

## Military Tattoos During the Simcoe Regime

What I hope to accomplish this morning/afternoon is to give a brief history of the Military ceremony known as the Tattoo. First by fleshing out the etymology of the term, second by describing the musicians, the instrumentation and circumstances under which the tattoo was performed and finally by deconstructing an audio example from Historic Fort York's music library. This should provide a more accurate and complete picture of what a Tattoo would have looked and sounded like during the Simcoe regime in Upper Canada.

In the 17<sup>th</sup> century the word Tap-too was first encountered by the English Army when fighting in the Low Countries or the Netherlands. The Dutch – tap-toe – came from tap as in cask; toe or doe for “shut”<sup>1</sup>. Although Dutch tap-toe was in military use in our sense in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, there is reason to doubt if this was its original use. Tap toe from the phrase “doe den tap toe” which literally translates as “put the tap to”, or “close or turn off the tap” was already in colloquial use by the Dutch for “shut-up” or “stop, cease”<sup>2</sup>. In a play of 1639 from Emden comes the line “*Doch hier de tap van toe*” meaning “but here we shut-up” or “say no more”<sup>3</sup>.

The English however adopted the literal translation and it became a signal, played by beat of drum, to tavern owners to turn off the taps of their ale kegs so that the soldiery would retire at a reasonable hour. Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century pre-dates the practice of constructing purpose-built military housing, soldiers were billeted wherever lodgings could be obtained. Without the watchful eye of their superiors, the opportunity for late-night carousing was hard to resist. The following order, issued in 1644 by a Col. Hutchinson was designed to mitigate such abuses;

*If anyone shall bee found tipplinge or drinkinge in any Taverne, Inne, or Alehouse, after the houre of nyne of the clock at night, when the tap-too beates, hee shall pay 2s 6d.*<sup>4</sup>

By the 18<sup>th</sup> century, British soldiers would find themselves housed in barracks at a military garrison. The days of billeting soldiers were coming to an end and would be mostly replaced by this new barracks accommodation by the end of the century. The Tattoo therefore was already losing its original meaning and was becoming simply a signal for lights out. In 1777 Thomas Simes in his *Military Course for the Government and conduct of a Battalion* writes:

*The Taptoo beates at ten o'clock every night in summer and nine in winter; the soldiers must then repair to their quarters or barracks when the non-commissioned Officers of each squad call over their rolls and every man must remain there till reveille next morning.*<sup>5</sup>

When on campaign the same signal would indicate that it was time to repair to their tents.

The Taptoo was firmly entrenched as one aspect of a repertoire known in the 18<sup>th</sup> century military as the “duty” which comprised the fife, bugle and drum calls used to regulate camp and

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<sup>1</sup> The Oxford English Dictionary, second edition, Clarendon Press, Oxford pg. 666.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 666.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 666.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 666

<sup>5</sup> Thomas Simes, Military Course for the Government and Conduct of Battalion, (London 1777).

garrison activities. Regiments of Infantry were permitted a total of 22 musicians to make up their Corps of Drums. Reporting to the Drum Major - a rank roughly akin to Sergeant - these fifers, drummers and buglers were referred to simply as drummers. Drummers had myriad responsibilities, from delivering mail to flogging miscreant soldiers, but their primary and pivotal role was to provide the duty. As early as 1688 drummers were expected to *beat all manner of beats, as a Call, a Troope [sic], a March, a Retreit [sic], a Tato [sic], and a Revally [sic]*.

The 18<sup>th</sup> century also saw the rise of the Military Band of Music. Not to be confused with the Regimental Drum-Corps, this new breed of military musician tended to be a professional, hired and paid for by the Officers. Their main purpose was to entertain – on the Parade Square, in the Officers' Mess or *pro bono publico*. This latter function was particularly useful in strengthening ties to the local community. Instrumentation for a typical late 18<sup>th</sup> century band would likely have included clarinets, bassoons, horns, flutes, serpents (a member of the cornet family and grandfather of the tuba) and, in all likelihood a Turkish percussion section comprising cymbals, bass drum, tambourine, triangle and Turkish crescent. It is during this era that the present interpretation of Tattoo has its roots.

While the drum-corps, or field music as it was sometimes known, continued to play the tattoo to put the soldiers to bed, the word tattoo was being used to describe an elaboration of this centuries-old ceremony, with additional music and exercises performed by troops, generally at night. In a letter dated 1742 Horace Walpole, wrote, "*You know, one loves a tattoo and review*". Just over a decade later, Scottish composer James Oswald published a collection entitled "*40 Marches, Tattoos and Night Pieces for two German flutes, violins or guittars as performed by the Prussian and Hessian Armies*". During the rise of the Military band old forms gave way to new; military music was leaving the parade square for the parlour and concert hall. The marches, tattoos and night pieces in Oswald's book show the evolution of the practical or instructional into a musical form meant solely for entertainment. Dances such as the gigue, minuet and waltz would go through a similar development, from one art form to another.

When Simcoe arrived in Upper Canada therefore, the word Taptoo could have described either the last duty call of the day or an evening entertainment. The former usage however, would still have predominated, used, as it would have been on a daily basis. Simcoe's hastily-constructed log barracks at the site of the current Fort York would have resounded each evening with the assembled members of the drum corps compelling the garrison to extinguish their lights and turn in for the evening. The following account by Thomas Jackson gives us a glimpse of the often-monotonous evening garrison routine:

*After dinner-romps, foolish talk and corrupting each other. Tattoo beating at nine. All in barracks and roll call; every man standing at his bed, and his name on the foot.*

The following is a description of a Taptoo ceremony, reconstructed using two books: *The Art of Playing the Fife*, and *The Art of Beating the Drum*. Both books were written by Samuel Potter, Head Drum Major for the Coldstream Guards and were adopted as standard by the British Army in 1815.

The Tattoo at this time consisted of several components. First, the members of the Drum Corps would have to be assembled. This required the beating of “The Drummers Call” by the duty drummer – a daily responsibility shared on a rotational basis among the members of the corps. Once assembled and joined by the Drum Major, the lead drummer would beat a drumming rudiment known as the open flam, then three signal strokes followed by the entire corps commencing the Three Cheers. The Three Cheers, also known as the three rolls or ruffles, consisted of three drum rolls, accompanied by three triads played by the fifes. The first was an A Major triad, the second D Major, first inversion and the third was an incomplete A7 (missing the third note or C#). These ruffles were used at the beginning and at the completion of all of the duties performed by the entire drum corps, as opposed to the incidental duties throughout the day which were played only by the duty drummer. Under different circumstances, the Three Cheers were also used as a flourish which paid compliments to high ranking officials; the higher the rank, the more ruffles one would receive – three ruffles for Lt. Generals; two for Major Generals, and; one for Brig. Generals.

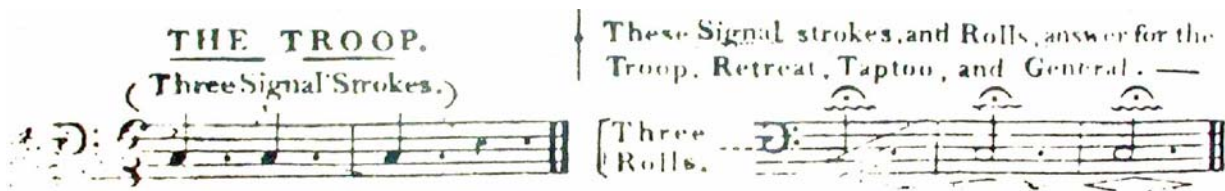


Fig. 1



Fig. 2

At the completion of the cheers or ruffles, the drums would beat the Singlings of the Taptoo, followed by seven bars of rest during which time the fifes would play an appropriate tune. Appropriate in this case simply meant any popular tune in 6/8 time consisting of an A part of eight bars repeated, followed by a B part, also of eight bars repeated. At the end of each eight bar phrase the drums would repeat the Singlings, although it was permitted that “a few of the Drummers may beat to make the Taptoo lively” during the time that the fifers play. At the completion of the 32 bar fife tune, the fifes and drums together would play the Doublings of the Taptoo.

The term Doublings is a corruption of the archaic French musical term *Doubles*, meaning variation, as in *Air avec Doubles*. The Singlings therefore, refer to the principal theme. Several duties possessed this theme and variation format, presumably to alleviate tedium.

After the Doublings, the corps would return to the Singlings with another popular fife tune, then the Doublings and so on alternating between the two until the Taptoo was complete. How long this pattern of Singlings and Doublings was repeated is difficult say, although according to the standing orders of the 26<sup>th</sup> Regiment in 1820:

*“Whilst the Taptoo is beating, the orderly Sergeants of companies will call the rolls, not exceeding 20 minutes. No lights are to be seen in half an hour after the time when Taptoo commenced....”*

After approximately 20 minutes, the drum major would signal the end of the Taptoo which would mean repeating the three signal strokes and three cheers. The final musical flourish of the Taptoo consisted of two drags and strokes on the drum with two bars of fife music resolving to G major. This is the perfect musical end to a soldiers’ day. Without these final two bars of music, the third of the three cheers – A7 – would have been the last thing the soldiers heard, and who in their right mind could settle down to sleep with an unresolved A7 hanging in the night air?

The musical example that you will hear momentarily, follows the above format to the letter, with one happy exception: I have only recorded three fife tunes for the Singlings, so this Taptoo only lasts for 4:00 not 20 or 30. The three tunes are as follows; “A Quick Step”, from a circa 1790 music collection known as the Buttrey manuscript; “I’ll Touzle Your Kurchy”, from the James Aird collection, 1781, and; “Quick Step No. 12”, from another of Potter’s manuals from 1804 when he was Fife Major for the Coldstream Guards.

Questions?