

The “Dorothy Medal” and the Dominion Rifle Association

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Occasionally, the Canadian War Museum receives an item which appears to have little significance to its mandate. Without immediate recognition of an object there are conflicting opinions about whether to retain the piece or return it to the donor. The arrival of the British Columbia Rifle Association's Dorothy Medal provoked such a quandary. Initially, the artifact seemed to have minimal importance to the museum's National Collection, but an investigation was launched to ensure a proper decision was made in this regard. It opened an interesting vista.

The medal was accompanied by a studio photograph of the winners of the British Challenge Shield in 1899. One of the members of the team in the picture, Bombardier S.W. Bodley, had won the Dorothy Medal the year before. Both the Shield and the Medal were prizes awarded for, respectively, team shooting at the national level, and individual marksmanship at the provincial level. The prizes are a reminder of the role of competitive shooting contests organized by the Dominion Rifle Association (DRA) and its provincial branches in the social and professional life of the Canadian Militia in the nineteenth century.

The popularity of militia service at this time encouraged a corresponding rise in competitive target shooting. As with the early United States National Guard, the Canadian Militia developed, in part, with the local regiments, and their social elements, meshing with this interest in competitive rifle matches. However, success on the ranges carried with it more than



regional, or even national, distinction. Marksmanship was the measure by which Canadians placed themselves alongside the professionals of the British Army.¹

The Dominion Rifle Association, as with the National Rifle Association in Britain, was a product of the Volunteer movement and to a degree, in North America, of game hunting. The DRA was founded in 1869 and was linked closely with militia politics in the young Dominion. In some ways, the organization was a legacy of the British troop withdrawals from Canada, being formed in the year preceding the controversial departure of the regulars.

Although undertaken for recreation and competition, many DRA contests were open only to the military. The conditions of the contests were meant to approximate the conditions of warfare at the time; range was established at what was considered the maximum effective range of the rifle in combat. The national rifle contests, of which the Challenge Shield was a part, took place in Ottawa each year. In 1899 the contests moved to the new ranges established at Rockcliffe, where the RCMP stables are now located (by the National Aviation Museum). Both the Governor General's Foot Guards and the 43rd Duke of Connaught's Own Regiment had club houses at these ranges.

The British Challenge Shield won by the gunners from 5th Regiment of the Canadian Artillery [see accompanying photo] was an

important national shooting award. The Shield was presented by the Auxiliary Forces of Great Britain to the Active Militia in Canada, demonstrating the ties between these two volunteer organizations. The contest was "Open

threat from the United States, thus becoming, in essence, the first indigenous artillery formation on the west coast of Canada. Originally known as the "Seymour Artillery Company," after the Governor of the territory, it was later incorporated into the British Columbia Provisional Regiment of Garrison Artillery, which itself finally evolved into the 5th Regiment of Canadian Artillery.³



Above: Dorothy Medal, obverse: "B.C.R.I. Dorothy Medal presented by HD Helmcken 1899."



Right: Dorothy Medal, reverse: "Won by S. W. Bodley Score 95." The hangar portion is reversed in both photos.

The Dorothy Medal, the small artifact which launched this inquiry, was a prize in the provincial rifle contests held by the British Columbia Rifle Association (BCRA). According to the 1899 prize list for the association, the

to teams of six efficient non-commissioned officers or rank and file, (Staff Sergeants excluded) from any corps of the Active Militia of Canada, the Cadets of the Royal Military College, and the North West Mounted Police." There was an accompanying cash prize of \$700, the Shield itself being retained by the commanding officer of the winning team, in this case Lieutenant-Colonel Francis B. Gregory.²

The win was a special one for the artillery, as it was the first time since the prize was offered in 1883 that a team from that service (and one from outside of the Quebec-Ontario militia powerhouse) had taken it. The gunners in the photograph are identified as being from the 1st "Battalion" of the 5th Regiment of the Canadian Artillery. This caption should probably read the 1st *Battery* of this regiment. If so, then this group's pedigree is important. The 1st Battery of the 5th Regiment can trace its beginnings to 1866 and the Fenian Raids. A company of volunteer gunners was assembled at New Westminster to counter the

medal came with an accompanying cup and a \$10 cash prize. These were the awards for winning the Helmcken Match in the BCRA's annual shooting contest. There were targets at 200, 500, and 700 yards, and seven shots were allowed at each range. The medal was presented by Mr. H. Dallas Helmcken, QC, MPP. The presentation cup was given by the Honourable C.F. Cornwall, the Lieutenant-Governor of the province. The cup became the property of any competitor who won the match two years in a row. The entry fee for this contest was eighty cents. The contest at which Bombardier S.W. Bodley won the medal took place at Nanaimo on the afternoon of 20 July 1899.⁴

The medal and Shield represented here are from the period just before the South African War. After this conflict, marksmanship became



Winners of the British Challenge Shield, 1 September 1898. I. to r.: Gunner R.J. Butler, Sergeant W.H. Lettice, Bombadier S.W. Bodley, Sergeant W.H. Bailey, all of the 1st Battery, 5th Regiment of Canadian Artillery. Their weapons are the Mk.1 Long Lee Enfield, which Canada acquired in 1896.

a more important element in British Army training, and by association in the training of the Canadian Army. Pundits, especially in civilian organizations, predicted that any future wars would be conducted at extreme long range, as had been done on the veldt.⁵

Combining the photograph of the winners of the British Challenge Shield with the Dorothy Medal, the winner of which is in the portrait, and adding these to the examples of shooting medals already in the National Collection, provides the museum with a solid group of artifacts related to the post-Confederation Canadian Militia. Provincial and national rifle contests were fundamental to the training and recreation of militiamen in the 19th and early 20th centuries, and the artifacts can be used to interpret this critical facet of the military history of this country.

Notes

- Photographs for CWM by Bill Kent.
1. T.C. Willet, *A Heritage at Risk. The Canadian Militia as a Social Institution* (Boulder and London: Westview Press, 1987), p.65; William Perkins Bull, *From Brock to Currie* (Toronto: George J. McLeod, 1935), p.271.
 2. *Report of the Proceedings of the Dominion Rifle Association, 1899* (Ottawa: Taylor and Clarke, 1899), pp.35 & 72.
 3. G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), pp.96. See also pp.112-113.
 4. *Proceedings of the British Columbia Rifle Association, 1899*.
 5. Charles Chenevix Trench, *A History of Marksmanship* (Chicago: Follett Publishing Co., 1972), p.254.

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