



Baker Rifle

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Captain John Dolsen's Rifles: new weaponry, new methods of warfare

Wearing green wool and armed with Baker rifles the Kent militia unit captained by John Dolsen was in the vanguard of a new phenomenon in warfare—rifle units.

Prior to the Baker rifle, artillery soldiers carried a musket, which was usually a tube from which a ball was shot with little control over its trajectory. The new “rifled” Baker barrel had twisted grooves on the inside which caused the musket ball/bullet to spin as it left the barrel making its trajectory straighter and more accurate. No longer did soldiers only have the option to line up to fire at the enemy at close range. Rifle units, such as Dolsen’s, were trained to be advance units sent to act like guerilla fighters picking off officers and musicians who signalled the officers’ commands to the troops. “Ungentlemanly,” came the cry from those who believed that in warfare you were intended to face your enemy and duke it out. Dolsen’s Rifles, Number 5 Company, 1st Regiment, Kent Militia saw service at the capture of Fort Detroit in August 1812. They took part in the skirmishes at Amherstburg and Fort Malden; they were participants in the *Battle of Queenston Heights*. They were at the *Battle of Fort Meigs* and the *Battle of the Moravietown*. After defeat at this latter battle, John Dolsen loaned his wagon and team of horses to missionaries to remove their property before the Americans burned the town of Fairfield to the ground. John Dolsen owned a large steam sawmill equipped with modern planing machinery in Chatham from 1848 to 1863. From rifleman to modern mill owner, John Dolsen, showed his preference to be at the cutting edge.