

# "Elliott's Horse"

Nov 8, 1936  
3rd Edition

By Col. W. K. Walker, 1

R. T. Elliott, K.C., of this city, was the founder of Elliott's Horse—a "free-lance" cavalry unit, composed almost entirely of seasoned veterans, which was raised in Victoria in the early days of the Great War. With the possible exception of the original battalion of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, no other Canadian unit comprised as many men who had seen active service previously. The story of Elliott's Horse is presented by one of the members of the force, Colonel W. K. Walker, who spent considerable time in collecting the data required for the writing of this interesting page in Canadian military history.

IN the month of August, 1914, like many thousands more, I was looking around for a unit to join in order to do my "bit."

I was visiting Colonel Andrew Haggard, D.S.O., and Mrs. Haggard at Cowichan Lake on Vancouver Island. Colonel Haggard, a brother of Sir Rider Haggard, was a veteran officer of many campaigns and took a serious view of the war just started. I suggested it might blow over in no time, but the old campaigner shook his head and said: "Lord Roberts went unheeded. This war has been brewing a long time. It will not blow over so quickly."

Another friend in the district was Mr. Hugh Savage, the owner-manager of The Cowichan Leader at Duncan, and a veteran of the Boer War. In the evenings, Hugh Savage and a few others gathered at the exhibition grounds of Duncan and did voluntary drill under the city clerk, Mr. James Greig, a retired experienced soldier. Those in possession of medals wore them. I was then twenty-six and had no medals.

Hugh Savage is now the member for his constituency in the British Columbia Legislature at Victoria, and James Greig is the Mayor of Duncan.

## All Veterans

ELLIOTT'S Horse was at that time being organized at Victoria, so I went to look them over. They looked good to me and I decided to join but was disappointed when told all must be veterans with previous active service. I decided to present myself, however, and take a chance.

On August 17, 1914, with fear and trembling, I presented myself at the quarters of Elliott's Horse; was taken before a sergeant with many ribbons on his breast; was interviewed by Capt. A. C. G. Smith, the Officer Commanding; was medically examined and declared fit for active service; was accepted as a member of Elliott's Horse and forthwith issued with breeches, puttees, khaki shirt, mackinaw jacket and Stetson hat. I was in the army now!

The founder of Elliott's Horse was Mr. R. T. Elliott, K.C., a prominent and much-beloved citizen of Victoria. On the outbreak of war it was represented to Mr. Elliott that cavalry was urgently needed, so Mr. Elliott cabled Lord Roberts asking whether, if a squadron were raised in Victoria, it could be made use of at once. Lord Roberts replied that he was sure any ex-cavalrymen would be welcome, particularly those with war experience.

Mr. Elliott was supported in his patriotic enterprise by Mr. William Blakemore, president and editor of The Week, a newspaper and review published in Victoria; Colonel the Hon. E. G. Prior, Lieutenant-Governor of British Columbia; Mr. G. H. Barnard, M.P. (now Senator Barnard), and Sir Richard McBride, Premier of British Columbia.

## Early Training

ELLIOTT'S Horse was composed of five officers and seventy-eight men. The unit was quartered in a large house in the residential district of Victoria and some training was carried out in a field nearby known as "Pemberton Meadows." The Minister of Militia and Defence in Ottawa, General Sam

Hughes, had instructed Colonel Ogilvie, commanding Military District No. 11, to assist Mr. Elliott, and some horses and rifles were loaned the squadron.

In its issue of October 24, 1914, The Week had this to say:

"By common consent, the squadron known as Elliott's Horse is about the finest and sturdiest body of men ever gathered together for military purposes in Victoria.

"At the moment of writing, the squadron is preparing to leave, and it will do so with the hearty good wishes of every member of the community. Of the patriotism, generosity and self-sacrifice manifested by Mr. R. T. Elliott, K.C., who raised the squadron, it is impossible to speak too highly."

Before its departure from Victoria, Elliott's Horse was reviewed by the Lieutenant-Governor, who was accompanied by Sir Richard McBride, the Premier; Mr. Alexander Stewart, Mayor of Victoria; Mr. W. Blakemore, Mr. G. H. Barnard, M.P., and, of course, the squadron's founder, Mr. R. T. Elliott.

Spencer's, Ltd., a large departmental store in Victoria, presented all the men with a new pair of boots and underclothing. One of the heads of the firm, Mr. Victor Spencer, became a colonel in the Canadian Army Service Corps and held a very responsible appointment.

## A Proud Record

THE members of Elliott's Horse, with their previous record of service, were:

Capt. A. C. G. Smith, O.I.V.M.I., Queen's West M.I., S.A. Queen's Medal;

Capt. W. A. C. Underwood, Mounted Infantry, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

Lieut. H. L. Houlgate, C.M.R., Royal Irish Rifles, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

Lieut. E. L. Roberts, 1st Imperial Light Horse, Basutoland Rebellion, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

Lieut. G. H. Sloan, Royal Scots Greys, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

W. A. A. Wiltshire Regiment, the Indian Frontier;

C. G. Adams, Elliott's Horse;

J. Bowen, 16th Lancers, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

L. H. Boyce, Imperial Yeomanry, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

F. C. Brewer, Imperial Light Horse, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

E. Boot, R.F.A., S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

A. Butler, C.M.R., S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

B. M. Brown, Imperial Yeomanry, S.A. Queen's Medal;

G. Brackenrig, Australian Bushmen, S.A. Queen's Medal;

W. A. Burnett, South African Constabulary, S.A. Queen's Medal;

G. T. Bell, Imperial Yeomanry, S.A. Queen's Medal;

R. J. Bachus, 15th Light Horse, Calgary;

R. Berrill, O.R. Sergeant, Elliott's Horse;

J. Crump, R.H.A., S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

W. H. J. Caple, Australian Bushmen, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

G. Gander, Imperial Yeomanry, S.A. Queen's Medal;

J. Christie, Royal Engineers, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

A. Cross, Imperial Yeomanry, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

A. K. Cape, Cape Mounted Rifles, S.A. Queen's Medal;

R. E. Dare, Northumberland Fusiliers, Egyptian Medal; Khedive Medal, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

J. De La Mothe, Elliott's Horse;

W. Ferris, Elliott's Horse;

G. F. Griffin, Border Regiment, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

G. W. Gorham, Cape Mounted Rifles, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

H. L. Grace, 2nd Life Guards, Zulu Rebellion 1906 Medal, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

M. M. Gibson, Queen's Own Rifles and Algonca Rifles;

J. Gibson, Elliott's Horse;

G. W. Getgood, Elliott's Horse;

J. Holt, 1st K.R.R., S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

B. Hill, 13th Hussars, S.A. Queen's Medal;

J. Howe, Imperial Yeomanry, S.A. Queen's Medal;

W. Hickey, 17th Lancers, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

E. Hyde, 15th Hussars, Indian Frontier Medal;

H. Haggerty, Natal Carabineers, Zulu Rebellion 1906 Medal, S.A. Queen's Medal;

R. A. Heffron, 16th Lancers, S.A. Queen's Medal;

Z. M. Hamilton, Elliott's Horse;

A. A. Johnson, Paget's Horse, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

C. Jenkinson, Imperial Yeomanry;

W. James, Elliott's Horse;

P. J. Kenyon, Rhodesian Regiment, Matabele Medal, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

A. Lawford, U.S. Cavalry, Ceylon M.R.;

F. Lehfeldt, Imperial Yeomanry;

O. B. Lowenstern, Australian M.I., S.A. Queen's Medal;

R. Lowe, Royal Horse Guards;

P. A. Leslie, South Africa Light Horse, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

W. Miller, Indian Frontier Medal, Mexico Madero Medal, S.A. Queen's and King's Medal;

H. W. Muir, South African Constabulary, S.A. Queen's Medal;

J. Mellen, Imperial Yeomanry,

H. W. Moore, Norfolk Regiment, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

A. Murdoch, Imperial Yeomanry, S.A. Queen's Medal;

G. W. Munyard, East Kent Regiment, S.A. Queen's Medal;

W. R. MacDonald, Seaforth Highlanders, S.A. Queen's Medal;

J. Maitland, Scots Greys, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

A. McNamara, Elliott's Horse;

A. P. Norman, Elliott's Horse;

J. O'Donovan, 4th (Royal Irish) Dragoon Guards;

T. G. Powell, Rhodesian Regiment, Matabele Medal, S.A. Queen's Medal;

A. Robertson, New Zealand, M.R., S.A. Queen's Medal;

A. P. Reynolds, 8th Hussars, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

A. E. Robinson, Imperial Light Horse, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

W. Reeder, Royal West Kents, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

A. D. Radford, Lumsden's Horse, S.A. Queen's Medal;

C. M. Randale, Buffs Regiment, Mexico;

G. Sargeant, 8th Hussars, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

T. A. Sargood, Queensland Imperial Bushmen, S.A. Queen's Medal;

J. T. Sperry, Sherwood Foresters, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals;

C. Scott, 1st Life Guards, Natal Police, Cor-

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onation Medal, Zulu Rebellion 1906 Medal, S.A. Queen's Medal;

T. B. Steele, 1st King's Dragoon Guards, S.A. Queen's Medal;

F. Tomlinson, R.A.M.C., S.A., Queen's Medal;

A. Tait, Scottish Horse, S.A. Queen's Medal;

J. Tabbernor, 21st Lancers, S.A. Queen's Medal;

F. A. Tasker, South African Light Horse, S.A. Queen's Medal;

E. P. Waldo, Munster Fusillers, S.A. Queen's Medal;

W. K. Walker, St. Bees O.T.C.; (Capt.)

J. Watt, R.G.A., Boxer Rebellion Medal;

P. B. Woodford, Imperial Yeomanry, S.A. Queen's Medal;

G. Woodhouse, Imperial Yeomanry, Mexico; A. Wright, 16th Lancers, S.A. Queen's and King's Medals.

To say that all these officers and men who in 1914 bore the title "Elliott's Horse" were literally wiped out by November 11, 1918, is almost true. Only twelve of the eighty-three got through alive.

### The Departure

ARRANGEMENTS were first made for Elliott's Horse to proceed to England by way of New York, the first step of the journey to be by boat to Seattle. This plan was cancelled at the last moment due to objection from the United States Government. The unit had actually marched through the streets to the Seattle steamer, but was stopped before embarking. The American authorities, though very courteous, firmly pointed out that while the men were not actually attested in a military sense, nevertheless they were a military body, and as the U.S.A. was a neutral country international complications might arise.

On October 23, Elliott's Horse bade farewell to Victoria and left on the afternoon steamer for Vancouver. The vessel was decked in bunting and the citizens of Victoria turned out to give the men a hearty send-off.

Montreal was reached on October 29. On the same special train was a number of the R.C.R. en route to Bermuda.

Elliott's Horse were given excellent accommodation and meals on the journey from Vancouver to Montreal. Mr. Elliott's instructions were that his men had to be well looked after. He doubtless realized that many would never return.

I quickly made chums with many, and in particular with Cape, Ferris, Heffron, Reeder, Gracey, James and Gibson. These men, all veterans of the Boer War, were with me during my own baptism of fire at Givenchy on the night of May 24, 1915. Reeder, a veteran of the Royal West Kents and a lovable character, was killed in action while carrying an important message for me. Other of my friends included Muir, Lowe, Waldo, Adams and Backhus, all of whom won commissions on the field.

### The Ocean Crossing

AT Montreal, Elliott's Horse embarked on the Ss. Letitia of the Anchor-Donaldson Line, which sailed for Glasgow on October 31. General Sam Hughes, Minister of Militia and Defence, anxious to assist Mr. Elliott, cabled the War Office in London as follows:

"Four officers and eighty men, called Elliott's Horse, left Montreal for Glasgow October 31 on board Letitia. They come from British Columbia and wish to join cavalry. All old soldiers who have seen previous active service. Please grant facilities."

Little did I think when going aboard the Letitia that I, the youngest member and one

with no previous active service, was to become the leader of Elliott's Horse on reaching England.

My quarters on the Letitia consisted of a hammock in No. 1 hold. The first night my hammock broke and I slept on the floor of the ship. The second night, after getting acquainted with the ship's baggage master, two chums and myself slept in a box room. The liner was filled to capacity with civilians, but we cared little about our accommodation so long as we got "over there."

This crossing was in strange contrast to my return to Canada nearly five years later, when I received, just before sailing, the following message from the Adjutant-General at Argyle House:

"As the Senior Effective Combatant Regimental Officer on board Sailing No. 46, the Ss. Adriatic, you will be Officer Commanding Troops."

### Varied Talent

AFTER a good crossing, the Letitia docked at Glasgow on November 9. We had been a source of entertainment to the passengers, who watched our drill on deck and enjoyed our concerts. Elliott's Horse possessed good concert talent, which included two pianists, an accordionist, impersonator, two baritones, a conjurer and a ventriloquist. The passengers were most generous and kept everyone going with smokes, etc. There was also a Presbyterian minister from Glasgow who held church service and presided at the concerts.

Captain A. C. G. Smith, the Officer Commanding, had gone ahead via New York, and Captain W. A. C. Ugderwood was in temporary command. He was assisted by Lieutenants H. L. Houlgate, B. L. Roberts and G. H. Sloan.

During the voyage, the men would discuss what units they would join on reaching England. The majority intended rejoining their old Imperial regiments. Frequently I would be asked what were my plans—what regiment I would join. My mind, from the start, was made up. I planned to join the Canadian Division recently arrived on Salisbury Plain. I was a Canadian by adoption; a Canadian I would remain, and as a Canadian I would fight.

Soon I noticed more and more men talking less about their old regiments and more about the Canadian Cavalry. By the time Glasgow was reached everyone wanted to join the Canadian Cavalry at Salisbury Plain! The men, on reaching England, were free to join any cavalry unit of their own choice. That was Mr. Elliott's wish and the definite plan of the unit he so patriotically organized and generously financed.

### Plans Upset

HOWEVER, Captain Smith, who met the Letitia at Glasgow, had in the meantime arranged for Elliott's Horse to become a squadron of the 2nd King Edward's Horse, then stationed at Hounslow Barracks near London. Disembarking at Glasgow we entrained for London, arriving on November 10 at Hounslow Barracks, where comfortable quarters were in readiness.

I took the first opportunity to tell Captain Smith that my choice was a Canadian unit and that I thought some others were of the same mind. Captain Smith fully discussed the situation with us and, finding that nobody wanted to join the 2nd King Edward's Horse, he realized the deal with the K.E.H. would have to be called off. The Officer Commanding, Colonel Cradock, a splendid officer, made an admirable speech, but his eloquence was not enough to change the minds of Elliott's Horse.

I was then unanimously chosen to command Elliott's Horse, and forthwith took charge. Captains Smith and Underwood rejoined their old regiments, as also did Lieut. Robert Sloan. Sloan joined the Scottish Horse and was killed in action. Lieut. Houlgate remained with me and joined Lord Strathcona's Horse as a

trooper. Late in 1915 he was commissioned in the 2nd Battalion the Border Regiment.

In the square of Hounslow Barracks the 2nd King Edward's Horse cheered Elliott's Horse and Elliott's Horse cheered King Edward's Horse. We were given railway transportation up to London; after that we must find for ourselves.

### A Fine Unit

IT is a coincidence that the 2nd King Edward's Horse, which was a splendid regiment, later became part of the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, and I had many chats later with Colonel Cradock and his brother, Major Cradock, who was second-in-command. Another brother, Admiral Sir Christopher Cradock, went down with his flagship, Good Hope, in the battle against the German Admiral Von Spee off Coronel, on November 1, 1914. Four Canadian midshipmen were serving with the Good Hope in that engagement.

On arrival in the City on November 12, Elliott's Horse marched from the station to the Union Jack Club, 91 Waterloo Road, where I was successful in coming to terms with the comptroller of the club regarding temporary quarters.

Captain Smith took away with him all the squadron's documents, which was the first obstacle to overcome, as fresh documents had to be prepared.

Some time ago I wished to check up some dates and wrote the Union Jack Club in London. The reply was:

"Dear Sir:

"With reference to your letter dated the 7th inst.: According to our records Elliott's Horse booked accommodation at this club from November 12 to 17, 1914. You yourself occupied Room No. 228. Hoping this will give you the information you require.

"Believe me, yours faithfully,

"J. H. HAYWARD,

"Brigadier-General,

"Comptroller, Union Jack Club."

### A Cool Reception

I NOW had a big job on my hands and first went to call on the High Commissioner for Canada, Sir George Perley, who received me very coolly. He paced the floor of his office and in no uncertain terms gave me to understand that Elliott's Horse had mutined!

When eventually I got a word in edgeways, I told Sir George he was entirely wrong and had been misinformed. He threatened to send us all back to Canada, but I said: "That would do no good, sir, as we would come right back again." I asked him if he would care to inspect Elliott's Horse, but this seemed to make him even more cross.

On November 13, Elliott's Horse marched through the streets of London and, with their semi-military uniform, Stetson hats and soldierly bearing, drew much attention and favorable comment. Mr. (now Sir George) McLaren Brown, European manager of the Canadian Pacific Railway, happened to be standing by looking on. He learned who we were and became a very good and useful friend.

Some ladies very kindly organized sight-seeing trips to keep the men occupied. Visits were made to Westminster Abbey, the Tower of London, St. Paul's Cathedral and many other places; tickets to theatres were also generously handed out.

### "K. of K."

THE following day, November 14, I called by appointment to see Lord Kitchener at the War Office. He was most kind and sympathetic and said he had had excellent reports about the members of Elliott's Horse and that men with previous war experience were needed. Back of the stern countenance of the British Secretary of War I could discern both kindness and understanding.

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Upon enquiries being made, it was ascertained that the Canadian Cavalry on Salisbury Plain were already under strength due to sickness and that Elliott's Horse would be welcomed.

Free transportation having been granted, Elliott's Horse left the Union Jack Club on November 17 and entrained for Salisbury Plain where a hearty welcome was awaiting them from the Royal Canadian Dragoons and Lord Strathcona's Horse. Everyone was happy and contented to be among their own again. I joined the R.C.D.

## The Reward

TWO days later Colonel C. M. Nelles, Officer Commanding the R.C.D., sent for me and asked me to accompany him to the headquarters of the 1st Canadian Division as the General Officer Commanding, General Alderson, wished to see me. I was thanked for my work with Elliott's Horse and rewarded with a commission as a lieutenant. I felt it a great honor to become an officer of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, and was especially glad because it meant my remaining with so many of my pals of Elliott's Horse.

In concluding this account, it is gratifying to be able to record that Mr. Elliott was completely satisfied with the outcome of his patriotic effort and has repeatedly remarked how proud he was of the men who had worn the badge of Elliott's Horse.

(This article is reprinted from the October issue of The Legionary, the official national publication of the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League.)