

Records of Our Militia Corps.—No. 1.

The Eighth "Royal Rifles."

By Captain F. C. Würtele, Retired List.

"Volens et Valens."

AS the 28th February will be the 25th anniversary of the formation of the Eighth Royal Rifles, a short record of the regiment may be interesting to the past as well as present members of the old corps and also to their many friends scattered throughout the Dominion. In consequence of the many events to be chronicled, and the limited space to which a cruel editor restricts me, it will be necessary to make this record somewhat concise, not to say abrupt.

The war declared by England against Russia, in 1854, no doubt awakened the Canadian Government to the fact that complications might possibly arise on this side of the Atlantic, and because the militia was very "sedentary" both in name and nature, a more active force was needed, therefore, on 16th August, 1855, general orders called for the formation of volunteer corps of all arms. Quebec responded with alacrity, for the following corps were gazetted on 31st August:—Quebec field battery, Capt. Gamache, one company garrison artillery, Capt. John Boomer, and one volunteer rifle company, Capt. Charles Corneil. Several other rifle companies, both English and French, were subsequently raised, but from some reason, probably from insufficient encouragement or the great expense they were put to for uniforms, the Government in those days only furnishing arms and accoutrements, there was a gradual disorganization, and on 8th August, 1861, the most of them were disbanded.

As the rebellion was now raging in the United States, this state of things did not last long, for a number of young gentlemen met together and organized the "Victoria Rifles," electing William H. Kerr, Esq., their captain, under whose command the company was, on 30th August, 1861, gazetted as the No. 2 Company Volunteer Militia Rifles of Quebec. The stoppage on the high seas of the British steamer "Trent" by an American man-of-war, and forcibly making prisoners of two of her passengers, Messrs. Mason and Slidell, nearly caused a war between the two countries. This gave an impetus to volunteering all over Canada, and in Quebec the following rifle companies were raised and gazetted, 10th January, 1862:—The Diamond Harbor Rifles, Capt. John Burstall, the "Wellingtons," Capt. James Gillespie, the Ballytrammons, Capt. L. B. Dumlin, and another company by Capt. Thomas Burns. On the 22nd of that month another was added to the list by Capt. Thomas J. Murphy.

These six companies were formed into a battalion and gazetted on 28th February, 1862, as the 8th Battalion Volunteer Militia Rifles of Quebec, with Captain Thomas J. Reeve, late Capt. H. M. 79th Highlanders, as Lieut.-Colonel in command.

The companies were numbered as follows:—

- No. 1—"Victorias," Captain Archibald Campbell.
- No. 2—Diamond Harbor, Capt. John Burstall.
- No. 3—Capt. Thomas Burns.
- No. 4—Wellingtons, Capt. James Gillespie, Brevet Lieut.-Col.
- No. 5—Ballytrammons, Capt. L. B. Dumlin.
- No. 6—Capt. Thos. J. Murphy.

By general orders of 28th March of that year the battalion was designated the 8th Batt. or "Stadacona" Rifles. Drill and rifle practice were carried on most energetically, and on 28th April, 1864, No. 4 Co., Capt. Gibsons's, was awarded the first prize of \$100 given by Government to the 7th military district for drill and general efficiency. By the same gazette No. 3 Co., Capt. Burns, and No. 6 Co., Capt. Murphy, having failed to pass the inspection, were removed from the list of the volunteer militia. On 23rd December, 1864, two companies were called out for active service, and on the 26th the Victorias, under Capt. Alleyn, Lieut. Fraser and Ens. Pendergast, left for the frontier, along with the Diamond Harbor boys, under Lieut. A. H. Jackson, Lieut. Froste Wood Gray and Ens. H. S. Lemesurier. The former company proceeded to join the 1st Administrative Batt. at Windsor, and the latter went to Laprairie to the headquarters of the 3rd Ad. Batt. These companies returned at the end of April, 1865, and the Ballytrammons, under Capt. Dumlin, Lieut. Cochrane and Ens. J. Louis, left for Windsor on the 26th April to be under Lieut.-Col. Reeve, who had been appointed to the command of the 1st Ad. Batt. This company, which was No. 1 of that battalion, returned home on 6th July. The next call out was for the Wellingtons, Capt. Gibsons, to proceed on the night of 30th December of that year to Chateau Richer in aid of the civil power. This civil power service, I may here remark, is one which is never glorious, and is uniformly disagreeable as well as dangerous work, and the number of times that the battalion has successfully performed such service in between pleasanter duties is an eloquent testimony to their discipline and utility.

As a precautionary measure against the threatened invasion, from the United States, of the Fenians in 1866, the Government called nearly the whole active force of the country to arms, and on midnight of 8th March the Eighth were called out and subsequently billeted in Montcalm Ward, near the drill shed, along with the rest of the Quebec city brigade and kept there, under arms, till the 29th, when they were dismissed with orders to drill regularly twice a week. Regular garrison duty was performed, and besides drilling every day for two hours both morning, afternoon and evening, a nightly picket of two companies alternately patrolled silently around outside the city walls, through the suburbs, St. Rochs, and lower town to the Queen's wharf and returned to the drill shed. This tramp of two hours at a time, because of the "dead march" pace, was very monotonous and tiresome. The regulars shut the city gates at midnight and kept the city surrounded by a cordon of sentries, posted on the ramparts, whose cry of "all's well" sounded clear and weird through the still night. The promised raid took place on the morning of 1st June, when the Fenians crossed over at Fort Erie, fought at Ridgeway and got back to Uncle Sam's territory as soon as possible. The regiment was called out and drilled part of every day till the 18th June, when it was dismissed. A citizens' relief committee had been formed, and subscriptions taken up to assist the families of the volunteers called out on these occasions, but the "Victorias" generously declined to accept any of this fund, and at the inspection held on the evening of 9th January, '67, Mr. H. S. Scott, on behalf of the committee, as a token of esteem for this generous action, presented the company with a solid silver bugle, which is still in possession of No. 1 company.

The 9th Batt. had two English companies on its strength, No. 5, known as the Highland Rifles, Capt. Herald Douglass, Lieut. Horace R. Sewell and Ensign Ed. F. H. T. Patterson, and No. 6 company, Capt. James Black Stevenson and Ensign Alfred H. White. These companies were on February 8th, 1867, transferred to the 8th Batt. as No. 5 and 6 companies respectively. This year the Enfield rifles were exchanged for Sniders and the price of ammunition was 25 cents a package of ten rounds.

On 1st July, No. 1 company, 55 strong, paraded at Montreal to take part in the review held there on Dominion Day, and marched past at the head of the 3rd Batt., or Victoria Rifles. In December, 1868, Quarter-Master Morgan and Mr. F. C. Würtele, lately a member of the Victorias, raised a company which was enrolled as No. 2, replacing the "Diamond Harbors," then disorganized. By the new law the whole force had to re-enroll within three months of this act coming into force: the companies of the 8th which complied with this order were Nos. 1, 2, 5 and 6 (vide G. O. of 6th February and 5th March, 1869.) Capt. Morgan and Lieut. F. C. Würtele were gazetted on 19th March, 1869, vice Capt. A. F. A. Knight and Lieut. J. Reynar, resigned.

In the spring of 1870 there were more rumours of Fenian raids, and the regiment was called out on 13th April and drilled three hours daily till the 22nd, when drill ceased. The threatened raid took place on the 24th May, when the "Pirates" crossed the borders at two points in the Eastern Townships and were quickly driven back with loss of several killed and wounded. The whole of the regulars in Quebec left for the frontier and the volunteer brigade did garrison duty during their absence, the 8th being quartered in the Jesuit barracks till the 29th of that month. That same spring Louis Riel started his first insurrection in the North-west and two regiments of volunteers, one each from the provinces of Quebec and Ontario, were formed and ordered to accompany the expedition under Col. Wolsley to suppress the rising, and were gazetted on 12th May. Several men of the 8th joined and Capt. Barrett of No. 1 company and Capt. Patterson of No. 5 were gazetted as Lieutenants, and Ensign W. Ross to the 2nd or Quebec battalion. Ens. Charles Douglass subsequently joined the depot company at Kingston.

By general orders of 14th October, 1870, the different companies of the 8th were renumbered, Nos. 5 and 6 to be respectively Nos. 3 and 4. A fife and drum band was organized on 3rd January, 1871, and subsequently changed into a brass band.

The regiment was called out to aid the civil power on 3rd and 4th March, 1873, at the Quebec East elections, and was quartered each day in the Jacques Cartier market hall. Captain and Bt.-Major Charles A. Pentland, of the 55th Megantic infantry, raised a company, which was on 12th September of that year gazetted as No. 5 company.

Again it was necessary to give aid to the civil power on nomination day, 22nd January, 1874, when Nos. 1 and 5 companies were placed on the Citadel for that day. The elections took place on the 29th, and as trouble was expected at Levis, Nos. 1, 4 and 5 companies were sent over there and Nos. 2 and 3 were placed on the Citadel.

On the evening of 29th January, 1875, while drill was in progress, the Mayor arrived and requested assistance at the Beauport lunatic asylum, then in flames; arms were piled, belts taken off, and the battalion got to the fire with celerity and worked hard till one o'clock next morning.