

The Regiment

In the unsettling times of the late 1800s, William Nassau Kennedy, second Mayor of Winnipeg and life long soldier, applied to Ottawa to raise a militia infantry regiment; with the Fenian raids of 1871 still fresh in peoples minds, and the provisional government established by Louis Riel in 1869 growing restless, the need for a local force was obvious. Lieutenant-Colonel Kennedy was granted permission, and appointed as the first Commanding Officer of The 90th "Winnipeg" Battalion of Rifles, gazetted 9 November 1883, and within a week organized its first parade in the area of Lombard Street. The Ninetieth were quickly drawn into action: Lord Kitchener requested a contingent of Canadian voyageurs to aid in his fighting the Dervishes (Mahdists) in the Nile. LCol Kennedy led the Winnipeg contingent to Khartoum to provide relief to General Gordon, making the Ninetieth among the first militia units to serve outside the shores of North America. LCol Kennedy died of smallpox in London on the return journey to Canada.



The Regiment received its true “baptism by fire” during the Northwest Rebellion in the early days of 1885; unrest was stirring in Troy (now Qu’Appelle SK) with the return of Louis Riel from Montana, who had established an armed camp and a new Provisional Government. Fearing further trouble, the men of the Ninetieth underwent training under the command of the units second Commanding Officer, Alfred McKeand, and were soon called upon; with the imprisonment of people by Riel’s Métis, General Middleton lead the Ninetieth in the Northwest Rebellion campaign. The Ninetieth participated in the Battle of Fish Creek and the decisive engagement that ended the rebellion, the Battle of Batoche, these battles becoming the Unit’s first and most honoured Battle Honours, cementing The Royal Winnipeg Rifles place in the Canadian Military, and the hearts and minds of the citizens of Winnipeg, and moreover, Canada.

The Battle of Fish Creek is where The Royal Winnipeg Rifles can truly claim their place in military history, for it was there that the Regiment was conferred, arguably, one of the most famous monikers in the Commonwealth Armed Forces: The Little Black Devils. How the name came about is equally as infamous; awed by the steady advance and sharp-shooting of the men of the Ninetieth, clad in rifle green tunics, a prisoner was heard to say, “*the red coats we know, but who are those little black devils?*”. The use of the name spread quickly, in particular with General Middleton himself referring to the

Rifles by the name in official documentation. Not long after their return from Winnipeg, the nickname was officially recognized, and the rampant devil and motto, *Hosti Acie Nominati* – Named by the Enemy – was born, and has been a source of pride and bragging rights since.



The Boer conflict in South Africa in 1899 found support from the Ninetieth in the form of five hundred men, and later an additional two hundred and fifty, serving King and Country as a company of the Royal Canadian Regiment, earning the Regiment to being bestowed its fourth Battle Honour, South Africa, 1899-1900. The year 1899 also found the Regiment honoured with the appointment of its first Honorary Colonel, His Excellency, The Right Honourable Sir Gilbert John Elliot-Murray-Kynynmound, 4th Earl of Minto, KG, GCSI, GCMG, PC, whom had served as chief-of-staff to General Middleton during the Northwest Rebellion, and thus he was well-known by the men and officers of the Ninetieth. In June of the same year “Pork, Beans and Hard Tack”[□] was officially authorized as the Regimental March, based on the popular song of the time “Old Solomon Levi”[□]. Sung on the arduous 325 mile march in the April snow from Qu’Appelle, with little shelter and little more to eat than pork, beans and hard tack (a hard, non-perishable bread), the men made up the words as they went along, a tradition carried onto this day with many songs adapted to army life over the years. Major Buchan is credited with formalizing and creating the verses for “Pork, Beans and Hard Tack”[□], the chorus of which is sung with great gusto by soldiers of the Regiment

Pork, beans and hard tack, tra, la, la, la, la, la, la
Poor hungry soldiers, tra la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la, la

□

When the First World War erupted, the 90th Regiment “Winnipeg Rifles” (as we were known by then) answered the call, forming the 8th Canadian Battalion, 90th Winnipeg Rifles, Canadian Expeditionary Force, further forming the 2nd Battalion, 90th Overseas Battalions, the 190th and the 203rd, as well as providing companies to other battalions. The Royal Winnipeg Rifles provided equally strong support to the Second World War, was part of the Canadian force landing on Juno Beach and provided significant contributions to the liberation of France and Flanders, Holland and Belgium, culminating in the war-ending battles across the Rhine.

Between the World Wars, the Regiment busied itself at home with training and major celebrations: in 1933, the Regiment, now known simply as The Winnipeg Rifles celebrated it’s 50th year, with displays from major episodes in the Regiment’s history – the organization and training at it’s inception; the First Call to Arms and service in South Africa; the coronation of King George

V, and the climax of the First World War. During the celebrations of King George V Silver Jubilee, the King conferred the Royal prefix upon the Regiment, 3 June 1935. Soon after, the Rampant Devil badge was replaced with the Regimental cap badge, in the style of the Rifle Regiments of the United Kingdom, as the formal alliance with Rifle Brigade (Prince Consort's Own) had been granted by King George V in 1923.



Since the end of the Second World War, the Regiment has continued to serve Canada in, and around the world on behalf of the people of Canada; from flood fighting in 1950, 1997 and 2011 to providing companies to NATO for the peacetime defensive force in Germany, augmenting regular forces unit during the Korean conflict and the Canadian peacekeeping efforts in Sudan, Croatia, Bosnia, Afghanistan and the arctic, the unit remains a integral component of the Canadian Forces.

Once a Rifleman, always a Rifleman!