

The Canadian Grenadier Guards under First world War

Introduction

This Canadian Guards Regiment traces its history back to March 12, 1764, when the 1st Company, District of Montreal Militia, was raised in Quebec. The company then became a battalion and a long series of changes in the unit's designation followed. The designation 1st Regiment dates back to 7 September 1860 when the unit was named the 1st (or Prince of Wales's) Regiment of Volunteer Rifles of Canadian Militia.

The unit's Guard status dates from 15 April 1912, when the battalion became the 1st Regiment The Grenadier Guards of Canada. On 16 March 1914 the name was changed to 1st Regiment, The Canadian Grenadier Guards, which later in 1914 was changed to 1st Regiment (The Canadian Grenadier Guards), and finally on 1 April 1920 to become The Canadian Grenadier Guards. Apart from the period 1954-1976 when the battalion bore the nickname (6th Battalion, Canadian Guards), this has since been the unit's designation.



Grenadier Guards.

From *Regimental Badges*
by TJ Edwards, Gale &
Polden Limited, 1951.

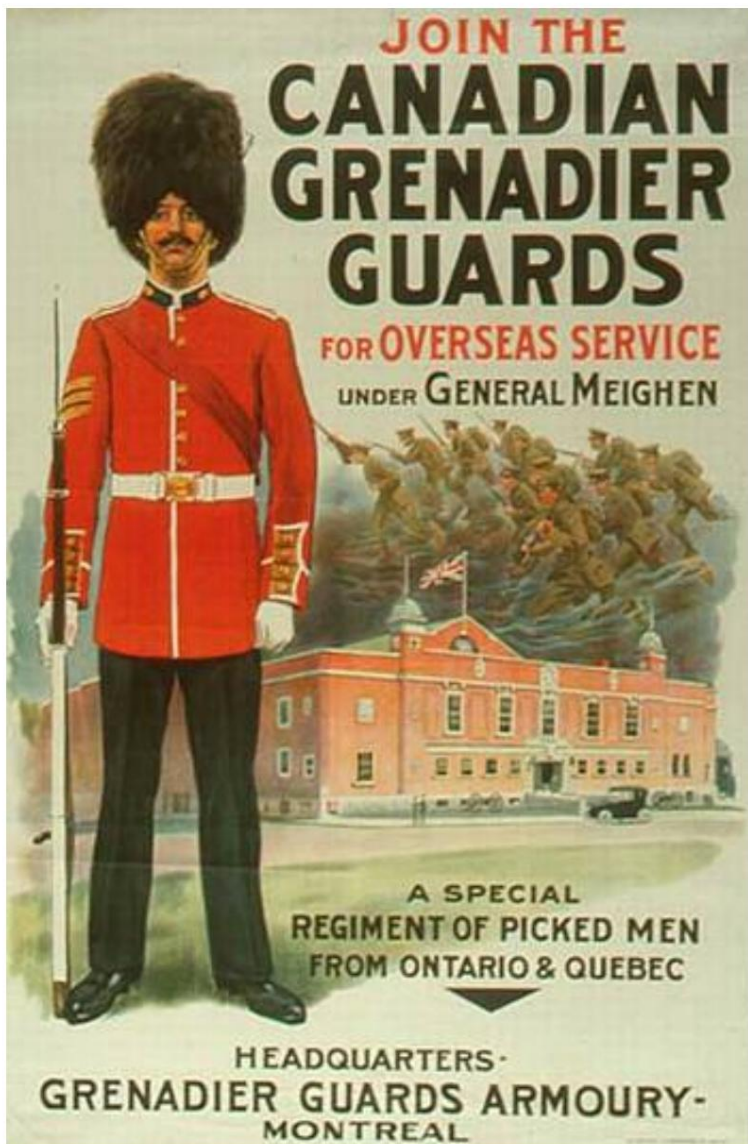
Throughout its existence, the regiment has belonged to The Militia (the Canadian counterpart to the English Territorial Army), and is thus not part of the (small) standing army.

As the name suggests, the regiment is affiliated with the most distinguished of the English guards regiments on foot - The Grenadier Guards - and accordingly has Queen Elizabeth II as Colonel-in-Chief.

The gala uniform is equivalent to The Grenadier Guards, including the cap badge - the flaming grenade - which today however bears the name Canada at the bottom.

When the regiment is called *the 1st Regiment*, it is due to a continuation of the 1860 designation and not, as one might assume, that it is the first Canadian Guards Regiment. This place is occupied by the regiment of the Governor General's Foot Guards, which - to complete the confusion - wears the uniform of the other English regiment of the Garden of Foot - The Coldstream Guards.

World War One



Recruitment poster from the First World War [2](#)).
From FirstWorldWar.com.

The vast majority of the Canadian Army which took part in the First World War was organized into units raised specifically for war participation. The infantry battalions were consecutively numbered from 1 to 260 and, as a rule, did not have a relationship with individual regiments, but rather with the locality where the battalions were established.

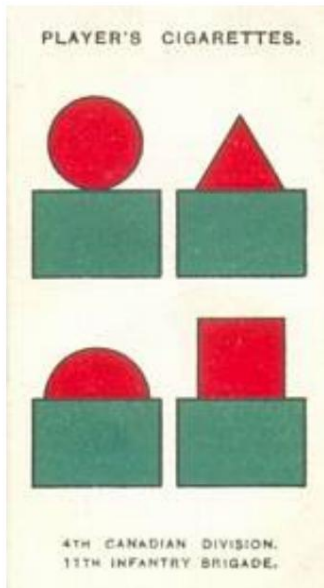
However, there were a large number of exceptions to this rule, e.g. 42nd Battalion, where Thomas Dinesen served [1](#)), bearing the designation *42nd Battalion (Royal Highlanders of Canada), Canadian Expeditionary Force*.

Similarly, *the 87th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force* was one of the exceptions, with the battalion receiving special permission to carry the designation *Canadian Grenadier Guards* as part of its name.

The then Governor General of Canada - His Royal Highness The Duke of Connaugh - who was also an Honorary Colonel of The Grenadier Guards from 1904 to 1942 - gave permission for the battalion to wear the Grenadier Guards insignia. When the battalion later came to England, it was assigned an officer and four non-commissioned officers from the Grenadier Guards, so that they could pass on the right spirit to the new Canadian Guards.

The battalion was established in September 1915 and recruited soldiers from large parts of Canada where it was more common to recruit within narrower geographical areas. The battalion arrived in France on 12 August 1916, as part of the 11th Infantry Brigade of the 4th Canadian Infantry Division.

Another battalion attached to the Canadian Grenadier Guards – *the 245th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force* – was created. However, it did not serve as an independent battalion, but functioned as a personnel replacement unit, among other things, for the 87th Battalion (Canadian Grenadier Guards).



4th Canadian Division,

11th Canadian Infantry Brigade.
Card No. 122

in Player's cigarette card
series Army, Corps
and Divisional Signs 1914-1918,
Series 2.

In practice, the badges may not have played a major role, as more neutral fabric shoulder badges were worn on the field uniform.

Red was the color of the sign of the 11th Canadian Infantry Brigade; the semicircle denoting the 75th [Mississauga], triangle the 87th [Canadian Grenadier Guards], and square 102nd [Northern British Columbia, the battalion was nicknamed *The Pea-Soupers*] Canadian Battalions. When the green patch was worn alone, it showed that the wearers were Divisional troops, and not attached to any particular Infantry Brigade. The Forth Division was the fourth of the Canadian Divisions to be formed, and came into existence in August 1916, serving right through to the end in the British Expeditionary Force in France and Flanders.

The text on the back of the map fails to mention the unit marked by the red circle, which was the 54th Battalion [Kootenays]. Other sources state April 1916 as the time of establishment [3](#)). —

1st Regiment "The Grenadier Guards of Canada"

This uniform postcard is actually the direct reason for this article to see the light of day. The card is not dated, but if the regimental designation is compared with the regiment's list of names, the motif may originate from the period 1912-1914 - before the name became *Canadian Grenadier Guards*.



1st Regiment "The Grenadier Guards of Canada".

Prominent in the picture are the two guards in the peacetime uniform, respectively for parade use (with bearskin hat) and as service uniform/exit uniform (with cap). At first glance, they are indistinguishable from the Grenadier Guards, as they wear a white marking on the left side of the bear and a red band on the cap.

The lancers in the background must represent English lancers - 12th (Prince of Wales's Royal) Lancers, judging by the red sash - as there were no lancer regiments in the Canadian army.

Considering the title of the postcard, one must think that the two soldiers in field uniform are also guards, but it is not immediately obvious. The Canadian Army had only a limited number of sets of Model 1908 and 1913 webbing equipment available for mobilization. Although stocks of the older leather equipment - the *Oliver Pattern Valise Equipment* - were somewhat larger and therefore more common, the Guards could well be equipped with this type.

The cart around which the guards are gathered is a Water Cart (= water tanker).

Until more detailed information about the early history of the regiment comes to my knowledge, I cannot determine the particular circumstances behind the motive. A working hypothesis could be that the Canadian "cousins" were visiting the mother regiment in England, immediately before the First World War.

The back of the card provides no information, except for a line drawing of the Canadian crowned maple leaf - see next illustration - which may suggest that the card was issued during or immediately after the First World War.

Tab ribbon [4](#))

The efforts of the First World War were recognized in the form of the following ribbons: YPRES, 1915, '17; FESTUBERT, 1915; Mount Sorrel; SUMMER, 1916; Anchor Heights; Anchor, 1916; ARRAS, 1917, '18; VIMY, 1917; Hill 70; PASSCHENDAELE; AMIENS; Scarpe, 1918; DROCOURT-QUEANT;

Hindenburg Line; CANAL DU NORTH; Valenciennes, Sambre and FRANCE AND FLANDERS, 1915-18. (Fan ribbons written in capitals, carried on the flags)

Victoria Cross

Private [5](#)) John Francis Young (1893-1929), 87th Battalion (Canadian Grenadier Guards), Canadian Expeditionary Force, received the Victoria Cross for his untiring efforts as a sick-bearer at Dury near Arras during the days 2-4. September 1918. Without regard for his own safety, and under heavy enemy fire, he attended to the wounded and later rescued several back to safety. See more here: Canadian War Veterans, Young VC and Wikipedia - John Francis Young.

On Canadian Infantry



Canada.

Card No. 8 in the
Colonial & Indian

Army Badges

series, John Player & Sons, 1917.

Although neither postcards nor cigarette cards can be directly considered primary sources, they are often contemporaneous.

This cigarette card from 1917 thus gives the following explanation for the brand with the crowned maple leaf:

The badge shown in our illustration was worn in the early stages of the Great War by the first draft of Canadian troops on both cap and collar. Each regiment now has its own distinctive cap badge, the "Crown and Maple Leaf" is only worn upon the collar.

The following postcard gives an impression of a Canadian infantryman in field uniform, as he could get out, from 1916 onwards. The corporal's marks, if any, are not visible, so he may be a sort of universal representative of the Canadian infantry.



Canadian Infantry, approx. 1918.

Drawn by Harry Payne.

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

The back of the postcard contains the following text:

Until a few years ago the various regiments of Canada possessed their own distinctive titles, such for instance, as the "Winnipeg Rifles", the "Three Rivers Infantry" etc., but they are now known only by the number of the battalion. The universal badge of the maple leaf is worn, with very few exceptions, on the cap and the battalion badge on the collar.

The homage and gratitude of the whole Empire goes out to the Canadians for the heroic part they have played in the Great War.

Series 3160 includes the following cards, all with corps/regimental insignia and a figure in khaki uniform:

- Australian Infantry
- Canadian Cavalry
- Canadian Infantry
- New Zealand Infantry
- Newfoundland Infantry
- South African Infantry.

Closing

If you want to know more about The Canadian Grenadier Guards during the First World War, the entire 87th Battalion War Diaries from August 1916 to April 1919 available on the Canadian Archives website (see Library and Archives Canada, War Diaries of the First World War).

All 781 pages (some are typewritten, but most are apparently handwritten) have been scanned! See War diaries - 87th Canadian Infantry Battalion.

For the record, however, I must add that I have only familiarized myself with the material. This is a very exciting material that I can only recommend. And it's only a single battalion that I've been interested in... What a huge and commendable archival act the good Canadians have made.

Sources

1. *Military Uniforms of Britain and the Empire* by R. Money Barnes, Seeley Service, London, no year (circa 1960).
2. *The Canadian Army at War* by Mike Chappel, Men-at-Arms No. 164, Osprey, London 1985, ISBN 1-85045-600-2.
3. Canadian Grenadier Guards, from the Land Forces of Britain, The Empire and The Commonwealth. This source also contains a very comprehensive overview of all imaginable websites in relation to Canadian defense through the ages.
4. The Canuk - The Canadian Solder in the 20th Century.

Per Finsted

Notes:

- 1) See e.g. my article Uniform Planche - The Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914.
- 2) Apart from the fact that the guard is missing the blue sleeve patches that belong to the Grenadier Guard uniform, the drawing is a fairly good reproduction of the uniform.
- 3) See also the discussion of 4th Canadian Division on The Regimental Warpath 1914-1918 website.
- 4) From The Canadian Grenadier Guards (Unofficial Canadian Army Home Page) and Perpetuation of the Units of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), 1914-1919.
- 5) Per On 22 November 1918, King George V gave the English Guards regiments permission to use the designation *garder* (guardsman) for private soldiers, and this honor was extended to also include The Canadian Grenadier Guards. (Source: Official Home Page, Canadian Grenadier Guards)