

# About Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) during the First World War

## Introduction

This Canadian cavalry regiment traces parts of its history back to 1 February 1900, when the then Governor General *Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal* offered to raise, equip and pay for a regiment of mounted infantry to be deployed in the Boer War.



*Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), ca. 1911.*

Police Commissioner Samuel B. Steele, Royal North West Mounted Police (now the Royal Canadian Mounted Police), was appointed commander of the regiment, which was named the Strathcona's Horse. During the next year, the unit thus participated in the Boer War, and it was disbanded on 11 March 1901.

The regiment's official birthday is July 1, 1901, when The Canadian Mounted Rifles was established as part of the standing force of the Canadian Army. The mounted infantrymen built on the many experiences that were partly gained with this type of weapon during the Boer War, and partly already existed in Canada in the form of The School of Mounted Infantry (from 1887).

In 1909 it was decided to name the Mounted Infantry after the unit that Donald Alexander Smith, whose official title was Lord Strathcona and Mount Royal, raised during the Boer War.

This re-established the regiment under the name Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), and on 1 November 1911 the regiment was given its current name Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians).

This uniform postcard is undated, but is from the same series as the previously mentioned Canadian Grenadier Guards [1](#)) motif.

## Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) - historisk resume

### Historical summary

#### 1901

The Canadian Mounted Rifles



*Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians).*

From Source 1.

#### 1903

The Royal Canadian Mounted Rifles

#### 1909

Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians)

#### 1911

Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians)

#### 1941

2nd Armoured Regiment (Lord Strathcona's Horse) (Royal Canadians)

1949

Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) (2nd Armoured Regiment)

1958

Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians)

The overview is, among other things, produced based on Source 11.

## Mobilization

The regiment's standing strength at the start of the war was quite small, its main function being to act as a training unit for mounted units in western Canada.

Only a few weeks after mobilisation, it was decided that the regiment would be part of the first contingent of Canadian troops to be sent to England, and recruitment could now begin in earnest.

There was no shortage of volunteers and the strength target for the staff squadron, including a machine gun platoon, and the three squadrons were soon reached.

Another regiment from the standing force was sent to England, The Royal Canadian Dragoons, and on 1 February 1915 *The Canadian Cavalry Brigade* was established.

### 1st Canadian Cavalry Brigade

*Chef:* Brigadier-General John Edward Bernard Seely [2](#))     —

- Royal Canadian Dragoons
  - Lord Strathcona's Horse
  - Fort Garry Horse (fra februar 1916) [3](#))     —
  - Royal Canadian Horse Artillery ("A" & "B" Battery)
  - Canadian Cavalry Brigade Machine Gun Squadron (from February 1916) [4](#))     —
  - Canadian Cavalry Brigade Signal Troop (omtales som "London Signal Company, Royal Engineers")
- 
- Et transportelement fra Canadian Army Service Corps 7th
  - Canadian Field Ambulance
  - Canadian Cavalry Brigade Motor Ambulance Workshop Unit (fra februar 1916)
  - "A" Canadian Mobile Veterinary Section 1st
  - Canadian Cavalry Brigade Ammunition Park.



*A squadron of Lord Strathcona's Horse, on exercise near Liège, March 1919.*

From Source 3.

## Om Brigadier-General "Jack" Seely

"Jack" Seely's appointment as Brigadier did not arouse enthusiasm in Canada, where the Prime Minister believed that a Canadian officer must be the right man for the post. Seely is later referred to by Basil Liddel-Hart as "... *an ex-War Minister turned Murat ...*" (Source 4). Similarly, the Chief of Staff of the English Cavalry Corps, Brigadier-General Sir Archibald Home, did not think highly of Seely's abilities as a military commander (diary note 29 October 1916, Source 5).

These views notwithstanding, it seems that the brigade commander was well liked by his soldiers (Source 1) and quite far-sighted as Minister of War. He thus helped to create the basis for a joint French and English planning, and together with Sir John French invited, including the later allied commander-in-chief and field marshal, Ferdinand Foch, to England to attend large English exercises in 1912. He was also involved in to create the political prerequisites for the establishment of the Royal Flying Corps, also in 1912.

Part of the reason for Seely's unpopularity in military circles must of course be sought in his role as a minister in Herbert Asquith's government, and the unrest that arose in military circles in Ireland when plans for Irish Home Rule (Home Rule Act 1914) were sought ) into life. The officer corps was divided between supporters of Irish independence and Irish belonging to Great Britain. The situation almost turned to mutiny, but it was stopped at the last minute by a declaration on 20 July 1914 from the Ministry of War that the military would not be used to enforce the self-government plans. The events dealt with in detail in Source 6 were subsequently referred to as The Curragh Incident or The Curragh Mutiny. Because of the unrest, Jack Seely had to resign as Secretary of War.

In June 1918, when Jack Seely was wounded during a gas attack, the commander of the Fort Garry Horse - Robert Walter Paterson - was appointed brigadier general and commander of The Canadian Cavalry Brigade. Jack Seely re-entered politics in 1918, as Deputy Minister for Munitions Manufacturing.

## Tab ribbon



*Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians).*  
Card no. 9 in the Colonial & Indian Army series

Badges, John Player & Sons, 1917.

The following appears from the text on the back of the card:

*The badge of Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians). This regiment was organised on the 1st July, 1901, and is a part of the Permanent Force of the Dominion. It fought in South Africa 1900-1901 as the Canadian Mounted Rifles. Its headquarters are at Winnipeg, Manitoba, and it is at present in the 1st Canadian Cavalry Brigade.*

### **Fanebånd**

Boerkrigen: SOUTH AFRICA 1900-1901.

Første Verdenskrig: FESTUBERT 1915, SOMME 1916 '18, Bazentin, Pozières, Flers-Courcelette, CAMBRAI 1917 '18, ST. QUENTIN, AMIENS, HINDENBURG LINE, ST. QUENTIN CANAL, BEAUREVOIR, PURSUIT TO MONS, FRANCE AND FLANDERS 1915-18.

Banners written in capital letters are carried on the standard; the regiment received its first standard on 17 September 1932.

## **Victoriakors**

### **Lieutenant Frederick Harvey**

Lieutenant Frederick Maurice Harvey (1888-1980) was awarded the Victoria Cross for his actions at Guyencourt on 27 March 1917. He was in command of "C" Squadron's 2nd Platoon.

The 1st Canadian Cavalry Brigade advanced over the large area of land vacated by the Germans in their retreat to The Hindenburg Line (*Siegfried Stellung*). Before the escape, the Germans had destroyed almost everything in the area, which was further made impassable by booby-trapping and guerrilla warfare; the latter was especially a problem for the mounted units.

The regiment was assigned to XV. Corps and moved together with other cavalry regiments in a similar role - i.a. 1st King Edward's Horse, working with the IV. Corps - perched forward over open terrain - an absolutely unique sight after several years of trench warfare. Horsemen and footmen alike were unaccustomed to this situation and perhaps did not advance as quickly as especially later historians seem to expect. Employing the tactics of evasive combat, the German units fought back towards their new positions.

During these operations the regiment was ordered to advance and capture the village of Guyencourt. Lieutenant Harvey's division was at the head of the squadron, and he rode a good distance in front of his men; he sees a number of enemy soldiers advancing with a position that was surrounded by barbed wire, and from here they open fierce fire against the division with, among other things, a machine gun.

Sleet and snow hamper visibility and the lieutenant quickly assesses that his horse will not have the opportunity to jump over the almost invisible barbed wire barrier. He throws himself off his horse, climbs the barbed wire fence, shoots the machine gunner with his revolver and captures the machine gun. By his lightning-quick action, he probably saves the attack from stalling and the squadron from annihilation. In recognition, he was awarded *the Distinguished Service Order*, which two weeks later was changed to a Victoria Cross.

Lieutenant Harvey ended a long officer's career during which he commanded the regiment from 1938 to 1940, with the rank of Brigadier General, and on his retirement was made an Honorary Colonel, a role he held from 1958 to 1966.

### **Lieutenant Gordon Flowerdew**



*Lieutenant Gordon Flowerdew.*  
From the Canadian War Museum.

The regiment's second recipient of the Victoria Cross - Lieutenant Gordon Muriel Flowerdew (1885-1918) - also came from "C" Squadron.

On March 30, 1918, Lieutenant Flowerdew was in command of "C" Squadron, which, together with parts of the 1st Canadian Cavalry Brigade, deployed at Moreuil Wood, near Amiens.

A very interesting account of the fighting is found in *The Battle of Moreuil Wood (30 March 1918)* (Source 9), written by Captain JR Grodzinski, of Lord Strathcona's Horse. Here is a detailed description of the operations that contributed to halting the German advance towards Amiens.

Here it is only necessary to summarize that Lieutenant Flowerdew led 3 platoons from his squadron - Lieutenant Harvey's (see above) platoon was deployed on foot - in a mounted attack against approx. 300 Germans. The strength figure for the mounted part of the 3rd Squadron is estimated at approx. 75 men.

Before the attack, Lieutenants Flowerdew and Harvey met in the north-east corner of the forest and while Harvey reports the result of his reconnaissance in the forest, Flowerdew spots two lines of German soldiers, some of whom - from the 2nd Battalion of the 101st Grenadier Regiment - are retreating from the forest, while others advance towards the forest. A howitzer and several machine guns can be seen among the Germans. In a flash, Lieutenant Flowerdew gives the order to attack: *"It's a charge boys, it's a charge!"* Trumpeter RG Longley, raises his trumpet to blow to attack, but falls as the first.

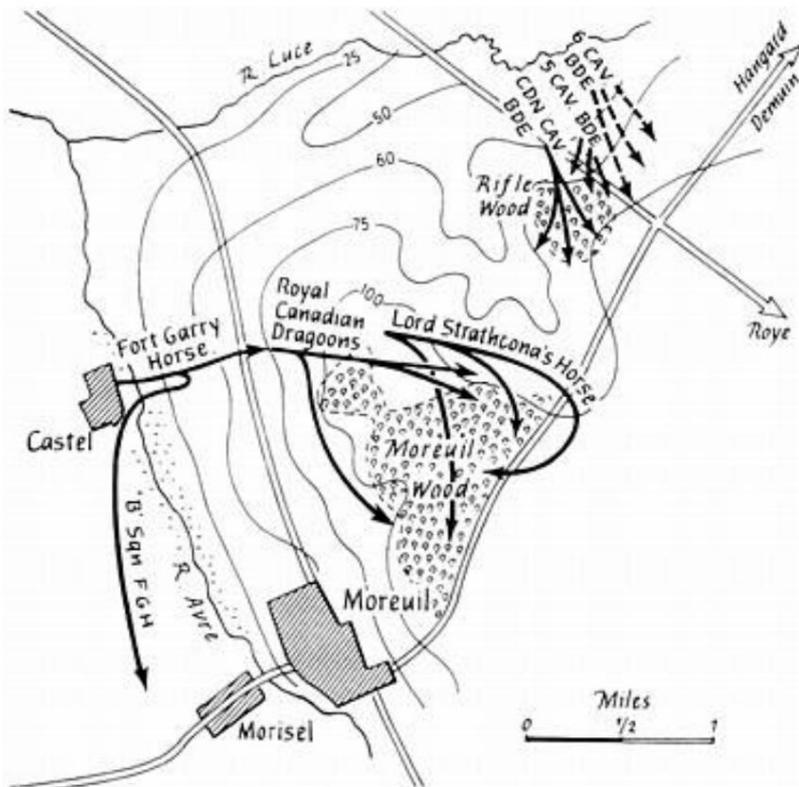


*Soldiers of the Fort Garry Horse in attack.*

From the Fort Garry Horse website.

The Fort Garry Horse also took part in the attack against Moreuil Wood, not mounted as here, but on foot. I have chosen to show the image to give an impression of Lieutenant Flowerdew's attack.

"C" Squadron's attack is immortalized in a painting by the English painter Sir Alfred Munnings (1878-1959). A thumbnail, in very low resolution, can be viewed on the Canadian War Museum website. The painting is also reproduced on Kilde 4's dust jacket.



**MOREUIL WOOD, 30 MARCH & RIFLE WOOD, 30 MARCH - 1 APRIL, 1918**

*Kortskitse over Moreuil Wood.*

From Source 4.

The riders are quickly in the midst of the surprised enemies, who defend themselves stubbornly.

With saber cuts to right and left, "C" Squadron rides through first the one German line and then

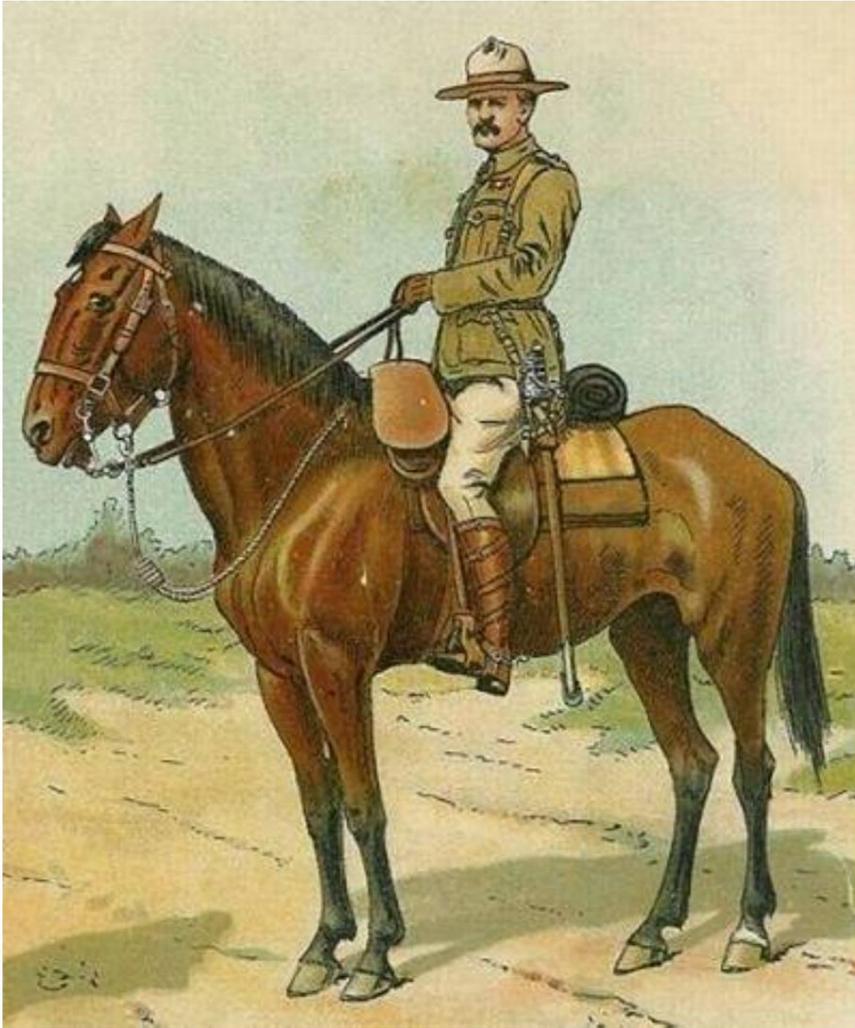
the other.

The force reorganizes roughly behind the Germans and rides back towards the woods, where Lieutenant Harvey's platoon and "A" Squadron are now in position.

24 Canadians fall and several are wounded during the attack. Lieutenant Flowerdew was among the badly wounded and he dies the next day from his wounds.

The fighting for the forest cost the regiment 45 dead and 120 wounded on the first day.

## Uniforms



*Officer, Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), ca. 1902.*

From Canadian Military Heritage. This is a section of a very exciting uniform plan, drawn by Richard Simkin [5](#)). The publication contained an arm from a figure on the left in the picture, which I have removed to get a better picture; however, the shadow of the figure is retained.

The officer wears a broad-brimmed Steatson hat, with the characteristic four bulges. The headgear is in the Canadian context today almost synonymous with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (until 1920 the Royal Northwest Mounted Police).

The Steatson hat was worn by the Canadian forces serving in South Africa during the Boer War, and from 1900 also by The South African Constabulary, commanded by Lieutenant Colonel Baden Powell. It is a given that Baden Powell got the idea for the scout hat from here.

The Steatson hat became the official headgear of the Royal Northwest Mounted Police in 1903 (some sources

says 1904).



*Canadian Mounted Police.*

Cigarette Card No. 21 in the  
*Soldiers of The King*  
series published by Godfrey Philips Ltd., 1939.

The back of the card tells the following story:

*The "Riders of the Plains", hero worshipped by readers of wild North-West literature as the "Mounties", were formed in 1873 for the purpose of maintaining the law in the sparsely populated parts of the Dominion. Recruiting was commenced in 1874, and early in their history their courage and integrity established order and respect in the Indian territory. Although tasks are less picturesque than in the old days, diverse activities still include punishment for wrongdoing and the enforcement of Federal Law throughout Canada.*

The first commander of the Strathcona's Horse, Samuel B. Steele, had a background in the police force, for which in 1894 he purchased the first Stetson hats [6](#). It is said that Lt. Col. Steele took the idea with him to the regiment, but perhaps this is just a rumor since the Stetson hat was worn by virtually all Canadian units during the Boer War [7](#) ).

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*Canadian Cavalry - A Signaller, ca. 1918.*

Drawn by Harry Payne.

In the field, however, the regiment did not wear Steatson hats, but either the English uniform cap Model 1902 or the Canadian Model 1903, and from autumn 1916 steel helmet. Correspondingly, the field uniform was used in 1902 or 1903. The most likely thing is that both the cap and uniform were the English Model 1902. Certain Canadian cavalry regiments, e.g. Canadian Light Horse (see image in Source 10), but perhaps all, however Steatson used the hat as a garrison cap.

Contemporary postcard from the "Colonial badges and their Wearers" series, No. 3160, published by Raphael Tuck & Sons "Oilette".

Bagsiden af postkortet indeholder følgende tekst: *The Great European War of 1914 upwards has been mainly fought by Infantry and Artillery, still there have been many instances in which the "Arme blanche" have been able to "cut in", and have often saved the situation.*

*The Canadian Cavalry has done its part of the various fronts both as Cavalry, and in common with all other mounted regiments, acting as Infantry on emergency.*

On the shoulder flap, Canada is worn in brass letters. The maple leaf is worn both as a cap and collar badge.



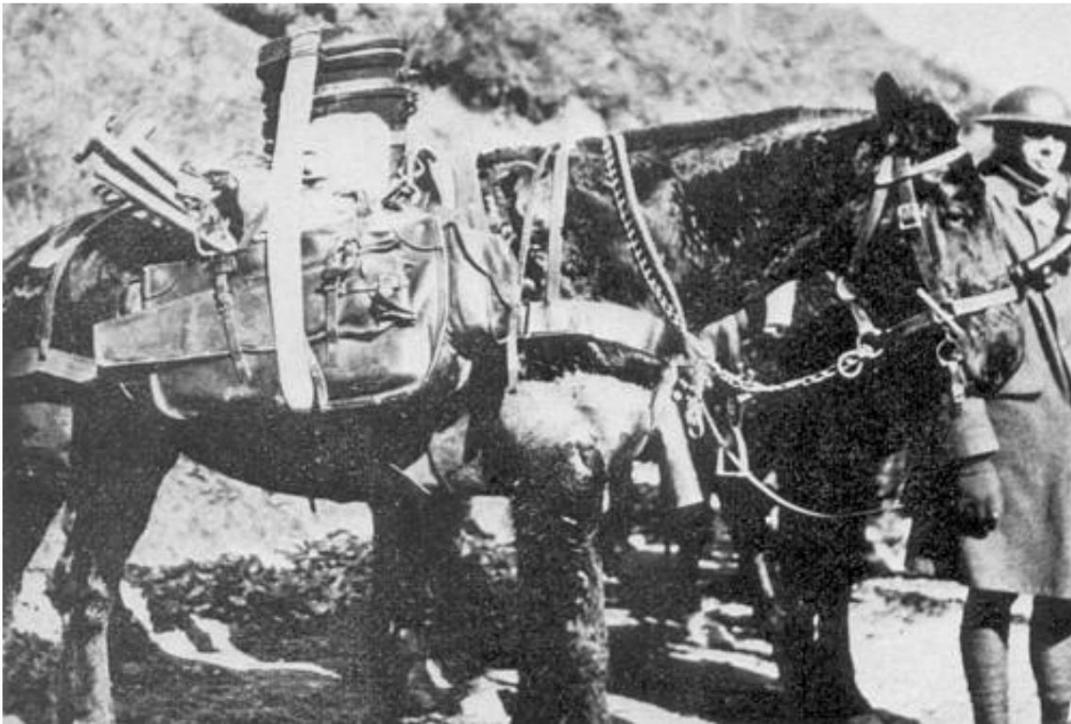
*Menig, Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), 1918.*  
Drawing by Ron Volstad, from Canadian Military Heritage.

The soldier's uniform and equipment is quite like an equivalent English horseman. The only clear characteristics that show the Canadian affiliation are the collar badge (maple leaf) and the red and green regimental badge on the shoulder.

In the drawing, the brass letters on the shoulder patch appear to be quite a short name, perhaps LSH- RC or LD.SH The regiment also used - and still uses (Source 2) - shoulder badges with STRATHCONA'S.



*Lieutenant Gordon Flowerdew.*



*Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians) - Pakhest, i.a. with entrenchment tools.  
From Source 3.*

When any change occurred I am not aware, but as the photograph of Lt. Flowerdew shows STRATHCONA'S, the long designation, given the lieutenant's death in 1918, must have been introduced earlier than the abbreviated name.

Later you must have gone back to STRATHCONA'S.

## **The Canadian Cavalry Brigade - Unit insignia approx. 1918**

(Designed after CEF Formation Patches.)



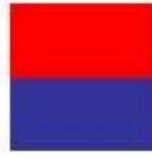
*Royal Canadian Dragoons\*.*



*Lord Strathcona's Horse.*



*Fort Garry Horse.*



*Royal Canadian Horse Artillery\*.*



*Machine Gun Squadron\*.*



*7th Field Ambulance.*

\* The units wore, for undisclosed reasons, their marks as shooting bows, i.e. on the shoulder pads.

## Closing

As a curiosity, it may be added that the post of intelligence officer of the 1st Canadian Cavalry Brigade and aide-de-camp to Brigadier-General "Jack" Seely - Antoine, Prince of Orléans and Braganza (1881-1918) - had royal ancestry, with French connections. However, French law forbade Prince Antoine and his older brother Louis to serve in the French army and President Poincaré did not want to lift this ban, after which King George V gave permission for them to enter the English army with unspecified rank.

Prince Antoine is described as fearless and a born soldier, and in every way an excellent representative of the aristocracy. For his efforts together with the Canadian brigade, where he was awarded the rank of captain, the Prince was awarded the Military Cross, just as Field Marshal Foch - despite his noble ancestry - appointed him Knight of the Legion of Honour. The prince was killed in a plane crash in England on 29 November 1918.

Prince Antoine was also immortalized by Sir Alfred Munnings, who in the first half of 1918 served as a battle painter with the Canadian forces in France. A miniature of the painting, in very low resolution, can be viewed on the Canadian War Museum website. There is also a very interesting biography of Sir Alfred Munnings, who is described as one of England's leading painters of horse depictions.

## Sources

1. *Stand To Your Horses, Through the First World War 1914-1918 with the Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians)* by Captain SH Williams, Regimental Association of Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), 1999. The book is a reprint of the author's private publication from 1961.
2. *Lord Strathcona's Horse - Regimental Manual*, 2nd Edition, 2004. This manual is one on all ways an exemplary release. Much was easier in this industry if you had access to similar publications on other military units.
3. *Lord Strathcona's Horse - A picture of a regiment* by RJ Marrion, from a Military Modeling Annual that I don't have the year of. (Purchased as a clipping at a Figure Exchange in Chakoten.)
4. *A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, Volume 8: The Western Front, 1915-1918, Epilogue, 1919-1939* of The Marquess of Anglesey, Leo Cooper, London 1997, ISBN 0-85052-467-9.
5. *The Diary of a World War I Cavalry Officer* of Archibald Home, Costello, Tunbridge Wells/Kent 1985, ISBN 0-7104-3004-3.
6. *A History of the British Cavalry 1816-1919, Volume 7: The Curragh Incident and the Western Front, 1914* of The Marquess of Anglesey, Leo Cooper, London 1996, ISBN 0-85052-437-7.
7. *Arras and Messines 1917 - VCs of The First World War* of Gerald Gliddon, Budding Books, Stroud, Gloucestershire 2000, ISBN 0-905-778-618.
8. *Spring Offensive 1918 - VCs of The First World War* of Gerald Gliddon, Budding Books, Stroud, Gloucestershire 1997, ISBN 0-7509-1107-7.
9. *The Battle of Moreuil Wood (30. marts 1918)* of Captain J.R. Grodzinski, Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians).
10. *The Canadian Army at War* of Mike Chappel, Men-at-Arms Nr. 164, Osprey, London 1985, ISBN 0-85045-600-2.

11. Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), fra Land Forces of Britain, The Empire and The Commonwealth.

12. The Royal House of Bourbon - Branch of Orléans - Braganza.

Per Finsted

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**To note:**

1) See my article About The Canadian Grenadier Guards during the First World War.

2) John Edward Bernard Seely (1868-1947) was English Minister of War from 1912-1914. On a practical military level, he was a veteran of the Boer War, having served in the Imperial Yeomanry. From 1907-1914 he was commander of the voluntary cavalry regiment The Hampshire Yeomanry (Carabiniers). See also Service biography.

3) At the time of its establishment, the Fort Garry Horse was still in Canada and the brigade's third regiment was from - March 1915 to early 1916 - the 2nd King Edward's Horse (The King's Overseas Dominions Regiment), an English *Special Reserve* cavalry regiment. See my article On King Edward's Horse (The King's Overseas Dominions Regiment).

4) For information on the organization of the machine gun squadron, see War Diary, Canadian Cavalry Brigade Machine Gun Squadron, February 18th, 1916.

nd 5) An extract from the plate *Canadian Types, Army & Navy Gazette, Military Types No. 176, August 2 1902*. See a small reproduction of the entire plate here Cranston Military Art and the corresponding No. 155, published November 3, 1900.

6) Read about the history of the hat on the Royal Canadian Mounted Police website, as well as another article on the history of the police force Royal Canadian Mounted Police.

7) See also Imperial Adventure, Equipment, Steatson Hat, which describes the Canadian bridge of Steatson hats during the Boerkrigen.