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"The Bytown Gunners: The History of Ottawa's Artillery, 1855-2015 (Book Review)" by Kenneth W. Reynolds

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Kenneth W. Reynolds. *The Bytown Gunners: The History of Ottawa's Artillery 1855-2015*. Ottawa: 30th Field Artillery Regiment, RCA, 2017. Pp. 320.

The 30th Field Artillery Regiment, Royal Canadian Artillery has a long, distinguished and colourful history. It now, thanks to Ken Reynolds and his talented colleagues, also has a regimental history fully worthy of its many accomplishments. The regiment is affectionately known as "the Bytown Gunners," a tribute to its hometown of Ottawa, Ontario. This new history is appropriately titled *The Bytown Gunners: The History of Ottawa's Artillery, 1855-2015*.

The 30th Field Artillery Regiment itself dates back to 1905 when it was formed as the 8th Brigade of Field Artillery. Artillery brigades became artillery regiments during the Second World War, and the designation 30th was acquired in 1946 following the post-war reorganisation of the Canadian Army. Although regimental lineages are significant and recognised, gunners also place great importance on their batteries which have their own lines of perpetuation. Even though the 30th Field Regiment can trace its own service back to 1905, one of its constituent subunits, 2nd Field Battery, can trace its lineage back to 1855 when it was raised as the Volunteer Militia Field Battery of Artillery of Ottawa City. It is in keeping with this tradition that Reynolds has organised the story of all of Ottawa's artillery units and subunits, following the fortunes of each of them from 1855 to 2015.

As the book jacket states, "the story is told within the context of international developments and the growth of the Canadian Army," and the text fully lives up to that claim. Reynolds has crafted an easy-to-follow narrative devoid of the military jargon and endless acronyms that one all too often encounters in works of this nature. The numerous illustrations, photos, posters, maps and diagrams are a visual feast and ably complement the text. Significant individuals are highlighted in standalone biographical sketches sprinkled throughout the book. Among the many interesting anecdotes to be found in this work is the little-known tale of Canada's three Victoria Crosses won in a single day (7 November 1900) during the South African War. The story, which naturally involves the Bytown Gunners, is fully discussed. As well, the intimate connection between Canada's most famous poem, John McCrae's Great War masterpiece "In Flanders

Fields,” and the Ottawa artillery may be a surprise to some people! We are also told the story of the Second World War 17-pounder anti-tank gun, the Archer, which could only be used by presenting its rear to the enemy. Although it was never used in combat, the Bytown Gunners manned that weapon.

Reynolds has been careful to chronicle the years of peace which, as he points out, outnumber those of war by a factor of six to one. The struggle to keep military reserve units alive and functional in the face of government penury and public indifference is as interesting, instructive and important as the trials of the battlefield, even if they are a little less exciting and sanguinary. In keeping with this theme, the chapter detailing the period of 1968 to 1989 is titled “A constant struggle.” As the work makes plain, it was only the ingenuity of the unit’s officers and the dedication of its soldiers that permitted the Bytown Gunners and other Canadian reserve units to survive the trauma of armed forces unification, and the accompanying unit reductions, reorganisations and financial cutbacks, to emerge in the 1980s as significant participants in both United Nations operations and NATO exercises in Europe. The eventual payoff would come with the war in Afghanistan (2001-2014) in which military reservists would end up providing nearly twenty per cent of the troops deployed overseas in what would be Canada’s longest war.

This is a work that can be used and enjoyed on several different levels. Readers interested in the technical aspects of the many guns used by the Canadian military will find that information in an easily digested format. Those seeking information on the triumphs and travails of the Canadian militia over the years will find that story. Similarly, those looking for relatives or ancestors with a connection to the Ottawa artillery will likely find them as well in appendices that include rolls of honour, senior appointments, honours and awards, as well as lists of personnel present on operational deployments dating back to the Fenian Raids of 1866 and 1870. Both generic artillery traditions and those specific to the 30th Field Regiment are well explained in the appendices. The unit’s many present-day activities such as operational deployments (the ice storm of 1998 being an example), field training, public ceremonies, national salutes, the regimental museum and their participation in band concerts is also covered. The cost of this service is also vividly and poignantly brought home in a photograph of the grave of Gunner Arielle Keyes-Oliver, killed in a vehicle accident in Petawawa in 2008 at the age of 19.

As Ken Reynolds notes in his introductory remarks, the artillery has not been nearly as well served by historians as have units of infantry and cavalry/armour. He is quite correct in that assertion and although he offers some suggestions as to why that is so, the question still remains. The successful employment of artillery is both an art and a science with the scientific aspect predominant. Perhaps it is for that reason that not nearly enough gunners have written their memoirs or histories of their units (Captain George Blackburn, MC, a Bytown gunner who is well represented in this work, being one of several outstanding exceptions.) This means that *The Bytown Gunners*, although it is focused on a single Canadian city, can help to fill in a national historical void and can perhaps also show the way for other Canadian gunner units to follow suit.

The Bytown Gunners: The History of Ottawa's Artillery, 1855-2015 will be a worthy addition to the library of anyone with an interest in or connection to the Canadian military. This book is therefore highly recommended to both the general reader and the military specialist.

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