

Military Dress and the Cataloguing of Photographs

by **DAVID ROSS**

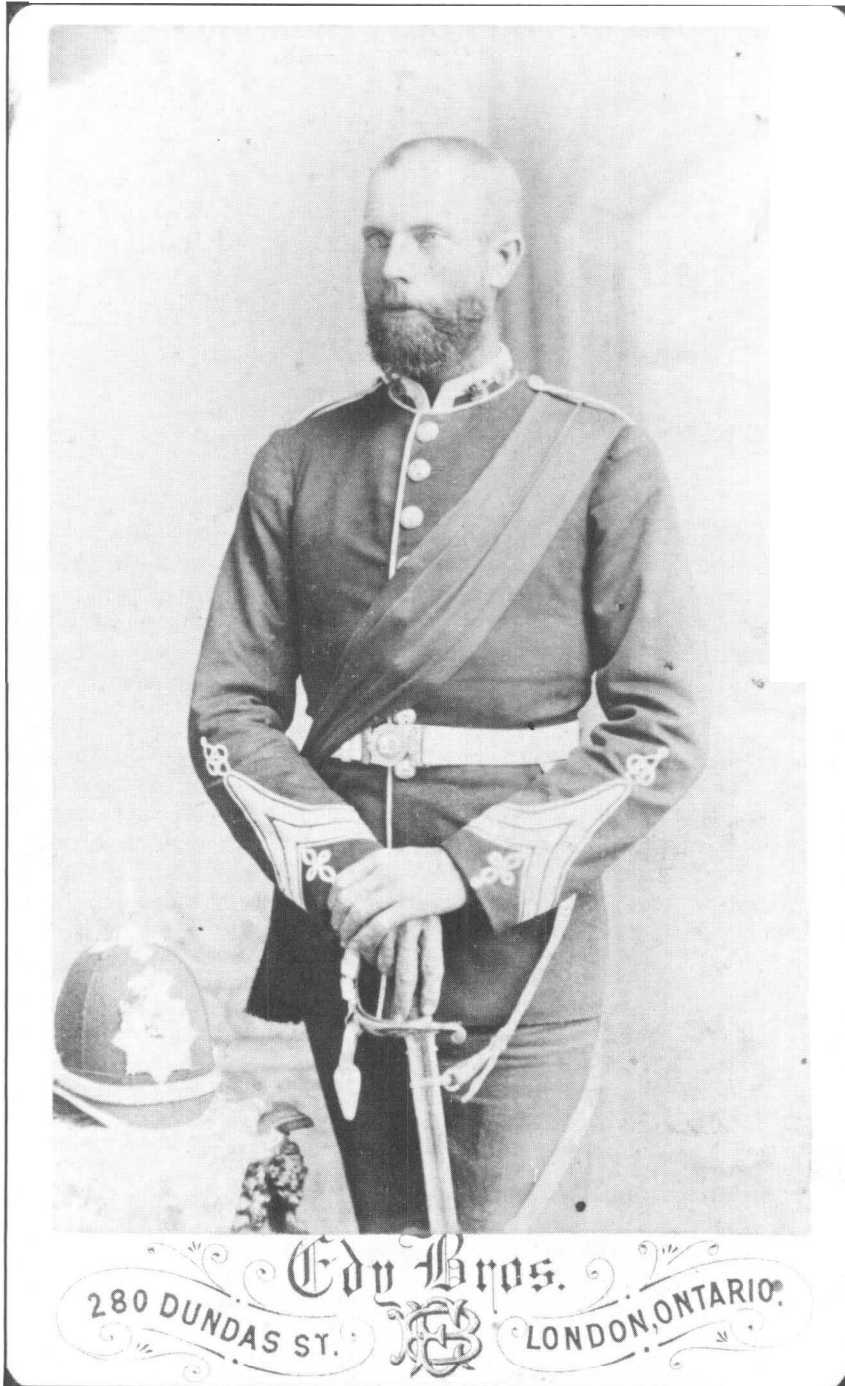
Photographs of soldiers in uniform can often provide a considerable amount of information about the sitter. Those of us who are concerned with the study of military dress would be very appreciative if this evidence were utilized to enable more data to be recorded. Most of us would be only too happy to assist archivists to glean this information. The military portraits in the Notman Photographic Archives were recently indexed by a military uniforms specialist, and regiment, ranks and biographical data were added to the catalogue.

The military uniform researcher needs the following catalogue entry data on the subject of a photograph (in order of importance): date the photograph was taken, name of the sitter's regiment, his rank, the type of uniform (full dress, fatigue, combat, etc.), and any departures from the norm in the uniform (for example, the wearing of a Victoria Cross, or a Canadian example of the double breasted infantry tunic which was both introduced and withdrawn in 1855). Without these minimum data the catalogue entry is not very useful in a military dress context.

The cut and style of military uniforms, the insignia, badges, patterns of braid, the design of swords and headgear worn were and still are carefully codified and regulated in printed volumes of Dress Regulations and all the officers' promotions and careers can be found recorded in the annual Canadian Militia Lists. The dates of changes are noted in detail and what is more important, adhered to by the soldiers, who are professionally an obedient lot, unlike unruly civilians who go on wearing a style long after the costume historian has assumed it has disappeared.

Thus the presence of a soldier in a group photo or on sentry duty outside a building may be an unexpected bonus for the archivist identifying the picture, not only as to date, but also as to place, since the location of regiments at a given time is recorded in such documents as Militia General Orders.

As an example, the photo accompanying this note was identified as George Wood. His family knew that he had moved to Manitoba in 1882 and they possessed his medal for service in the North West Rebellion of 1885. Internal evidence provides the following information:



Photograph of George Wood in military uniform, nd. Courtesy: Victor Colclough

The pattern of tunic and helmet indicate an infantry regiment. The sword and the sash over the left shoulder indicate that he is an officer.

The pattern of lace on the cuffs and the small crown and star on the collar give this rank as a Captain.

The numerals "26" in the centre of the helmet plate show that he served with the 26th Middlesex Battalion of Infantry of London, Ontario.

The helmet, the Blue Home Service pattern, was introduced into the Canadian Militia in 1878 and discontinued in 1886. He is not wearing the North West Canada Medal 1885.

Thus far one can say that this photo is of a Captain in the 26th Battalion, in full dress uniform between 1878 and 1886. Since the sitter's regiment is known, one can now find him in the Militia Lists. Prior to 1885 they were not indexed by name, only by regiment. These tell us that he was promoted to captain in No. 8 Company of the 7th London Light Infantry 12 March 1875 and that No. 8 Company was transferred to the 26th Battalion in 1881 in which year Captain Wood is listed as Commanding Officer of the Company. He does not appear in the 1885 Militia List, indicating that he retired between the end of 1881 and the beginning of 1885, presumably in 1882 when family records show that he moved to Birtle, Manitoba. Thus the photo must have been taken in 1881 or 1882 before he left London for the West.

The absence of the medal confirms that the photo must be pre-1885, and examination of the Medal Roll at the National Archives of Canada or a look at Major Boulton's *Reminiscences* show that he raised a company of home guards in Birtle.

This note is not intended as a criticism of current archival cataloguing, but to indicate the usefulness of a knowledge of military costume for the archivist and to invite archivists to make more use of the services of the specialists in this field.