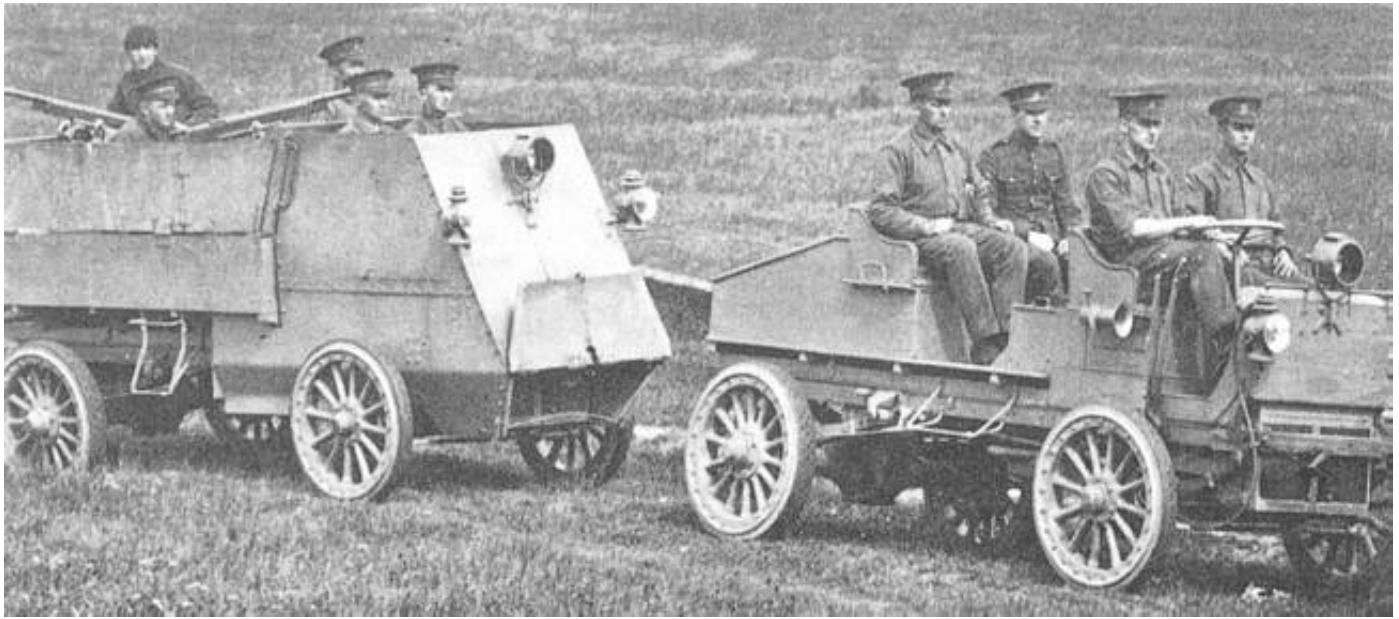


The Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade, Part 1

Introduction

The Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade was one of the more unusual units in the Canadian Army during The First World War, and it was the first fully motorized unit within the forces of The British Empire.



The Canadian Automobile Machine Gun Brigade, Ottawa, 1914.
From Source 1.

Canadian Automobile Machine Gun Brigade No. 1

On 20 August 1914 a group of 15 wealthy Canadian businessmen offered to finance and equip, among others a fully motorized machine gun unit, with machine guns mounted in armoured vehicles. The Minister of Militia and Defence, Sam Hughes, happily accepted the offer and on 9 September 1914 the Canadian Automobile Machine Gun Brigade No. 1 was formed.

The first commanding officer was Raymond Brutinel, a French émigré officer. Brutinel got the rank of major and a unit, comprising 9 officers and 114 other ranks, was soon formed. However, the vehicles - 8 armoured cars [1](#) and 6 supply vehicles - were harder to come by.



Colt calibre .303 air-cooled machine gun.

From Source 1

Major Brutinel went to USA and bought 20 air-cooled machine guns of the Colt .303 calibre type - two for each armoured car, and 4 spare.

It was impossible, in 1914, to equip the many new units in the Canadian Army with Vickers machine guns, and only the very small regular force within the Canadian Army got the Vickers machine guns, e.g. Royal Canadian Regiment.

Consequently, the American machine gun was a solution made by necessity rather than choice. The .303 calibre however, was however the standard calibre used within the British Army.

The unit was formed at *Camp Valcartier*, near Montreal. After a brief training, they left for England on 29 September 1914, ahead of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, which sailed from Canada on 3 October 1914.

Raymond Brutinel

Raymond Brutinel (6.3.1882 - 21.9.1964) immigrated to Canada in 19105 and settled in Edmonton, Alberta. As an engineer, geologist and mineralogist he was very much involved in building railroads in Western Canada. Besides his professional skills he must have been very good with money as he turned out a millionaire. He might be called an entrepreneur (in the broadest sense of the word), but some historians call him an adventurer.

In the French Army he still ranked as a captain in the Reserve Forces and had planned to return to France at the beginning of the war. However, he was persuaded to join the Canadian Army, and given the rank of major. The 15 wealthy businessmen involved in financing the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade offered a sum of CAD 150.000 for the project.



Raymond Brutinel, here as Lieutenant-Colonel, with French officers.
From Source 9.

Brutinel had closely followed the development of the machine gun and the tactics involved, and he supported the view that machine gun units must be independent arms of service, somewhere in between infantry and artillery.

In 1917 he was made head of The Canadian Machine Gun Corps, created 16 April 1917.

He held this post together with being corps machine gun officer.

After the war he acted as military historical advisor to the General Staff, and in 1920 he retired to France due to personal circumstances.

Interlude in England

When the machine gunners arrived in England, nobody knew what to do with this motorized unit, which did not fit into any known order-of-battle. Lord Kitchener and other high ranking officers were however very interested in the unit, but the only way to fit it into the army was to attach it to some of the home defence forces guarding England - South Eastern Mounted Brigade.

On 4 February 1915 the brigade was inspected by King George V on Salisbury Plains.

An anecdote - mentioned in Source 3 - gives an insight in the rather improvised nature of the unit. Since no official regulations on how to parade the unit was published, Major Brutinel made his own arrangements. Following this, most of the personnel paraded in front their vehicles, but a number of men were left over, and rather than leaving them behind, they were placed within the vehicles, but out of sight.

The King wanted to inspect the vehicles more closely and rode up to one of the armoured cars. The soldiers rose to their feet and jumped to attention and the King's horse reared. The King kept control over the horse, thus avoiding an embarrassing situation.

The story are told in a number of variations, e.g. as mentioned in Source 8.

In France

The Brigade arrived in France on 16 June 1915 where it stayed until the end of the war. On arrival the Brigade was organized as follows:

**Canadian Automobile Machine Gun
Brigade**

Organization as per 16 June 1915 (Source
3)

LIEUT.-COL. R. BRUTINEL, Officer Commanding

LIEUT. E. D. WALLACE, Adjutant

"A" Battery

CAPT. J. E. BROWNE, Officer Commanding

LIEUT. W. E. C. MCCARTHY

LIEUT. F. A. WILKIN

"B" Battery

CAPT. C. F. HAWKINS, Officer Commanding

LIEUT. F. M. GARRISON

LIEUT. M. A. SCOTT

Train

CAPT. H. H. DONNELLY, Quartermaster & Officer
Commanding

CAPT. D. MACCLENNAN, Medical Officer

The war had settled into trench warfare and motorized units were not in great demand. Consequently most of the vehicles were left unused whereas the machine gunners were used in various capacities. Quantities of Vickers machine guns began to arrive in the Canadian units and also issued to the Brigade.



Canadian light armoured cars (Autocar), equipped with Vickers machineguns

From source 10

Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade

On 19 August 1916 the Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade was formed. It consisted of the two original batteries - also known as Sifton A and Sifton B (after the Canadian Minister of the Interior) supplemented by 3 other batteries - "C" (Borden Motor Machine Gun Battery), "D" (Eaton Motor Machine Gun Battery) and "E" (Yukon Motor Machine Gun Battery) [2](#)).

Each battery consisted of two sections, each of two armoured cars with two machine guns. A number of motorcycles for reconnaissance and communication duties were included as well.

Due to the static nature of the war, the batteries supported The Canadian Corps on foot, e.g. at Vimy Ridge in April 1917 and at Passchendaele (Third Ypres) in the autumn of 1917 [3](#)). In the operations at Passchendaele, the machine gunners were used in barrages, fired indirectly. Although this method of fire owed much to Raymond Brutinel's way of thinking, the method was not invented by Brutinel.

March-April 1918

During the German March 1918 offensive, the Brigade played a major role as a truly mobile unit, and available units were sent forward to close the large gaps which the German attack made in the British lines.

The Brigade, under command of Lieutenant-Colonel W.K. Walker, formed two detachments - "D" and "E" Batteries, under Captain V. Muerling in command, and "B" and "C" Batteries, with Captain Holland in command - which were to support 17 and 7 Corps respectively. "A"



A destroyed Autocar light armoured car.
From Source 9.

During the next 3 weeks the Batteries fought along with various British and French units, and fighting from their vehicles as well as on foot they covered withdrawals as well as local offensive operations. Even attacks from the air were encountered; including an attack by a British fighter plane which however without being hit by the latter.

The Brigade was highly praised for its performance during these hectic weeks; please refer to Source 3, pp. 123-138, and Source 12 for further information on the operations.

Losses between March 24 and April 7, 1918:

(from Source 3)	Dead	Wounded	Missing	Total
Officers	5	8	1	14
Other ranks	20	100	10	130
Total	25	108	11	144

The losses include British machine gunners, attached to the Brigade at various times.

Restructuring

Whereas March 21, 1918 is often termed as the Black Day in the history of the British Army, August 8, 1918 may hold a similar position in the history of the German Army when the Allied forces punched a major gap in the German front, thus marking the beginning of the end of trench warfare.

As part of the preparations for the Offensive at Amiens, August 8, 1918, the Canadian machine gun units were restructured.

2nd Motor Machine Gun Brigade

2nd Motor Machine Gun Brigade was formed on June 15, 1918. Yukon and Eton Motor Machine Gun Batteries were transferred from 1st Motor Machine Gun Brigade, making up "A" and "B" Batteries; "C", "D" and "E" Battery were formed by personnel from 17th and 19th Canadian Machine Gun Company.

Within 1st Motor Machine Gun Brigade a new "D" and "E" Battery was formed by personnel from 18th Canadian Machine Gun Company.

The Last 100 Days - Brutinel's Brigade

The Commander-in-Chief of The Canadian Corps, Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur Currie made Brutinel commander of all mobile units within The Canadian Corps, and this force was known as *Brutinel's Brigade*. In August 1918, the designation changed to *The Canadian Independent Force*, but in September 1918 changed back to Brutinel's Brigade.

Brutinel's Brigade

Brigade Commander: Brigadier-General Raymond Brutinel

Organisation pr. August 1918 (Source 3)

1st Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade

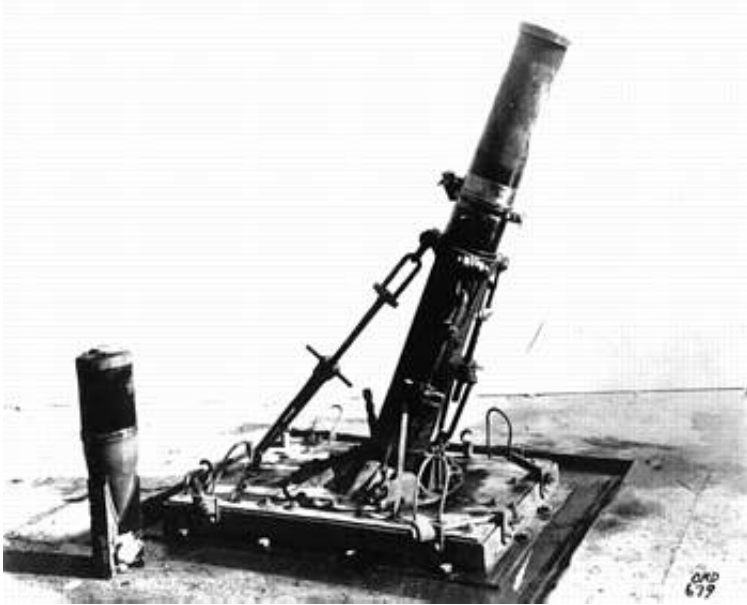
Pr. November 11, 1918 a brigade consisted of:

2nd Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade

- 26 Officers
- 406 Other ranks
- 40 machine guns

Two sections 6-inch trench mortars The trench mortars were transported by - and were able to fire from - lorries.

Canadian Corps Cyclists Battalion Headquarters and 3 Cyclist Companies (approx. 300 mand)



The British 6-inch Newton Trench Mortar.

From the homepage

US 80th "Blue Ridge" Infantry Division in World War One.

A number of sources mention that the trench mortars - presumably 1 trench mortar in each section - were able to fire from the lorries. I have been unable to trace a photo of a lorry borne trench mortar, but suspect that the trench mortar was best used dismounted.

The weight of the grenade is given as approx. 30 kilos, and the effective range as between 100 and 1,300 metres (depending on elevation - minimum 45°; maximum 77°).

See also *The 6-inch Mortar* on the Royal New Zealand Artillery Old Comrades' Associations homepage.



An Autocar light armoured car on the move.

Fra Armoured Acorn - The Canadian Armour Website.

During the operations in The Last 100 Days various units were attached to Brutinel's Brigade, e.g. The Canadian Light Horse (the corps cavalry regiment of The Canadian Corps), an engineer company together with 30th Battery, Canadian Field Artillery.

Further, the Brigade had a radio section and The Canadian Motor Machine Gun Mechanical Transport Company [4](#)) in support.

At various times, the British 101st Machine Gun Battalion (minus one company) was attached to Brutinel's Brigade, together with 6 armoured cars from 17th (Armoured Car) Battalion, Tank Corps, and the 10th (Prince of Wales's Own Royal) Hussars.



British Austin armoured cars from 17th (Armoured Car) Battalion, Tank Corps, 1918 [5](#)).

Compared to open-topped, light Autocar type, these are real armoured cars.

Following the breakthrough at Arras on August 8th, 1918, armoured cars penetrated the German lines, thus inflicting huge damage behind the lines.

In many ways the Allied operations in The Last 100 Days is a foretaste of the later Blitzkrieg type of operations. For further reference to the Machine Gun Brigade's operations in The Last 100 Days, see source 12.

Wargame organisation

In Source 15 Greg Novak describes how the Motor Machine Gun Brigade as per 1918 may be organised, according to the Over the Top rules, the First World War version of the Command Decision wargame rules.

Brigade Staff **5 Motorised Machine Gun Batteries**, each with

1 command stand 1 command infantry stand

1 staff car 2 light armoured cars, each with 1 machine gun

Support Battery 1 supply stand

2 supply stands 1 lorry

1 lorry

2 supply lorries

1 field kitchen

If the machine guns are dismantled, they must be replaced by 1 medium machine gun stand.

If the machine guns fire while mounted, they can use 1 machine gun when firing in the front arch or rear arch of fire, but can use 2 machine guns when firing in the right or left arch of fire.

Part 2

In Part 2 of this article you can read about the various types of equipment used by the Brigade, the uniforms, Colours etc. together with a list of my sources.

Per Finsted

Notes:

- 1) The vehicles were called light armoured cars, but today they might be termed infantry combat vehicles or armoured personnel carriers. The machine guns could fire from the cars or dismantled, to fire from the ground.
- 2) The units now forming Batteries C-E were raised more or less at the same time as the Canadian Automobile Machine Gun Brigade. The Yukon Battery derived from The Boyle Mounted Machine Gun Detachment, a unit raised in 1914 and funded by Colonel J.W. Boyle in Dawson, Yukon Territories.
- 3) Refer to e.g. For King and Empire - Canadian Soldiers in the Great War for an introduction to these battles.
- 4) The Canadian Motor Machine Gun Mechanical Transport Company was formed in June 1918 by merging the supply units of 1st and 2nd Motor Machine Gun Brigades.
- 5) From *Tank Battles of World War 1* by Bryan Cooper, Ian Allan, London 1974, ISBN 0-7110-0483-8.