

## "B" SQUADRON, 31st REGT., B.C. HORSE

Notes made at random from recollection of events of 40 years ago respecting the formation in Langley of an organization which later was recognized under the "Reserve Forces Act", "B" Squadron, 31st Regt., B.C. Horse (Mounted Rifles).

In the spring of 1914 a group of military minded horsemen of Langley got together for organized rides evenings and Sunday mornings. The originator was the late Doctor B. B. Marr with late Major Art Johnston. Some of the others in the group at that time were George I. Blair, George Sellers, Archie Bartlett, Frank Morton, George Ripley, Fred Gay (all since deceased) Dave Lattimer, Walter Reid, Frank Moir, George Medd and Archie Payne. Headquarters was established in the Community Hall, Murrayville.

Motor cars then in Langley could be counted on the fingers of one hand, but horses, and good ones were many, as were horsemen very good, and not so good. The movement was popular, and quickly grew in numbers necessitating more detailed organization of command and activities. Application was then made for recognition by military authorities. Awaiting this, many more were added to the group and quite intensive military training was carried on with outdoor parades on the Burns Hutchison farm and indoor at the Hall in Murrayville. As instructor, the organization was fortunate in getting the services of the late Harry Witcombe, a former English N.C.O. of the permanent force; a wonderful soldier for drill and discipline but not so hot in the saddle.

With the declaration of war, recognition as a military unit appeared imminent, and with authority of the Officer Commanding the Regiment, Doctor Marr and Archie Payne were delegated to make personal submissions to the District Officer Commanding, and did so at Esquimalt. The result being that the group was gazetted as "B" Squadron, 31st Regiment, B.C. Horse (Mounted Rifles). Saddlery and other equipment was then issued and organization in Military Law (Reserve Forces Act) was carried out. Appointments were made: Commanding Officer, Captain Arthur Johnston; Second-in-Command, Lieut. B. B. Barr; Quartermaster, Lieut. George Sellers; Administration, (capacity of Adjutant) Lieut. R. Archie Payne; Squadron S.M., George I. Blair; Sgt. Instructor, Harry Witcombe, Sgt. David Lattimer.

Enquiries were received from interested men in Abbotsford and district and it was decided to recruit up to two Troop strength there, headquarters for same to be in Abbotsford. The late Doug McLagen with rank of Lieut., acting in command. Recruiting there was successful; amongst the members being Tommie Ushaw, rank of Sergeant, other N.C.O.'s being Billy Hill-Tout, Tommie Hutton and Arthur Hulton-Harrop. Headquarters of the Regiment was finally located in Vancouver with Lieut. Colonel Wilson in command and Captain Jack Locke as Adjutant. Squadron Headquarters being: "A" in Vancouver, "B" in Langley and "C" and "D" in the Kamloops district.

Squadron headquarters remained in Langley and during the winter of 1914-15, membership rapidly increased, all being keen for overseas service, training became more intensive, and several were called to military training schools.

As time passed it was evident that Mounted Rifle units were not being called as rapidly as Infantry and Artillery, all ranks became restive, and several left to join units then called for Active Service. The late Doctor Marr was the first man in Langley to offer his services, this was in the fall of 1914. He insisted on combatant service, but was told he would be accepted only by the Medical Corps. He continued training in Mounted Rifles and successfully passed all examinations to the rank of Field Officer in Cavalry Training School. He was later enlisted in the Medical Corps with rank of Captain. On one occasion thirty of the other ranks of the Squadron in a body applied for enlistment in designated Overseas Units in Vancouver. By the close of the year 1915, all ranks of the original Squadron, excepting the odd one unable to pass the final medical examinations, were in overseas units. At least 80 per cent of the Squadron saw active service overseas, unfortunately many made the supreme sacrifice.

This account of the "B.C. Horse" was copied from a May 18th, 1953, Souvenir Program of May Day celebrations when Alex Hope and Reeve Brooks opened the Fort Langley Park. The author of the piece is not recorded.