

Military: AM / 88th BATTALION

# Lt.-Col. John Hall was driving force behind formation of 88th Fusiliers

By Jack Fawcett

**S**EVENTY-FIVE years ago today the 88th Regiment of Victoria Fusiliers held their first parade. And the *Colonist* carried this report of the event:

"The parade was formed in a quarter column of eight companies, with just under 200 men of all ranks, and in service dress, on parade. After taking over the parade, Lt.-Col. John Hall addressed the unit, saying: 'I feel this is a very important occasion, on my taking command at this first parade of the regiment.' He then carried out a close inspection of each company, noting that many men wore medals indicating previous service in many parts of the world. With satisfaction he noted that 90 per cent of the recruited strength of the regiment was on parade, and announced that recruit drill parades would be held every Thursday, and regimental parades would be on Friday evenings. After dismissal of the parade, all ranks gathered together at a meeting to form a Regimental Rifle Association."

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**T**HE WONDER is that a militia infantry battalion had not been established much earlier in Victoria. All the necessary ingredients were present: the need, the manpower and a favorable political atmosphere. When the British garrison artillery had withdrawn from Esquimalt in 1905, the Fifth (B.C.) Regiment of Canadian Garrison Artillery continued, as it had since 1883, to provide militia support to the regular force, but who would protect the men who manned the guns?

On the Mainland, the 6th Regiment (Duke of Connaught's Own Rifles) had been formed at Vancouver in 1899; the 102nd Regiment (Rocky Mountain Rangers) at Kamloops in 1908; the 104th Regiment (Westminster Fusiliers) and the 72nd Regiment (Seaford Highlanders) at Vancouver in 1910.

In Victoria, officers and men who had served in South Africa with Canadian or Imperial units had returned or emigrated to Victoria after hostilities ceased, and several graduates of the Royal Military College at Kingston had returned to their Victoria homes without having taken commissions in the regular force. The time was ripe for a militia infantry battalion to be formed here.

Authorization for the formation of the 88th Regiment came on Sept. 3, 1912. Recruitment and indoctrination proceeded at a deliberate pace — to ensure a good appearance of officers, NCOs and men for the first parade.

The first commanding officer was Lt.-Col. John A. Hall, an officer of considerable ability and boundless energy. He had worked for several years to bring the regiment into existence. It could even be said that his unique military career was an additional factor leading to the formation of the unit.

First gazetted as honorary lieutenant (quartermaster) in the Fifth Regiment in October, 1899, Hall served in that role for 13 months, then resigned and immediately accepted re-appointment as a provisional second lieutenant in the same unit on Nov. 30, 1900. Three weeks later he was confirmed as second lieutenant and, within eight months, was promoted to the rank of captain. Even more remarkable, after 18 months' service as a captain, he was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel and placed in command of the Fifth Regiment, just three years and four months after his first appointment!

Hall relinquished command of the Fifth in September 1909, went on reserve and became the most experienced and capable officer available to undertake the formation of a new militia infantry unit in Victoria.

This endeavor had the active support and encouragement of the District Officer Commanding, Col. Wadmore, who urged Hall to begin the formation of a roster of suitably experienced officers from the reserve list and to look for younger candidates for junior officer appointments. Meanwhile, the DOC started the lengthy process of securing funds in the militia vote for a new unit.

There was much to be done, and Hall could not take care of it all by himself. Fortunately there were a good number of seasoned officers available, many of them veterans of British units that served in the Boer War.

Hall chose Capt. Walter Bapty, who had served as a gunner in D Battery, Canadian Artillery, and later as a sergeant in the Mounted Scouts in South Africa, as his medical officer. Bapty had a medical degree from Western University, and had gradually migrated westward through Saskatchewan and Alberta to Victoria where, in 1909, he was in practice and gazetted as a second lieutenant. A physical fitness enthusiast, his career spanned both world wars and amounted to 36 years' service.

In selecting a chaplain to see to the spiritual needs of the proposed unit, Hall aimed as high as he possibly could and enrolled the Anglican Lord Bishop of Columbia, the Right-Rev. John Charles Roper, in the modest rank of honorary captain.

In 1910, Col. Hall was 42, not all that old for his new venture, bearing in mind he had already commanded a major militia unit for much longer



Victoria Fusiliers were formed in 1912. Many members went on to fight with distinction in the First World War.

than was usual. As his chief aide and first adjutant he enlisted the services of Maj. William St. John Beale, late of the Norfolk Regiment and the Bechuana Border Police. Beale, 46, was 190-cm tall and had an impressive military bearing. He was of great value to Hall in promoting the merits of a new militia unit to the general public, and in running an embryo orderly room.

To command the eight companies that comprised an infantry battalion, Hall was fortunate in gathering together a group of experienced officers, well-known in the community. In the order of companies (A through H) they would eventually command on first appointment, the roster of captains included: Harold J. Rouse Cullin, 35, an architect and former lieutenant, Royal Engineers, with South Africa experience; Charles F. de Salis, 35, late of the Essex Regiment in South Africa; Percy Byng-Hall, 32, a graduate of RMC Sandhurst with 7½ years service in the Indian Army; William G. Cunningham, 27, formerly of the Royal Garrison Artillery and the Wiltshire Regiment; A. Bruce Powley, 34, with previous militia service in eastern Canada; Charles A. Moorhead, 33, an Irish-born contractor, formerly of the Scottish Horse and Natal Mounted Rifles in post-war South Africa; Robert V. Harvey, 34, schoolmaster, warden and cadet instructor at University School; and Richard C. Cooper, 28, Dublin-born bank accountant with seven years' service in the Bechuana Border Police and the South Rhodesia Volunteers. All were to serve with distinction in the First World War.

Also recruited to serve on the headquarters staff were honorary Lieut. Herbert L. Roberts, 41, quartermaster, formerly three years in The Lancashire Rifles and three years with Hall in the Fifth Regiment; Regimental Sgt.-Maj. Fred Guest, 43, a 21-year veteran of the Royal Engineers; Orderly Room Sgt. Walter H. Keatings; and Hospital Sgt. H. W. Clark.

To organize, train and conduct the regimental band, Hall enlisted Band Sgt. Reginald G. Rowland, a well-known local musician and composer of popular music. Among the more than 20 original members of the band were other familiar names: James M. Miller, formerly a bandmaster in Britain, France, and, after the war, the long-time Capt.-Bandmaster of The Canadian Scottish; William Fairall; Joseph Ball; Thomas Pilgrim; George Keown; William Davidson; David Rife; George Westwood; and bugler James McVie, the youngest of three brothers mentioned below.

To serve as junior officers, Col. Hall selected a very promising group of young men, well-known in the community including: Walter S. Barton, 22; \*H. Beaumont Boggs, 20, graduate of RMC Kingston; \*Herbert A. Bromley, 31; \*Carleton C. Holmes, 23; \*Napier A. Jessop, 24, late of The Bedfordshire Regiment; \*Henry C. V. Macdowall, 21, graduate of RMC Kingston; A. Frederick Nation, 23, graduate of RMC Kingston; Harold T. Nation, 34, born in New Zealand; George E. Shaw, 26, late the Norfolk Yeomanry; Lionel H. Major, 27; and E. O. Carew Martin, law student and son of Mr. Justice Archer Martin,

B.C. Supreme Court. Joining at the first summer camp were Lieuts. C. H. Collison and H. E. Rowley.

A good number of experienced, capable senior NCOs were enrolled, assessed and assigned to appropriate duties as color sergeants (equivalent to today's company sergeant majors). In order of companies they were: Col.-Sgts. B. H. Anderson, W. McVie, F. Barkshire, J. C. Perry, W. Dawson, V. Low and, in acting capacities, Sgts. E. L. Hall and J. O'Donovan. At camp, Cook Sgt. George Wolfe was a key NCO, along with platoon sergeants T. P. Rooney, J. B. Acland, J. Davey, H. Brown and acting Sgt. F. W. Newberry.

Among the junior NCOs were corporals J. R. McIlree, R. W. Nixon, G. E. Ambery, R. H. Fort, R. H. Columbine, W. Collins and lance-corporals A. Ford-Young and J. C. Anthony. In the ranks of private soldiers to begin with were many well-known to Victorians of that day, including bugler Fred Richardson, active in rifle-shooting and Bisley competitions; the Hobdays, R. E. and V. M.; two more McVie brothers, of whom Robert would become garrison sergeant major at Work Point Barracks in the Second World War; Edgar Rossiter, Alf Boyce, C. S. Thurburn, A. S. Golding, D. Michelin, J. S. Hibberd, W. Craigmyle, W. Kirchin, S. Holdrige, Tom Obee, R. Sneddon, F. Thompsett and Fred Durick.

The keystone in building a new unit is the availability of funds in the militia vote of federal spending estimates. Evidently the earliest such assurance that the DOC could obtain was for 1913-14, which must have disappointed Hall, as he seems to have been ready to start recruiting in March 1912, and would have preferred funding available in 1912-13.

Nevertheless, as reported by the *Colonist* and the *Times* on the following day, a public meeting was held at City Hall on March 7, with Maj. Beckwith in the chair. The meeting was well attended. Hall and Beale reported progress and urged public support. Among those present were Cols. E. G. Prior and A. W. Currie, past and present commanders of the Fifth Regiment, as well as Maj. F. W. L. Moore, district staff officer, Maj. W. Ridgway Wilson and Capt. J. C. Harris of the Fifth, and Capt. (Naval) Clive Phillips-Wolley, lending their support to the proposal.

After his progress report, Hall appealed to civic pride, pointing out, quite accurately, that a city as populous and affluent as Victoria, compared to others of similar size and potential, did not measure up at all favorably in terms of citizens' support for militia units.

Citing the estimated cost of busbies as distinctive headdress for the unit and musical instruments for a regimental band, he appealed for a public subscription of \$10,000, to be raised over a period of three years, as a sign that Victorians were ready to match the contributions offered by the provisional officers. An office had been leased in the Haynes Building on Fort Street, where inquiries, subscriptions and offers of service could be made. A committee made up of Hall, Beale, Captains Powley, de Salis, Harvey and Cunningham

and Lieut. Jessop were directing the agenda, and plans were under way to establish an interim officers' club in the Ritz Hotel.

A strong letter of support from Premier Richard McBride was read, along with similar expressions from the local MP, the Hon. A. E. McPhillips, KC, and J. H. McGregor, president of the Board of Trade and the Real Estate Board.

In regard to the proposed name for the unit: City of Victoria Fusiliers, Hall cited the 7th Royal Fusiliers as a regiment the new unit could look to for standard of excellence.

A response was not long in coming, though not quite what Hall was anticipating. At a meeting of the Victoria Trades and Labor Council, a motion was passed condemning the plan for a new infantry unit, and advising members already serving to withdraw when they legally could. Among the concerns of the council were the views that only the wealthy would benefit; that it was a scheme of the manufacturers to garner some kind of protection in the event of industrial strife; and, somehow, that the threat of imported, cheap labor would be increased.

Despite this apparent setback Hall pressed on with his plan.

In the *Times* of June 12, 1912, there were two items concerning the proposal. One was the announcement of a smoker and concert in the A.O.F. Hall on Broad Street the following evening, in the interest of the new regiment. The other was a report of a meeting held the previous evening at the Foresters' Hall by the St. Andrews and Caledonian Society, at which "the formation of a regiment of Scottish Fusiliers in Victoria" was discussed.

Hall's plans all came to fruition when, on Nov. 9, 1912, a news item in the *Times* said:

## NEW REGIMENT NOW OFFICIALLY FORMED

Major Beale Receives Copy of General Order

Authorizing 88th Victoria Fusiliers  
"The 88th Regiment Victoria Fusiliers is now in official existence, the authority having at last reached Major Beale, the Adjutant. The gazette notice announcing the formation of the new regiment is dated Nov. 7, 1912:

"The following extracts from an advance copy of General Order dated Ottawa, 3rd Sept., 1912, are published for general information:  
"Military District No. 11 — the organization of an eight company Regiment of Infantry, to be designated the 88th Regiment Victoria Fusiliers, with headquarters at Victoria, B.C., is authorized."

"Maj. Beale said this morning the full strength of the regiment was 310 officers and men. The regiment will be given accommodation in the new drill hall when that building is completed."

\* Killed in action, second battle of Ypres, 1915.

† Prisoner of war, along with Maj. P. Byng-Hall, 1915-18.