



Letters to the editor...



BLUE/YELLOW PENNON (PENNANT)

On page 5 of the Editor's Notes section of the Fall 1999 issue of the Quarterly, a question was raised regarding the history of the blue/yellow pennon. The Quarterly asked readers for their help in shedding some light on this subject and Cpl. Darren Campbell of the Burnaby RCMP has come to our rescue! The following is Cpl. Campbell's account of the blue/yellow pennon:

Dear Editor,

I am a collector of Mounted Police artifacts and have always been interested in the history of the Force. In my "travels," I've had the pleasure of befriending many former and retired members of the Force. They have been very supportive with my interest in the Force's history. One of those members is retired S/Sgt. Ralph Cave. Ralph was the Riding Master in Ottawa for the Musical Ride in the late 60s and early 70s. I'm sure that you, and everyone else, have seen a photo of Ralph. He's the standard Mountie whose image has adorned everything from playing cards to cigar box tins. He is a pleasure to know.

I remember having a conversation with Ralph about two years ago in regard to the blue and yellow pennon. Ralph stated that in the late 40s to early 50s, the Ride Master of the time, S/Sgt. Al Anderson, experimented with the colours of the pennon. The reason for the change was that the pennon colours were "borrowed" from the Polish Lancers.

Their colours were red and white. There are several myths that the colours of red and white were used due to the fact that the pennons, originally white, became stained with the blood of their enemies. As the blood ran down the pennon, it would harden causing the crimping effect. This left the crimped pennon red on the top and white on the bottom.

Knowing of this legend, a trial of using a pennon in the regimental colours of the RCMP began. The Regimental Colours of the RCMP are of course blue and yellow. The new trial pennon became a non-crimped pennon of blue over yellow. The new pennon was eventually abandoned to the approval of many of the equitation staff. Ralph told me that most preferred the red over white pennon for purely aesthetic reasons. I agree — the red and white pennon does go with the review order much better. Interestingly enough, being Canada's national police force, we now fly our national colours atop our lances as opposed to the regimental colours of the Force. I think that it's quite appropriate.

I can also offer an explanation regarding the old photographs and View-Master Reels on the RCMP. Many of the View-Master photos of that era were actually tinted photographs. Capturing the colour of yellow with black and white film can be pretty tricky. Yellow has a photographic peculiarity and appears white in a black and white photo. I've seen many Mountie photographs where the member is wearing "white" striped breeches. This is the same case; it was just tinted improperly.