Infantry, in the South African War, most notably at the Battle of Paardeburg in February 1900. Subsequently he served as the first Canadian Chief of the General Staff from 1908 to 1910 and as inspector general from 1910 to 1912. Knighted in 1913, during the First World War he held the position of officer commanding internment operations in Canada.

During the earlier part of his career Otter was devotee of the practice of amateur photography,

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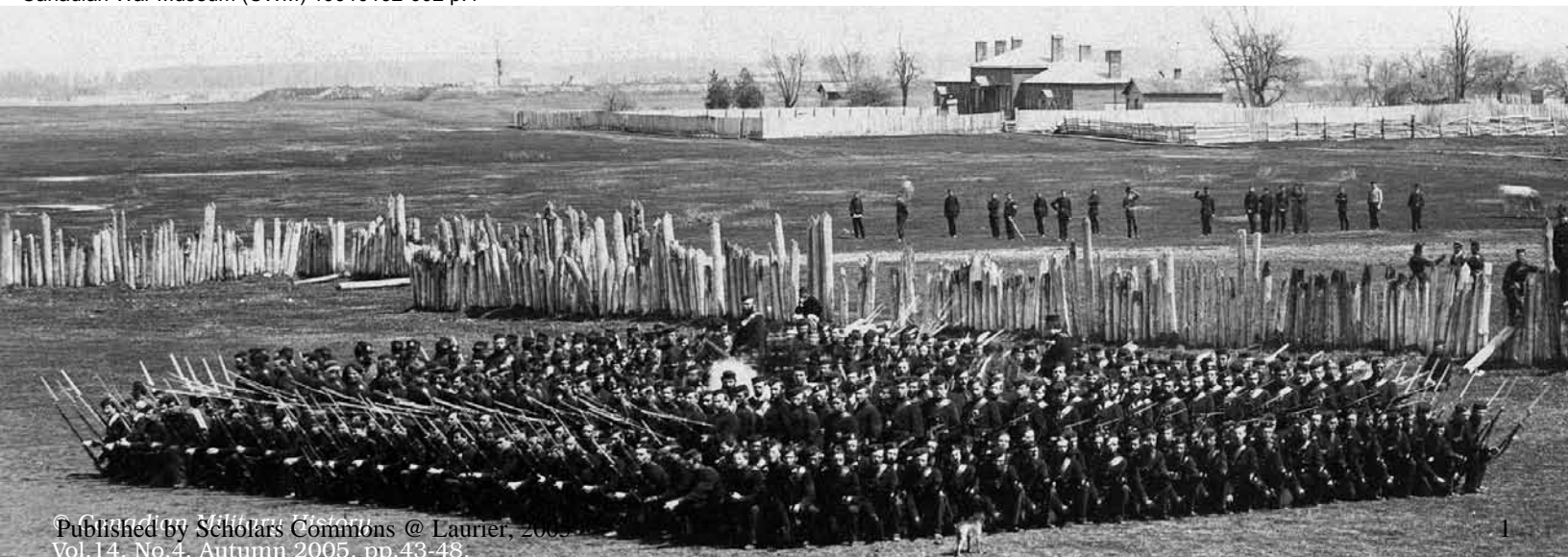
Musée canadien de la guerre

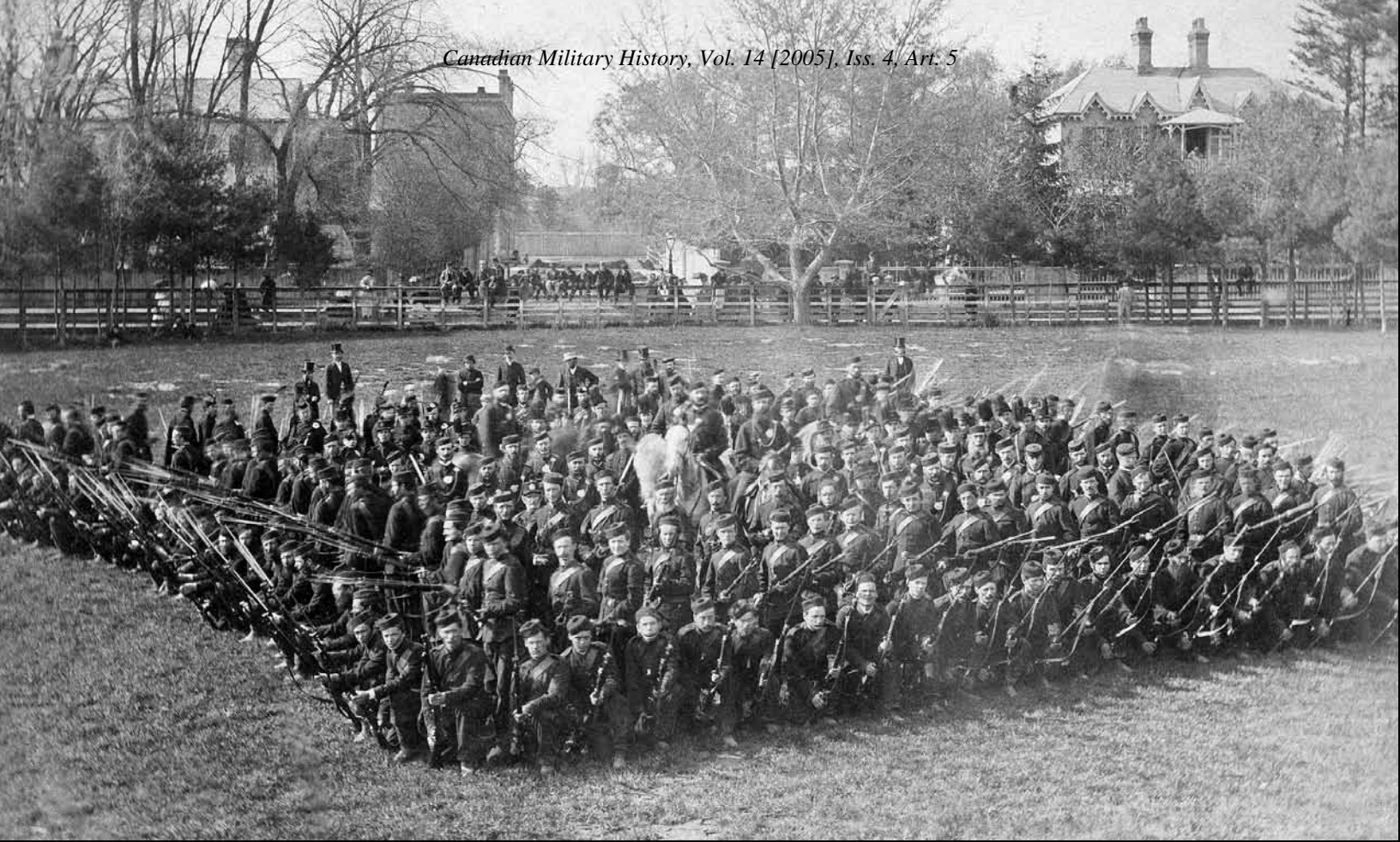
either taking himself, or arranging to have taken, pictures depicting various aspects of activities of the Canadian militia. These did not show the great dramatic moments, such as Cut Knife Hill or Paardeburg, but, rather, scenes from the everyday life of the service, in which he was so very proud to be an officer. These photographs, pasted in albums, were long preserved by Otter's descendants, along with his personal papers and correspondence. In 1991 they donated the collection to the Canadian War Museum, where they remain available for consultation and viewing in its new Military History Research Centre. A number of the photographs are reproduced here, both for the interesting scenes they depict of daily life in the Canadian Militia at a time when a Canadian military culture was being born, and as examples of the kind of photographic holdings that are available at the Canadian War Museum.

Cameron Pulsifer

The 2nd Admin Battlalion forms square, Niagara 1865.

Canadian War Museum (CWM) 19910162-002 p.4





The Queen's Own Rifles forming square in Toronto, 1868. Two years earlier, at the Battle of Ridgeway, the Queen's Own had also formed a square to resist attacking members of the Fenian brotherhood. The troops were unable to hold and the battle soon turned into full-scale rout.

No. 5 Company, Queen's Own Rifles on manoeuvres at Stratford, Ontario, 1866.



CWM 19910162-002 p.26 (top) CWM 19910162-002 p.17 (bottom)



CWM 19910162-003 p.6-1



CWM 19910162-003 p.2-2

In 1883 Otter became Commandant of the Canadian Infantry School, which position he continued to occupy, conjointly with that of adjutant general of Military District No. 2, after his return from the Northwest in 1885. The school was located in New Fort Barracks (renamed Stanley Barracks in 1893) in Toronto just west of Fort York on the shores of Lake Ontario. He immediately took up residence in the commanding officer's quarters, and while there he took the opportunity to record scenes of daily life within the barracks.

Above: The guard room in 1887.

Left: A barrack room, New Fort Barracks, Toronto, 1887.

Below left: The billiards room, Stanley Barracks. Toronto, 1894.

Below: The Otters' drawing room, Stanley Barracks, Toronto, 1898.



CWM 19910162-003 p.27-1



CWM 19910162-003 p.1



CWM 19910162-003 p.11-2

Above: "Royal Canadians" on the attack, 1890.



CWM 19910162-003 p.12-1

Left and Opposite above: Queen's Own Rifles, practices the defence during a field day, 1890.

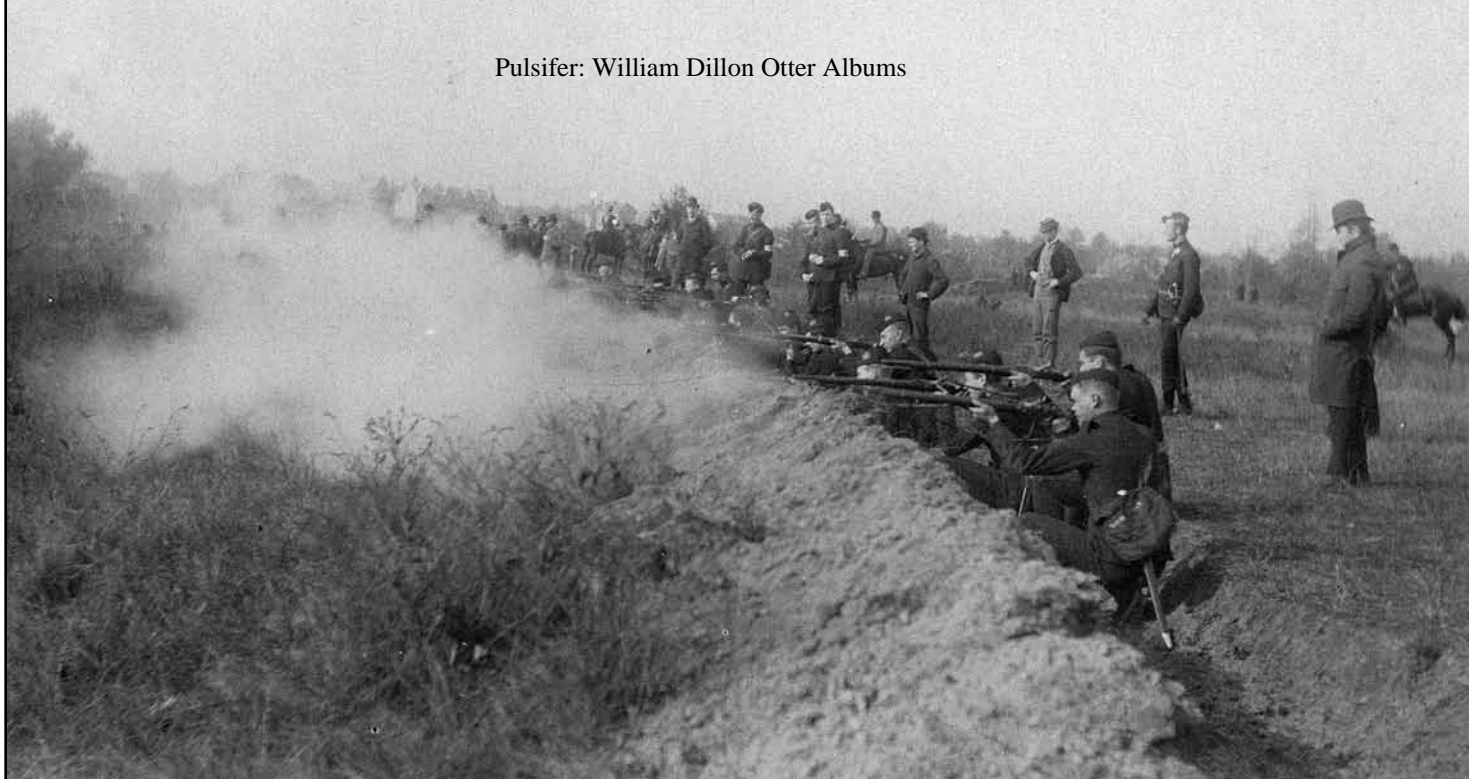
Below: Artillery staff, Hamilton and Toronto Batteries, Niagara Camp, 1893

Opposite below: Private Moore, Royal Regiment of Canadian Infantry, in full gear, 1894.

CWM 19910162-003 p.9-1



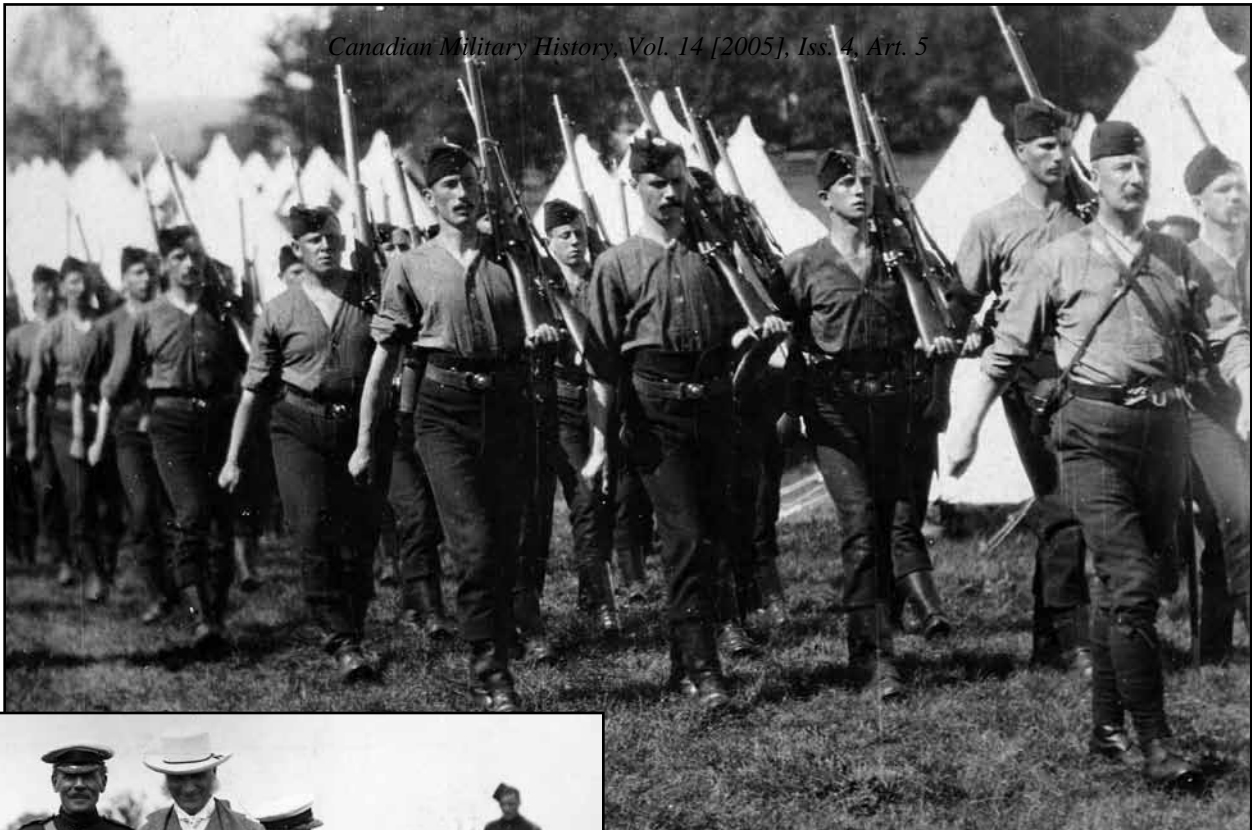
CWM 19910162-003 p.12-2



CWM 19910162-003 p.29-3



CWM 19910162-003 p.29-2

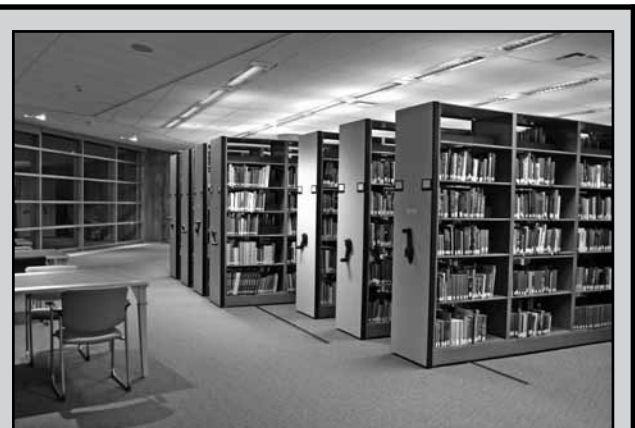


CWM 19910162-003 p.55-2 (top) CWM 19910162-004 p.6 (middle)



Above: The Royal Canadian Regiment at Rockcliffe, Ottawa, 1899. "Going out for work."

Left: Otter escorts the Minister of Militia and Defence, Sir Frederick Borden, through the lines at Niagara Camp, probably May 1904.



The photographs shown here comprise part of approximately 65,000 held by the George Metcalf Archival Collection, part of the Military History Research Centre, at the Canadian War Museum. Many of the photographs in this collection, like Otter's, stem from personal collections, and remain a rich resource that has hitherto not been sufficiently exploited. We anticipate that this will change, given the much improved public accessibility at the new Canadian War Museum. Hours of operation at the Military History Research Centre are 9:00 to 4:30, Monday to Fridays (closed on statutory holidays). To view photographs, clients are asked to provide three day's advance notification. More information can be found on the following website: <http://warmuseum.ca/cwm/libraryarchives/information_e.html>.