



Sabretache

THE OFFICIAL JOURNAL OF
THE CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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January 2013

“Form Square”

Historically an **infantry square** is a combat formation that a infantry unit forms in close order, usually when threatened by a cavalry attack.

As used in the Napoleonic wars , the formation was made up as a hollow square , with each side composed of two or more lines of soldiers. They were armed with single-shot muskets with fixed bayonets. . Generally, a battalion (approx. 500 to 1,000 men) was the smallest force used to form a square. The unit's commanding officers would take station with the colours, musicians and drummers in the centre of the square. Also sometimes a reserve force was included to reinforce any side of the square weakened by attacks. A square of 500 men in four ranks, such as those formed by Wellington's army at Waterloo, was a tight formation less than twenty metres in length upon any side.

Ensign Gronow, a veteran of Waterloo wrote. “our squares presented a shocking sight. Inside we were nearly suffocated by smoke. It was impossible to move a yard without treading upon a wounded comrade, or upon the bodies of the dead; and the loud groans of the wounded an dying were most appalling. At four o'clock our square was a perfect hospital, being full of dead, dying and mutilated soldiers. . .

When we received cavalry, the order was to fire low, so that on the first discharge of musketry the ground was strewn with the fallen horses and their riders, which impeded the advance of those behind them and broke the shock of the charge. . .”

The next CMHS
meeting will be held
on

**Tuesday,
January 15th
2013**

7:00 pm

At the
Petty Officers' Mess
HCMS Tecumseh



“Twenty-Eight, remember Egypt! The 1/28th, encouraged by Sir Thomas Picton to remember its distinguished achievement in Egypt in 1801, held firm. Painting by Elizabeth Thompson, Lady Butler

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The
CALGARY MILITARY HISTORICAL SOCIETY
is a non-profit registered society
which fosters the study of the
military and the police, and the heritage of
Canada, the British Empire, and the world
as well as the preservation of military
artifacts and records.

The CMHS meets once every calendar month
at:

Petty Officers' Mess
HMCS Tecumseh
1820 - 24th Street SW
Calgary AB T2T 0G6

All are welcome to attend

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SABRETACHE

Is published monthly by the

Calgary Military Historical Society
P.O. Box 205, Station M
Calgary, AB Canada T2P 2H6
mail@cmhs.ca
http://www.cmhs.ca

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Notice of Next Meeting

The next CMHS meeting will be held on

Tuesday, January 15th, 2012
19:00 (7:00 pm)

At the Petty Officers' Mess, HMCS Tecumseh.

Members are reminded that an offering of foodstuffs for the Legion Food Bank is considered your unofficial entrance fee to our regular scheduled meetings.

The unofficial agenda of this meeting will be:

- Introduction of guests
- Minutes of last meeting
- Correspondence
- Membership report
- Treasurer's report
- Old business / New business
- Break

The President, David Soltess, would like to invite everyone to remain after the meeting for an informal time of fellowship.

"Form Square"



Another painting of "The 28th at Waterloo" by William Barnes Wollen

The 28th a(North Gloucestershire) regiment of Foot. at Quatre Bras depicts with rigorous accuracy an infantry regiment formed in a battle square. They are repelling the cavalries of France and Napoleon on the long Friday afternoon at Quatre Bras near Waterloo. The battle was vital. It allowed Prussian and British forces to combine and finally defeat Napoleon two days later at Waterloo

Minutes of the last meeting

December 18th , 2012

18 members attending.

Minutes, Call for acceptance of minutes presented in December issue of the "Sabretache"

Moved by Bob Mcf. And seconded by Gary M.. All in favour.

Membership report given by Brian H.

Treasures Report given by the tall Brian H. Moved by Brian H. to accept. Seconded by Barry E. All in favor.

Old Business.

Pres. David S reminds everyone that the yearly supper meeting will take place at the Legion on Horton Rd. Friday , January 11th. Members will pay for their own meals and society will pay for wine. As usual. Questions and discussion.

Pres. David S. Describes problems with website. Questions and discussion follows.

New Business

Barry E. talks about up coming gun shows. January 12th will be the usual one at Thorncliffe Community Centre. Barry is looking after distribution of tables. Some discussion of Easter show also.

Book Auction, Marty has donated a number of quality books. The ever popular Bab McF. continues his club duties as auctioneer. Huge quantities of monies are raised.. Many thanks to them both.

Morris Harvey award ballot takes place.

Break.

Draw. Tickets sold and many happy winners.

Show and Tell

David G. Medals of colourful WW1 shown. Soldier has spent time in jail for his activities.

David S. Discusses story of WW2 pigeon in chimney with secret message attached.

Brian H.

Barry E. Merchant Marine medal and discussion

Marty. WW2 books

Bob Mcf. Story of Chinese Emperor and his death and his tomb. Tara cotta soldiers, horses, and carts. Shows miniature terracotta soldier that he purchased.

Al D. Spit fighters to be dug up.

Rob. W. Trip to Ottawa and visits to War Museum and others.

Don S. Sword collection of Bates up at auction in England. Discussion of Bonhams Auction and prices.

Gary M Large brass propeller at military museum in Calgary. LHMS Victory model, books on Nelson's navy 1700-1800s

Stuart E. Boer war picture and stories. Picture of dead British soldiers.

Al D. Story of fire at base and how the Naval Museum started by private donations. Aircraft belonged to SAIT

President David S. wishes all a Merry Christmas and Happy New Year.

Motion to adjourn at 8:36. Motion by Barry E and Floyd S.

Attention All Members; Reminder

Our annual Christmas, New Years Levee will be held on January 11th at the Horton Road Legion. This will start at 6 pm.

Members and their guests are invited.





Although Felix Phillipoteaux exaggerates some aspects of Waterloo, his painting of French cuirassiers attacking British squares (here one which includes a Highland and another line regiment) catches essential elements of the battle. Squares were vulnerable to artillery fire and suffered most of their casualties from shot and shell. Most British guns (like the battery in the background) were abandoned when the cavalry overran them. Their gunners taking refuge in squares to emerge later.

When cavalry had chosen its objective and was ready to move, it set out at a walk, officers in front, their sabres unsheathed. If, at this moment, the infantrymen in the square started to fidget a bit too much, the cavalry officers could risk acceleration the pace to a trot. Should the musket volley be fired badly - too soon or too high - the cavalry could pass to a gallop, and then the infantrymen, in all probability, would lose their nerve, break their ranks and flee. The result would be massacre.

For the squares, the first attacks were usually the ones that came closest to causing panic. "The first time a body of cuirassiers approached the square into which I had ridden, the men - all young soldiers - seemed to be very alarmed. They fired high and with little effect, and in one of the angles there was just as much hesitation as made me feel exceedingly uncomfortable" - wrote an officer of British Royal Engineers at Waterloo.

If the square was broken very many infantrymen were killed and wounded, many lost fingers and hands as they sought to protect themselves from sabers by holding their muskets over their heads. Others threw themselves down. Horses were unwilling to step upon prone body. The excited cavalry usually passed over their heads, they quickly rose to their feet and either run to the rear or fired at attackers' backs.

However, the infantry square was the best formation against cavalry. The square presented rows of bayonets ahead of them and no horseman armed with saber would have been able to strike at them without exposing himself and his horse to the sharp points of bayonets. Horses were unwilling to impale themselves on bayonets. Usually there were more horses killed and wounded than riders. The cavalrman instinctively "ducked" under fire becoming smaller target. A horse is a bigger target than man anyway.

A fast moving horse when hit and falling required several paces to fall down. Therefore it was unwise to fire at less than approx. 12 paces. Otherwise the square was hit by falling and kicking (if wounded) horses. One horse could make a big gap in the wall of square, bowling and wounding the men. If the volley is delivered at 12-25 paces, it will raise up a rampart of dead and wounded men and horses which will probably suffice to repulse the charge. However an infantry square rarely reserves its fire so long; and if the fire is delivered at any considerable distance, no such effect will be produced.

In 1867, one of the first battles of the U.S. 10th Cavalry was the Battle of the Saline River. This battle occurred 25 miles northwest of Fort Hays in Kansas near the end of August 1867. Captain George Armes, Company F, 10th Cavalry, while following an active trail along the Saline River were surrounded by about 400 horse-mounted Cheyenne warriors. Armes formed a defensive "hollow square" with the cavalry mounts in the middle. Seeking better defensive ground, Armes walked his command while maintaining the defensive square. After 8 hours of combat, 2,000 rounds of defensive fire and 15 miles of movement, the Cheyenne disengaged and withdrew. Company F, without reinforcements, concluded 113 miles of movement during the 30 hour patrol, riding the final 10 miles back to Fort Hays with only one trooper killed in action. Captain Armes commented later, "It is the greatest wonder in the world that my command escaped being massacred." Armes credited his officers for a "... devotion to duty and coolness under fire."