

CORPS IDENTITY:
THE LETTERS, DIARIES AND MEMOIRS OF
CANADA'S GREAT WAR SOLDIERS

MAARTEN GERRITSEN





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**Corps Identity:
The Letters, Diaries and Memoirs of
Canada's Great War Soldiers**

by

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**A thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the
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Abstract:

The purpose of this dissertation is to analyze the role published diaries, letters and memoirs of Canadian soldiers played in shaping, consolidating, and preserving the “myth of the [Great] war experience” in Canada. In *Death So Noble, Memory, Meaning, and the First World War*, Jonathan Vance argues that, during and shortly after the First World War, Canadian politicians, artists and historians created this myth to soften the horrible realities of the trenches. To justify and explain the deaths of more than 60,000 Canadians, the war was most often portrayed as a positive, if costly, experience that led a colony to full nationhood. At the same time, Canadian soldiers were described as backwoodsmen; natural soldiers who evinced a strong disdain for army discipline.

Although Vance’s interpretation of the Great War legacy in Canada has been well received, the role that Canadian soldiers played in the creation of this legacy has yet to be examined. One approach to this enormous task is to probe the hundreds of published soldier sources composed by members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). Granted, they are limited in number compared to total enlistment figures. Thus, no final claim can be made that they speak categorically for the CEF as a whole. Indeed, in some cases, the reliability of individual writers might be quite dubious. Still, these sources exist and are part of the historical record. They have, however, yet to be analyzed systematically. When they are, these unique sources collectively offer some intriguing, if

conditional, insights into soldier agency in the process of myth-making about Canada's Great War.

Published sources suggest that the way Canadian soldiers portrayed the war fits, almost seamlessly, with the "myth of the war experience." This is not only because the myth influenced soldier writings, but also because Canadian soldiers had both embraced and helped to generate it during the war. The latter point is often overlooked. Although the war divided the dominion as much as it united it, these soldier sources reveal that, layer by layer, something of a pan-Canadian "corps identity" developed, at least among many within the wartime CEF. Moreover, this "corps identity" is present in material written at the time, as well as in memoirs published long after it.

Volunteers had not consciously set out in 1914 to create this identity. However, traveling and training together created an *esprit de corps* before Canadians even set foot in the trenches. Apart from their shared experience, this rudimentary identity was also based on the retelling of anecdotes, generally detailing the CEF's pioneer disdain for army discipline. The fact that British civilians viewed the CEF as a homogenous unit, often as a result of the CEF's unique maple leaf uniform and cap badges, only heightened the soldiers' sense of collective identity.

The CEF's participation in major battles, Second Ypres, Vimy, Passchendaele and the Hundred Days, added another, more positive, layer to this newfound

identity. Considering that the Canadians Corps sometimes managed to succeed where British or French armies had failed, it is not surprising that many soldiers depicted these battles as the crowning moments of Canada's war effort. After April 1917, the successful storming of Vimy Ridge, soldiers generally showed little surprise about the CEF's combat effectiveness. Many explained this by pointing to the outstanding soldierly qualities Canadians had brought to the trenches. Even though most volunteers came from urban and industrial professions, the belief that many CEF soldiers had, in some shape or form, experienced Canada's vast wilderness was, perhaps strangely, deeply entrenched. In any case, this helped to create the perception that 'colonials' were ideally suited for the war.

There can be no doubt that the Great War furthered a Canadian consciousness amongst many soldiers of the CEF. By portraying themselves as different, Canadian soldiers created a "corps identity" that set them aside from others. This identity, perhaps based more on perception than reality, strongly coloured these soldiers' memory of the war. It is exactly this perception of a "corps identity" that we see in the countless letters, diaries and memoirs that have been published in the more than ninety years since the war.

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read 'Franklin the Turtle' or enticing me to a game of hockey on the kitchen floor. Not an easy person to live with in the first place, my wife has borne the brunt of the years spent on this thesis. I love you both, and know how happy you are 'this thing' is finally over.

Introduction: Thesis, Sources and Themes

This study is built upon a very particular foundation. That foundation is the extensive number of published memoirs, diaries and letters composed by members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) during and after the Great War. Curiously, although plentiful and frequently cited, these sources have yet to be analyzed systematically by historians as a discrete cache of material.¹ That task is undertaken in this dissertation. It is undertaken, however, with an awareness of the problems and limitations inherent in the use of such sources, but also with confidence that they can be rendered historically useful with proper care and handling. When carefully analyzed, the published memoirs, diaries and letters of CEF soldiers offer some intriguing, if conditional, insights into soldier agency in the process of myth-making about Canada's Great War. Indeed, they suggest that, layer by layer, something of a pan-Canadian "corps identity" developed within the wartime CEF. This identity persisted long after 1918 and was broadly in line with the "myth of the war

¹ In *When Your Number's Up* Desmond Morton uses CEF soldiers' letters, diaries and memoirs to explain what the war would have been like for the average CEF recruit. Although Morton's study paints a rather vivid picture of Canada's Great War soldiers, his work is more a narration than an analysis of the available sources. He pays little attention to when the material was written, whether it was edited and how this may have coloured our view of Canadian soldiers' Great War experience. See Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993).

experience” described by Jonathan Vance in his *Death So Noble*.² This dissertation extends the work of Vance and others by focussing sharply on the active role CEF soldiers played as agents helping to shape and preserve that myth during, as well as after, the war.

Concerning the “myth of the war experience” Vance has argued that, in the years after the conflict, popular memory of the war was based upon Victorian sensibilities.³ Despite the fact that more than 60,000 Canadians died on the battlefields and many more were mentally or physically damaged, most Anglo-Canadians believed that the war had brought benefits to society. Four years of war had not only enhanced the dominion’s international reputation, but also, it was hoped, united the nation internally.⁴ Canadian politicians, poets, novelists and historians, as well as war memoirs and monuments, not only created, but also perpetuated this myth. Because

² Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997). For this notion see also Jay M. Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, Canto ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); George L. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memories of the World Wars* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990); Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Providence, RI: Berg, 1993); I.F.W. Beckett, *The Great War, 1914-1918* (New York: Longman, 2001) and Niall Ferguson, *The Pity Of War* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

³ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 163-172, 199-217.

⁴ The myth and its rich historiography will be dealt with in greater detail later in this chapter.

Vance views this as a largely post-war and generally civilian construct, the role that soldiers played in creating this collection of ideas remains somewhat clouded.

Although soldiers' writings can help to disperse some clouds, they require careful and thorough analysis before they can be used by historians. Indeed, in some cases, the reliability of individual writers may be questionable. After conducting three in-depth interviews with Great War veterans, Alistair Thomson, an Australian Great War historian, observed that soldiers' memories are influenced by a variety of factors.⁵

The concluding sections of the memory biographies of Percy Bird, Bill Langham and Fred Farrall show how their Anzac memories and identities were affected in different ways by popular memories of Anzac in the 1980s. For each man the influence of new Anzac representations depended on his original experience of war, on the way he had previously composed his war remembering, and on the social and emotional context of old age.⁶

Keeping Thomson's conclusions in mind, it is obvious that the writings of Great War soldiers need to be handled with care. Editors may have pushed soldiers to leave out the graphic details of trench warfare in order to increase sales figures or boost enlistment. Thus, it is necessary to compare these publications with other soldier sources.

⁵ Alistair Thomson, *Anzac Memories: Living with the Legend* (Melbourne, New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), conclusion.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 215.

Apart from editors, passage of time may have influenced the memory of CEF veterans and altered their perception of the past. Authors, both during and after the war, often used historical literature and established memory as a foundation for their own work, perhaps relying more on these works than their own memory. The particular material circumstances of the author could also have influenced the writing of soldiers both during and after the war. Working-class privates may not have been overly impressed with the army's strict rules and regulations, which subjected them, once again, to the authority of middle and upper class superiors. Similarly, soldiers who had lost their livelihood, because of their absence from Canada or a life-altering wound that made it impossible to make a decent wage after the war, might have been very bitter about their decision to enlist in the first place. Soldiers' writings published by family members long after the war could be tainted for more personal reasons. Unhappy episodes might have been omitted from memoir manuscripts, diaries or collections of letters, in order to protect the memory of a loved one.

While it is obvious that letters, diaries and memoirs written by Great War soldiers need to be handled with care, it would be unwise completely to exclude these sources in a rounded study of the war. Granted, they are limited in number compared to total enlistment figures.⁷ Thus, no final claim can be made that they speak categorically for

⁷ The total enlistment figure for the CEF is 619,636. This number includes nearly 3,000 nursing sisters and 7,000 soldiers who enlisted in the UK (& possessions) or the USA. Of these more than 600,000 soldiers 424,484 were volunteers. The remaining 124,588 were conscripted in the latter years of the war. See C. A. Sharpe, "Enlistment

the CEF as a whole. Still, these sources exist. They are part of the historical record. The mere fact that these sources exist and have been cited, but not closely interrogated, is a compelling reason to investigate this particular type of material. After all, similar resources have been rendered useful by experienced and respected historians. For example, the sources employed in this thesis present problems almost identical to those faced by Linda Colley in her seminal work, *Captives*. Despite the problems inherent in published captivity stories, Colley is convinced that personal narratives and anecdotes can still be valuable. In *Captives*, she discusses the issue quite directly; emphasizing that cross-referencing and corroboration across a broad selection of similar narratives can overcome the problems of reliability in a single source. Although editors and publishers often shaped and disseminated personal exploits of war and other adventures, these narratives can still have historical value. Thus, she notes, "it needs stressing from the start that, while these texts sometimes contain fictional interludes, together of course with a tithe of lies and errors, their overall factual anchorage can usually be tested,"⁸ The carefully analyzed whole, in other words, is more valuable than the sometimes dubious parts.

One factor that certainly needs to be taken into account when discussing published soldier accounts is the extent to which the content of this material was

in the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1918: A Regional Analysis," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18, no. 4 (1983-1984): 15-29.

⁸ Linda Colley, *Captives* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2002), 12, 13, 82.

influenced by censorship during the war. While overseas, each company assigned one officer as field censor. It was the field censor's duty to delete illegal information, such as the position of their unit, the strength and movement of troops, as well as offending passages aimed at bringing the army or its officers into disrepute.⁹ Although the machinery to censor soldiers' letters was quite extensive, troops received blue and green envelopes for personal and family matters which were not censored by their own officers but by outsiders, the system was, according to Jeffrey Keshen, far from airtight. "Officers, often working in dimly-lit trench dugouts, examined hundreds of letters. Fatigue, boredom or distractions as shell fire produced mistakes."¹⁰

Like letters, books published during the war were subject to censorship but, according to Keshen, most authors never came close to breaking censorship guidelines.

Censorship provisions, patriotism, possibly an author's concern about sales, along with the fact that some writers possessed scant knowledge about the butchery overseas, saw publications continue to cater to an audience that demonstrated in the immediate pre-war years a preference for adventure stories whose male protagonist embodied the highest physical and spiritual standards¹¹

⁹ Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship during Canada's Great War* (Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 154, 155.

¹⁰ Ibid., 155.

¹¹ Ibid., 15, 16. In a study of wartime Toronto, Ian Miller challenges Keshen's "civilian ignorance" idea. According to Miller Canadians were well aware of the realities of trench warfare but chose to create a more positive version of the war. Although the letters and diaries written by soldiers during the war suggest citizens

Even though soldiers did have first-hand knowledge of the brutality of trench warfare, most memoirs focus on the valour and virtues of the Canadian soldier. While these rather positive and heroic soldier accounts may be a result of censorship guidelines or editors' purposes, it is possible that, despite the carnage at the front, many soldiers still held on to elements of the traditional concept of war as a noble and glorious thing.¹² Comparing material published during the war with letters and diaries written without the intent of publication should clarify this matter, at least to a degree.

What makes the Great War unique compared to earlier conflicts is the relatively high literacy rate of enlisted men. It is because of these high literacy rates that an enormous number of personal accounts, which normally would never have been published or preserved, found their way to the press, allowing historians some insight into the shared experiences of CEF soldiers. During the war at least eighty personal accounts were published by a variety of Canadian, British and American publishing houses. Between 1915 and 1919 McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart alone published twenty-four memoirs.¹³ The publisher's sales figures indicate that the company never

were aware of these realities, they can rarely be found in material published during the war. See chapter three for a more in depth discussion of Keshen and Miller's different views. Ian Hugh Maclean Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002).

¹² Of course not all soldiers viewed the war as a glorious undertaking. See for example, James H. Pedley, *Only This: A War Retrospect, 1917-1918* (Graphic Publishers Limited, 1927) and Will R. Bird, *And We Go On* (Toronto: Hunter Rose, 1930).

¹³ Carl Spadoni and Judy Donnelly, *A Bibliography of McClelland and Stewart Imprints, 1909-1985: A Publisher's Legacy* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1994).

lost a cent on war-related publications. One author was offered royalties as high as fifty percent if the company sold more than 3000 copies of his war memoirs.¹⁴ One of the reasons for the popularity of personal war stories can undoubtedly be found in their style and tone. Most memoirs published during the war read like adventure novels and were strongly at odds with the supposed “modernism” touted by the Fussell-school.¹⁵ The smell of fried bacon, eggs and coffee, often cooked on little stoves or fires in the trenches, is just as present as that of cordite and rotting flesh.

In the first five years after the war at least another fifteen war memoirs were published in Canada, and, although the number dropped to nine between 1925 and 1929, the book boom of the late 1920s ensured that publications of soldier accounts once again reached double digits. From 1935 onward, however, we see a steady decline in the number of publications and it is not until the mid-1960s, the fiftieth anniversary of Vimy Ridge, that numbers began to rise again. Between 1964 and 2004 at least one hundred personal accounts of CEF soldiers were published in Canada, either privately or by well-established publishing houses. Apart from letters, memoirs and diaries published in book form, the internet has also facilitated easier access to this type of personal material. *The Canadian Letters and Images Project*, under direction

¹⁴ George L. Parker, “A History of a Canadian Publishing House: a Study of the Relation Between Publishing and the Profession of Writing, 1890-1940” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1969).

¹⁵ Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975).

of the history departments of Malaspina College and the University of Western Ontario, currently contains the correspondence of nearly 200 Canadian Great War soldiers.¹⁶ The fact that both types of published soldiers' sources are so easily accessible to both scholars and the general public perhaps explains why this type of material is still fundamentally affecting the way in which Canadians remember the Great War.¹⁷

By analyzing both the printed and electronically published soldier accounts of the war, the aim is to clarify the connection between Canada's national memory of the Great War and these personal accounts. Autobiographical writings not only give us insight into how soldiers experienced the war, but they also allow us to investigate whether there was harmony or disjunction between popular memory and these personal observations. While letters, memoirs, diaries and trench newspapers deposited in various archives across Canada would have helped to clarify this connection, extending the research of this dissertation beyond published soldier sources would have opened this study to endless and justified, criticism based on

¹⁶ *The Canadian Letters & Images Project*, <http://www.canadianletters.ca>. [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹⁷ In *Battle Lines: Eyewitness Accounts from our Military Past* Jack Granatstein and Norman Hillmer use material from the *Canadian Letters & Images Project* website as well as other CEF soldiers' publications to explain what the war had been like for the 'average' Canadian soldier. Rather than analyse and uncover new material from archives, Granatstein and Hillmer weave their book from sources that are easily available and have been used many times before. Jack Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, eds., *Battle Lines: Eyewitness Accounts from our Military Past* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2004).

selectivity. Which, of the hundreds of boxes of letters available for research are truly “representative”. Are those being scanned truly “corroborative” or is corroboration merely an illusion of fortunate circumstance? Using archival sources would have been an all-or-nothing strategy, extending this project over the limits set by time, space and money.

Apart from keeping this project manageable, limiting the research to published material also has certain advantages. Since the CEF was a dominion-wide institution, analyzing only published sources, makes it physically possible to look extensively at material written by soldiers born in many different parts of Canada and the United Kingdom, as opposed to focusing intensively either on a particular unit or regional study, which only speak for a small, regional cross-section of the CEF. Second, memoirs published long after the war have the added benefit of allowing us an insight into the way in which the style and tone of these personal reminiscences changed over time and provide an opportunity to assess the interplay of shifting personal and national memory.

Determining the social status or background of the soldiers whose writings are used in this dissertation is not an easy task. While recruits were asked to specify their trade or calling on their enlistment forms, it is not always possible to determine a soldier’s profession for the simple reason that his writings cannot be linked to a specific CEF file. There are more than half a million CEF files available online. Without the place and year of birth of a particular soldier, however, it is often

impossible to positively identify his online file.¹⁸ Even if a soldier's trade or calling is known, the profession itself can be difficult to place. For example, a "brewer" could have been a manual labourer. Equally, he could have been the owner, general manager, or master brewer of the firm. In the case of some files, there is no way to tell.

Despite these difficulties, more than three quarters of all the soldiers' accounts used for this dissertation have been positively identified and indicate that the core of the research constitutes a fairly representative sample.¹⁹ While the CEF was a predominantly working-class army, the memoirs and collection of letters published early in the war seem to have been written by well-educated lawyers, doctors and students. However, an analysis of all the available material reveals that, in the total sample, working-class soldiers are slightly over-represented. While these more recent publications, written by clerks, farm-hands, machinists and labourers, do not display the polished prose of earlier publications, their content is most often similar. For example, the letters written by Private Percy Winthrop McClare, at the time of his enlistment a seventeen year old farm-hand from Nova Scotia, are full of spelling and

¹⁸ For example, a random search of George O'Brien revealed 27 hits, James Clark, 158 and William Jones 358. See CEF database.
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/archivianet/cef/001042-100.01-e.html> [accessed October 2007].

¹⁹ Appendix A contains an inventory of professions listed by the majority of all soldiers included in my research. Professions were given at the time of enlistment and recorded on the first page of the soldier's CEF file.

grammatical mistakes reflecting his low level of formal education. Rather than repair McClare's writing errors, his editor, Dale McClare, left these unchanged "to convey the flavour of the original letters."²⁰ While McClare observes that Winthrop's letters display little original thought and often echo universal soldier attitudes, he sees them as an important part of Canada's past. "Their ultimate value, perhaps, is that they express, in an unvarnished way, some of the thoughts, observations, and preoccupations of a more or less average Canadian soldier"²¹ While the publications of doctors and lawyers turned officers may have strongly coloured popular memory early on in the war, the letters, memoirs and diaries published after the war and written by labourers and farmhands, who served as lowly privates and corporals, can help to balance that uneven memory.

Published soldiers' letters, diaries and memoirs are valuable sources in and of themselves, but we need to place them in the varied and growing historiography of the Great War to see how these writings have contributed to the creation of Canada's war myth. Although in the first fifty years after the conflict the historiography of the war remained that of "big men" and "great events", the publication of two important works in the mid-1970s shifted this focus substantially. John Keegan's *Face of Battle* is not concerned with the way in which strategy and tactics influenced the outcome of

²⁰ Percy Winthrop McClare, *The Letters of a Young Canadian Soldier during World War One: P. Winthrop McClare of Mount Uniacke, N.S.*, ed. Dale McClare (Dartmouth NS: Brook House Press, 2000), xii.

²¹ Ibid.

certain battles, but rather with the way in which these battles were perceived and experienced by front-line soldiers. To convey what takes place in battle Keegan used memoirs, diaries and letters to reconstruct the battle of the Somme, 1 July 1916. Keegan takes us to the world of the front-line soldier and tells us how the 9th Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers perceived the battle. He also discusses treatment of the wounded, the will to fight, and the influence of heavy bombardments on the minds of soldiers; subjects that until then had not normally received much consideration from students of military history.²²

In *The Great War and Modern Memory*, Paul Fussell is equally uninterested in strategy and tactics. Rather, he claims to look at the way in which the events of 1914-1918 were remembered by the ordinary soldier. For Fussell, the First World War symbolized the beginning of a modern era. As a result of the horrors and carnage of the trenches, traditional perceptions of war as a glorious and noble undertaking had lost their appeal and were replaced by new, more ironic and pessimistic ideas of the purpose and meaning of war. According to Fussell, these horrors had not only transformed the minds of young soldiers, but also the minds of those who had stayed out of the trenches and were trying to give meaning to the war. "The Great War has

²² John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (London: J. Cape, 1976) see chapter four and for the quotation page 243. Keegan's book, reprinted more than ten times since 1976, was not the first scholarly work to deal with the soldier's perception of battle. This 'honour' should go to Bill Gammage, who in 1974 published *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Canberra: Australian University Press, 1974) a study entirely focused on the experiences and memories of soldiers.

been taken from us and transformed into a subject expressive of the modern existential predicament.” According to Fussell, the horrors of war had made men mute, the events indescribable. “What possible good could result from telling the truth?”²³

That Fussell and Keegan inspired other historians is demonstrated by the growing number of publications that focus either on the war and remembrance theme, the experiences of soldiers in battle, or on the connection between the two, as is the case in this dissertation. Dennis Winter’s *Death’s Men*, for example, describes in great depth the life of the soldiers in the “Kitchener armies” that were formed in 1914 and 1915. Winter uses memoirs, letters and diaries as the main source for his work. *Death’s Men* does not discuss strategies, technology or tactics, but focuses entirely on the life of soldiers in the trenches, in battle, at rest and on home leave, emphasizing how unprepared young soldiers were for what awaited them at the front.²⁴

Another comprehensive study of soldiers in battle is the work of Samuel Hynes. In *A Soldier’s Tale, Bearing Witness to Modern War*, eyewitness accounts from both

²³ Fussell, *The Great War*, 170, 182, 321.

²⁴ Denis Winter, *Death’s Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin Books, 1979). For other examples see Martin Middlebrook, *The First Day on the Somme, 1 July 1916* (London: Allan Lane, 1971) and *The Kaisers Battle, 21 March 1918: The First Day of the German Spring Offensive* (London: Allan Lane, 1978); Lyn MacDonald, *They Called It Passchendaele: The Story of the Third Battle of Ypres and the Men Who Fought in It* (London: M. Joseph, 1978) and *1915: The Death of Innocence* (London: Headline, 1993); John Ellis, *Eye-Deep in Hell* (London: Croom Helm, 1976); Gordon Corrigan, *Mud, Blood and Poppycock: Britain and the First*

world wars and Vietnam are used to explain how soldiers experienced battle. Hynes argues that there was a very distinct difference in attitude between soldiers of World War One and those who fought World War Two. According to Hynes, the British middle class saw World War One as the ultimate field sport. Going to war was surrounded by romantic notions, and soldiers who died in 1914 did so without disenchantment. This naiveté changed as the war progressed, but it was not until the late 1920s that ex-soldiers wrote about the war in bitter and disturbing terms.

[m]odern, technological war would not come to the young men of the 1930s generation as something new and strange, as it had to their fathers in 1914; they had been there before, in their imaginations. The war-in-their-heads, when war came, would not be the romantic fancies of nineteenth-century writers but the antiwar myth of the Western Front.²⁵

Like Keegan's work on the experience of soldiers in battle, Fussell's *Great War and Modern Memory* has also inspired other historians. In his *Rites of Spring, the Great War and the Birth of Modern Age* (1987), Modris Eksteins argues that the Great War, despite all its destruction, was a creative cultural event that led to a new way of describing war. Like Fussell, he states that, because of the enormity of the war, old traditional ways were no longer adequate to describe what had happened. Citing the

World War (London: Cassell ; 2003) and Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front* (London: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., 2004).

²⁵ Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (New York: Allan Lane The Penguin Press, 1997), 108.

words of war artist Paul Nash, Eksteins shows how difficult it was for some soldiers to portray the war as glorious and honourable. After seeing the battlefields in Flanders, Nash remarked to his wife: "No pen or drawing can convey this landscape."²⁶

Although equally interested in how societies experienced and remembered the war, Jay Winter's *Sites of Memory Sites of Mourning* forms a stark contrast with the work of Fussell and Eksteins. In his book Winter shows how people turned to a mixture of classical symbolism, religion and traditional art to come to terms with the horrors of the war. "It is the central contention of this book that the backward gaze of so many writers, artists, politicians, soldiers, and every day families in this period reflected the universality of grief and mourning in Europe from 1914."²⁷ Like Winter, George Mosse sees the popularity of the "cult of the fallen soldier" as an indication that societies dealt with the realities of war in a traditional manner.²⁸

Writing about the popular memory of the Great War, Mosse argues that every country suffering severe losses in the Great War, created a "myth of the war

²⁶ Paul Nash quoted in Modris Eksteins, *Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), 11, 216, 272. Eksteins' sees modernism as preceding the war and forming the cultural divide between Germany and Britain, serving as a *causus belli*.

²⁷ Winter, *Sites of Memory*, 223, 224.

²⁸ According to Mosse "the cult of the fallen soldier" was one of three aspects that helped build the myth that has influenced how the war is remembered. The other two are, according to Mosse; "the appropriation of nature" and the "process of trivialization." Nature reflected eternity, and this helped to mask the "reality of war." The use of trivia for the purpose of "retaining pleasant or, at least thrilling memories" also helped to mask this reality. Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, 70, 107, 126.

experience.” According to Mosse, the Great War was viewed as a meaningful and almost sacred event in order to justify and legitimize the horrors and carnage of the trenches.²⁹

The memory of the war was refashioned into a sacred experience which provided the nation with a new depth of religious feeling, putting at its disposal ever-present saints and martyrs, places of worship, and a heritage to emulate. The picture of the fallen soldier in the arms of Christ, so common during and after the First World War, projected the traditional belief in martyrdom and resurrection onto the nation as an all-encompassing civic religion. The cult of the fallen soldier became a centrepiece of the religion of nationalism after the war, having its greatest political impact in nations like Germany which had lost the war and had been brought to the edge of chaos by the transition of war to peace.³⁰

Although Mosse’s interpretation is based on post-war Germany, Vance uses this idea to explain how the memory of the Great War in Canada was transformed into a nation-building experience. According to Vance, traditional notions of war filled an emotional need for Canadians trying to come to terms with the horrors and bloodshed of the Great War.³¹ Rather than emphasize the futility of war, journalists and artists

²⁹ Ibid., 7

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ According to Vance it was not change but continuity that reigned in Canada after the war, and he disagrees with Fussell’s notion that the Great War signaled the birth of modernity. Fussell based his work almost exclusively on white males of “literary inclination” and overlooked the works of the “inept novelist, the bad versifier and the talentless essayist.” Vance, *Death So Noble*, 5.

focused on what had been achieved, thereby casting a positive, if still somber, glow on events. This popular memory was so strong that, long after the armistice, the war was seen as a crusade in which Canadian soldiers had not only died like Christ on the cross, but had also helped to lay the foundations of the Canadian nation.³² The idea that Canadian soldiers had died as saviours of civilization was not imposed on society from above, but “sprouted from the grief, the hope and the search for meaning of a thousand Canadian communities.”³³ Although the myth has never been used deliberately to justify Canada’s more than 60,000 war dead, Canadian politicians, historians and the media have often crowned the First World War as one of the most defining moments in the nation’s history. “Canada’s progress by way of Flanders, an interpretation born in the earliest days of the war, has become the standard method of gauging the impact of 1914-1918.”³⁴

That Canada interpreted its war experience in such positive and even exaggerated terms is not surprising. In “The Glories and the Sadness,” Mark Sheftall suggests that, while in Britain “a narrative version of the war experience emphasized the human,

³² Ibid., 262-266.

³³ Ibid., 163, 267.

³⁴ Ibid., 9-11. The ‘Canada by way of Flanders’ idea, refers specifically to Second Ypres, April 1915. Second Ypres was seen as the battle that put Canada on the map, until the unveiling of the Vimy monument in 1936. Andrew Iarocci, *1st Canadian Infantry Division and the Second Battle of Ypres: Historical Memory Versus Operational Reality*, (paper presented at annual Canadian Historical Association Conference, London, ON, May 2005).

material, social and spiritual cost of the conflict”, popular memory of the war in Australia and Canada only focused on what had been achieved. Early on in the conflict, elements in both dominions legitimized the war by focusing on the national awakening it had caused. Even though the CEF fell under British military authority, Sheftall points out that the war provided dominion troops with a sense of self-worth that until then had been lacking in the relationship between metropole and periphery.³⁵ The efforts of Canada’s citizen soldiers had not only brought freedom to the oppressed of Europe, but had also enhanced Canada’s reputation on the international stage.³⁶ Some of this reputation was undoubtedly generated by the soldiers themselves who often wrote about the CEF as the greatest and most feared force on the Western Front.

The notion that dominion troops were the most effective soldiers on the Western Front became part of a dominant narrative that developed early in the war. Challenges to this narrative were marginalized, having only a limited impact on the way in which

³⁵ Mark D. Sheftall, “The Glories and the Sadness: Shaping the National Memory of the First World War in Great Britain, Canada and Australia, 1914-1939” (PhD diss., Duke University, 2002), 458-460. See also Dale Blair, *Dinkum Diggers: An Australian Battalion at War* (Carlton South, Vic: Melbourne University Press, 2001).

³⁶ See, C.P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 1, 238,239; George F. Stanley, *Canada’s Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People*, Revised ed. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1960), 444; Allen Andrews, *Brave soldiers, Proud Regiments: Canada’s Military Heritage* (Vancouver: Ronsdale, 1997), 249; Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon, Canadians and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), 143; Arthur M. Lower, *Colony To Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Longman and Green, 1946), 455 and Vance, *Death So Noble*, 226, 227.

the war was perceived.³⁷ Yet while in Australia national identity is still strongly connected with Gallipoli, today few Canadians will equate their national identity with the events at Vimy Ridge nearly ninety years ago. Still, every November, Canadians all over the country are reminded of the fact that the Great War was one of the defining moments in Canadian history, even though the war divided the dominion as much as it united it.³⁸

The idea that Canada united as a result of the war is reflected in the historiography of Canada's involvement in the Great War. More than seventy-five years after the war, popular histories persistently portray the battle of Vimy Ridge as an important nation-building event.³⁹ One of the earliest publications in which we can find this 'birth of a nation theme' is undoubtedly Max Aitken's *Canada in Flanders*, published in 1915.⁴⁰ Aitken's narrative dwelled on the enormous contribution the

³⁷ Sheftall, "Glories," 458, 459 and Vance, *Death So Noble*, 36.

³⁸ For the war as the most important event in Canadian history see for example Vance's discussion of the works of C.P. Stacy and Pierre Berton, *Death So Noble*, 10. See also Jeffrey A. Keshen, "The Great War Soldier as Nation Builder in Canada and Australia," in *Canada and the Great War: Western Front Association Papers*, ed. Briton C. Busch (Montreal: McGill University Press, 2003), 3. For Australia see, Blair, *Dinkum Diggers*, Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 1-22.

³⁹ See for example, Patricia Giesler, *Valour Remembered, Canada and the First World War* (Ottawa: Veterans Affairs Canada, 1998), 12 and N. M. Christie, *For King and Empire: The Canadians at Vimy, April 1917* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1996), 1.

⁴⁰ Max Aitken, *Canada in Flanders*, vol. 1 (London, New York: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916). For a discussion of how Aitken, later Lord Beaverbrook, influenced

Canadian 'lumbermen' and Australian 'shearers' were making to the war effort of the empire. According to historian David Lloyd, it was this enormous contribution that came to symbolize Canada's coming of age as a nation. Vimy Ridge in particular was often viewed as the birthplace of the Canadian nation, especially after the unveiling of Allward's monument in 1936.

[T]he pilgrimage reflected many of the key themes of the memory of the Great War in Canada. Firstly, it remembered the dead, achievements of Canadian servicemen and the loss felt by the bereaved, at the same time the pilgrimage and the unveiling ceremony of the Vimy Ridge memorial merged the assertion of the new status of Canada as a nation with the memory of the imperial cause to which Canadians had fought.⁴¹

Despite the successful 1936 pilgrimage, the concept of Canadian national identity is a complex idea that has fascinated generations of Canadian scholars.⁴² According to one renowned historian, Canada even holds the record for the world's longest running

Canada's popular memory of the war see, Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 10-19.

⁴¹ David W. Lloyd, *Battlefield Tourism: Pilgrimage and the Commemoration of the Great War in Britain, Australia and Canada, 1919-1939* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 1998), 199-202.

⁴² Randy William Widdis, "Borders, Borderlands and Canadian Identity: A Canadian Perspective," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 15 (Spring 1997): 49-65.

identity crisis.⁴³ Although Canadians developed a Canadian consciousness after confederation in 1867, Ramsay Cook suggests that this identity remained little defined. Canada, unlike the United States, lacked a core around which this identity could be centred.⁴⁴ Despite this lack of centrepiece, historians, such as Donald Creighton and Arthur Lower, wrote about Canada and Canadians as clearly defined entities.⁴⁵ In a blistering reply to Jack Granatstein's *Who Killed Canadian History*, A.B. McKillop emphasized the narrow focus of these early national histories.⁴⁶

For the first half of the twentieth century, Canadian historians worked within an imperial-national interpretive framework of political and social evolution and, for the next quarter century or so, within that of the Laurentian and Metropolitan theses that buttressed the former with explanations of economic power rooted in the physical and political geography of the nation. With such interpretive templates at hand, the 'important facts of Canadian

⁴³ J.M.S. Careless, "The Metropolis and Identity in the Canadian Experience," in *Frontier and Metropolis: Region and Identity in Canada Before 1914* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987), 72.

⁴⁴ Ramsay Cook, "Landscape Painting," in *The Maple Leaf Forever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 163, 165.

⁴⁵ See for example, Lower, *Colony To Nation* and Donald Creighton, *Dominion of the North* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1944). See also Ramsay Cook, "Identities are not Like Hats," *Canadian Historical Review* 81, no. 2 (2000): 262. For an overview and analysis of this type of historical works see, Carl Berger, *The Writing of Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing, 1900-1970*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1976) According to Frits Pannekoek these national narratives rarely focussed on the poor and the marginalized, and often justified the dominance of government elites. See Frits Pannekoek, "Who Matters? Public History and the Invention of the Canadian Past," *Acadiensis* XXIX, no. 2 (2000): 213.

⁴⁶ Jack Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: Harper Collins, 1998).

history were easy to discover and to write about from the uncontested viewpoint of the omniscient narrator – the arbiter of final authority. This is no longer so.⁴⁷

McKillop's last sentence undoubtedly refers to the changes Canada's national historiography has undergone since the 1960s and '70s. In a 1969 article, Maurice Careless suggested that the search for one Canadian national identity should be replaced by a search for more limited identities based on region, culture and class, hoping that the "the whole, may indeed be greater than the sum of its parts, producing through its internal relationships some sort of Canadianism."⁴⁸

It is exactly this lack of "internal relationships" within Canadian history that prompted Jack Granatstein and Michael Bliss to suggest that Canadian history collapsed in the 1970s.⁴⁹ In their eyes, regional, class and gender historians fractured the structure of Canadian history by focusing on discord rather than consensus. In a similar fashion, Doug Owram called on historians to focus more on the interplay between the regional and local identities than these narrow identities themselves in the

⁴⁷ A.B. McKillop, "Who Killed Canadian History? A View from the Trenches," *Canadian Historical Review* 80, no.2 (1999): 282.

⁴⁸ J.M.S. Careless, "'Limited Identities' in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review* 50 no. 1 (1969): 10 and J.M.S. Careless, "Limited Identities Ten Years Later," *Manitoba History* 1 (1980): 3-9.

⁴⁹ Granatstein, *Who Killed* and Michael Bliss, "Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History; the Sundering of Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 26 no. 4 (1992): 5-17.

hope of discovering the “way in which this interplay distinguishes this country from the rest of the world.”⁵⁰

While Owram’s critique of Canada’s ‘recent historiography’ may seem reasonable enough, his goals are not easily achieved. How do we interpret Canada’s national experience, when over the last thirty years Canadian historians have shown that we can no longer speak of one single strand of Canadian identity? According to P.A. Buckner, Canadians often possess more than one identity; “even ones which historians believe ought not to be compatible.”⁵¹ The idea that people have more than one identity has become a popular notion in the recent literature on identity, but does this mean that national or collective identities have become obsolete concepts? Krishnan Kumar certainly does not seem to think so. In *The Making of English National Identity*, Kumar points out that the idea of national identity, despite its difficulties, is still a valid concept for twenty-first century historians.

All arguments for national consciousness or national identity rest on shaky and questionable evidence; there simply is no way of showing incontrovertibly that such a thing exists in any given case or even, precisely, to say what that might mean. But that is not a sufficient reason for dismissing it as a meaningless or unusable concept, or to deny that it points to a real phenomenon. Like identity in general, it allows us to deal with certain questions and to describe certain

⁵⁰ Doug Owram, “Narrow Circles: The Historiography of Recent Canadian Historiography,” *National History* 1 no. 1 (1997): 11.

⁵¹ P.A. Buckner, “‘Limited Identities’ Revisited: Regionalism and Nationalism in Canadian History,” *Acadiensis* XXX, no. 1 (2000):12.

attitudes, and behaviour which cannot readily be comprehended in any other way.⁵²

Like Kumar, John R. Gillis is convinced that national identity is a historically important concept. In an essay titled “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship”, he suggests that, by the 1990s, identity and memory had lost their significance because they had been given too many different meanings. In an effort to reconnect these two terms, Gillis suggests that identity depends on memory and vice versa. For Gillis, the core meaning of identity, whether it be of a group or an individual, is based on memory.

The relationship between memory and identity is historical; and the record of the relationship can be traced through various forms of commemoration discussed in this volume. Commemorative activity is by definition social and political, for it involves the coordination of individual and group memories, whose results may appear consensual when they are in fact the processes of intense contest, struggle and in some instances annihilation. In this collection the focus is on the public rather than private commemoration, though the parallels between the way identity and memory operate in personal and public life are striking and a reminder that the division between public and private is also historical, appearing natural only in retrospect.⁵³

⁵² Krishnan Kumar, *The Making of English National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 33.

⁵³ John R. Gillis, “Memory and Identity: The History of a Relationship,” in *Commemorations*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), 3-5.

Although Gillis's work is more concerned with national memory, war monuments and cemeteries, one could argue that the personal accounts left behind by CEF soldiers are, in some shape or form, a foundation of Canada's commemorative practices and, perhaps, even national identity.

Writing about national identity in Victorian Britain, Marjorie Morgan suggests that travel and encounters with 'the other' played an important role in the way middle-class British travelers shaped their own 'national' identity.⁵⁴ Applying this concept to military service in eighteenth-century Britain, Stephen Conway concludes that joining the army led to a widening of horizons, forcing enlistees to reconsider their identity. Conway describes the British army as an ethnic melting pot, while at the same time being the embodiment of the British nation. The fact that the British army employed thousands of Scottish, Irish and Welsh minorities mattered little, as outsiders were prone to identify any man in uniform as British. The presence of a common enemy only made 'the national cause' a more prominent element of the soldier's ever changing self-image.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Marjorie Morgan, *National Identities and Travel in Victorian Britain* (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 2.

⁵⁵ Stephen Conway, "War and National Identity in Mid-Eighteenth-Century British Isles," *English Historical Review* 116, no. 468 (2001): 876, 877. The claim that a common enemy helped to give prominence to the idea of nation in 18th Century Britain has also been made by Murray G.H. Pittcock and Linda Colley. See, Murray H. Pittcock, *Inventing and Resisting Britain: Cultural Identities in Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997) and Linda Colley, *Britons Forging the Nation, 1707-1837* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1992).

Like the Victorian travel writers and eighteenth-century soldiers, CEF soldiers were constantly on the move. First, they moved from their point of enlistment to a regional training centre, then to a port city in eastern Canada, then to a training camp in Britain, and finally to the trenches on the Western Front. Being away from Canada not only opened the eyes of the Canadian-born CEF soldiers, but also led outsiders to emphasize the Canadian character of the CEF. Traveling and fighting together, CEF soldiers forged an identity that was different from the one they had assumed in Canada. Although regional, ethnic, and class identities may still have held value for these soldiers, enlistment with friends, endless hours of training and the shared intense experience of the trenches, layer by layer, built a collective identity, that became a popular way for Canadian soldiers to self-identify during the war.⁵⁶

What is most interesting about the writings of CEF soldiers is that, even though only a handful of the 450,000 soldiers who left Canada for overseas service returned to the dominion on leave, letters and diaries written at the front often reflect key themes of the “myth of the war experience.” With their maple leaf cap and uniform badges, soldiers serving in Europe were often addressed simply as ‘Canada’ or ‘Johnny Canuck’; and this recognition often led CEF soldiers to self-identify as Canadian. Although contemporary authors, such as Aitken, had already isolated and exaggerated

⁵⁶ In a study of New Zealand war brides Gabrielle Fortune concludes that shared experience is often more important than shared nationality or ethnicity. See Gabrielle Fortune, “‘Mr. Jones’ Wives’: War Brides, Marriage, Immigration and Identity Formation,” *Women’s History Review* 15, no. 4 (2006): 587-599.

the CEF's supposed frontier heritage early in the war, the notion that the CEF possessed a distinctive identity may have preceded these publications. For example, Garry Sheffield and Isabella Losinger have pointed out that discipline in the CEF was almost as strict as in the British army, yet the notion that Canadian soldiers disregarded army regulations formed an important layer of the CEF's "corps identity". Significantly, it was clearly present in letters and diary entries written in the first year of the war.⁵⁷

Although this dissertation is titled *Corps Identity*, it does not suggest that all CEF soldiers had a clear and well defined idea of what it meant to be Canadian. Nor is it a history of Canada's coming of age. The published letters, diaries and memoirs surveyed here do not allow for an exploration of the nation-building theme beyond the published observations and perceptions of CEF soldiers. In this respect, the reader should not be surprised to find relatively little reference to Quebec-born members of the CEF. Only a handful of published sources written by French speaking soldiers exist, perhaps reflecting the notion that the war was an event French-Canada was anxious to forget. Thus, there may well have been French-Canadian soldiers who sought to publish their experiences, but who could not find a publisher. Unfortunately the lack of French-Canadian soldier sources makes it difficult to determine how these

⁵⁷ Isabella Losinger, "Officer-Man Relations in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919" (master's thesis, Carleton University, 1991), 267 and G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 172.

Quebec-born soldiers viewed the CEF's growing collective identity from this particular type of source.

While it is likely that most CEF soldiers possessed multiple identities, we have to keep in mind that local, class, or ethnic identities are not necessarily at odds with a wider allegiance to the nation. Meanwhile, at varying times some identities are more popular than others.⁵⁸ Published letters, diaries and memoirs clearly show how the maple leaf cap and uniform badges increasingly served as a focal point of the CEF's growing "corps identity" that played such an important role in the creation and persistence of the Canada's war myth. Even if national and personal identity are never exactly the same, there can be no doubt that the Government's and the soldier's common goal during the war, the defeat of Germany, brought the two closer together.⁵⁹

The rationale for developing this study in a chronological and narrative format is that the CEF's "corps identity" consisted of a number of layers. This study will be grouped around four important questions answered in four separate chapters, each revealing another layer of the CEF soldiers' growing sense of collective identity during the war. Chapter one will try to provide an answer as to why so many men in

⁵⁸ Conway, "War and National Identity," 867.

⁵⁹ Cook, "Identities," 264. Of course this collective or national CEF identity was not a national Canadian identity. The Canadian Corps was an all male, predominantly white force. Women and ethnic minorities played only a limited role in the formation of this identity. See Lucy Noakes, "Gender, War and Memory: Discourse and Experience in History," *Journal of Contemporary History* 36, no. 4 (2001): 664.

Canada joined the CEF. Was it out of a duty to empire or Canada? Was it out of a sense of adventure or simply because it seemed the right thing to do at the time? If we are to believe Aitken, most volunteers joined out of a sense of duty to both empire and Canada. Although all of the above reasons have been discussed by historians at length, they have rarely been analyzed from a soldier's perspective.⁶⁰ By giving a number of specific reasons for enlistment, the authors of these works also assume that joining the CEF was a deliberate choice. The idea that most volunteers joined the CEF, easily persuaded by their friends and peers, and without giving their decision careful and proper thought, has received little attention. Indeed, this lack of experience, or expectations, may have made it easier for Canadian volunteers to mould the CEF into one autonomous Canadian unit. A question that will need to be answered in each of the four chapters is how accounts written at the time compare to accounts written after the war. How do public memory and private memory compare and how do they fit in with historiography, and changing times?

The experience of these volunteers after enlistment, the way in which military service, layer by layer, continually moulded their self-image and subsequent memory of the war, is the central focus of the second chapter. Although almost seventy-five percent of Canada's First Contingent consisted of men born in the British Isles,

⁶⁰ Perhaps the only exception is Desmond Morton who lists a variety of reasons of why soldiers enlisted, but fails to investigate why volunteers often had more than one reason to enlist. See Morton, *When Your Number*, 47-56. For an analysis of financial motives see Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldier's Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 27-37.

soldiers' sources written during the war indicate that, even before the Canadians left Britain for the Continent in February 1915, for some at least a rudimentary form of collective identity had developed. From early on in the war, letters and diaries reveal that Canadians often enjoyed newspaper reports comparing the CEF to an undisciplined mob. Rather than worry about this reputation, many CEF soldiers emphasized and embellished the 'Canadianess' of these incidents in their letters and diaries. Of course, soldierly perceptions that Canadian military discipline was relatively mild might have had little basis in fact. Even so, perceptions often became realities in themselves, thereby strengthening the collective identity of the CEF. The comparison between wartime and post-war sources should once again help us to establish whether this perception was a wartime reality that facilitated the formation of a "corps identity."

Another way to determine how soldiers' sources fit in with Canada's Great War legacy is by studying the way Canadian troops wrote about major battles. Although it is not likely that the sum of the soldiers' stories will add up to one definitive soldier's tale, the defensive stand at Second Ypres was an important milestone for the CEF. A number of letters, diaries and memoirs indicate that after this battle soldiers became more confident of their soldierly qualities. Soldiers' letters generally reveal that the CEF's successes in battle were important milestones for Canada, indicating that the CEF's reputation as shock troops of empire was, perhaps, not just a civilian invention. While it is doubtful that Canada, indeed, came of age during the battle of Vimy Ridge,

some soldiers clearly viewed the success at Vimy as the single most important event in Canadian history.

Chapter four will focus on the soldierly qualities of the Canadians. What set the Canadian soldier aside from his British colleague, according to Canada's Great War legacy, was the fact that the Canadian soldiers possessed valuable outdoor experience. In historical literature, published during and after the war, the Canadian soldier was, and is, often portrayed as an intelligent and resourceful fighter. The idea behind this assumption is that CEF soldiers had been rugged independent individuals before they volunteered for service. Soldiers' writings often stressed this 'frontier' heritage, claiming that the CEF consisted of better and more resourceful soldiers; again strengthening the Corps' collective identity. The fact that soldiers created a collective identity for the CEF may be an indication that "myth of the war experience" is not entirely a post-war, civilian invention. Indeed, these soldiers' sources can provide us with a different interpretation of an important part of Canada's past.

Chapter 1, Patriotism or a Buck Ten?

According to the “myth of the war experience”, Canadians enlisted out of loyalty to King, country and empire, suggesting that these volunteers had entered the war with a clearly defined idea of what it meant to be a subject of the British Empire. However, the published letters, diaries and memoirs of CEF soldiers reveal that many young volunteers enlisted out of a sense of civic duty in combination with peer pressure and the fear of being left behind. Meanwhile, in hard times, more than a few were drawn by the offer of decent pay. Although historians often make mention of the fact that there were countless reasons for enlistment they were never part of Canada’s Great War legacy, and have never been analyzed from a soldiers’ perspective. In order to fully understand why soldiers enlisted, and how this influenced their self-identity as soldiers, it is necessary to take a detailed look at this wide range of motives as exhibited in the sources.

Furthermore, although Canadian historians have often written about enlistment, most studies only offer the perspective of those recruiting, not of those recruited, making it difficult to understand how young volunteers experienced their transition from civilian to army life.¹ Initially, the CEF had no established identity. Meanwhile,

¹ See for example Kathryn M. Bindon, *More Than Patriotism: Canada at War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1979), 21; John Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory: The Canadian Corps in World War I* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965), 29, 30; Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 10, 22-25 and Terry Copp, “Canada: The Military

no single motive drew people to it. Consequently, the identity of Canada's new army was highly malleable. The fact that enlistment had often been a 'spur of the moment' decision not only facilitated the formation of the CEF's "corps identity," it also helped shape the "myth of the war experience" in Canada.

Between 1914 and 1918 the "magic magnet of the war" pulled hundreds of thousands of men into the service of the CEF. Less than two months after the outbreak of war more than 30,000 volunteers were assembled in Valcartier, many of whom had rushed to the colours without giving their decision much careful thought. According to Major Frederick McKelvey-Bell, there were as many reasons for enlistment as there were men in the army, making the First Contingent a far from homogeneous unit.² In the four years that followed, students, lawyers, carpenters, and farmers all over Canada would trade in their suits, gowns and overalls for khaki. Letters, memoirs and diaries, written both during and after the war, suggest that, by enlisting and accepting a common enemy, these volunteers laid the foundations upon which the CEF's "corps identity" would be layered.

In *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War*, Desmond Morton provides his readers with a multitude of reasons for enlistment other than patriotism. While some volunteers enlisted out of loyalty to empire or Canada,

Effort in the Great War," in *Canada and The First World War*, ed. David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 35-61.

² F. McKelvey-Bell, *The First Canadians in France: The Chronicle of a Military Hospital in the War Zone* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1917), 13.

others enlisted out of a sense of adventure or a free trip to Europe. For most unemployed volunteers the \$1.10 a day offered by the CEF was an opportunity that could not be ignored.³ A number of volunteers, according to Morton, had also been shamed into joining. Meanwhile, as a Christian, when one's country called, one had very little choice but to fight in the quickly consecrated "war to end all wars."⁴ Although Morton suggests that loyalty to Canada played only a minor role in the recruitment of the CEF, soldiers often made reference to Canada when discussing enlistment. While few recruits had a clearly defined idea of what it meant to be Canadian, service in the CEF would eventually clarify the Canadian identity of many young volunteers.

While we can never hope to completely untangle the myriad motives for enlistment, the sources clearly suggest that these diverse motives were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, it was not uncommon for soldiers to list multiple reasons. However,

³ Morton, *When Your Number*, 55-58. See also Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 26-28. With regards to duty see also J.J. Wilson, "Skating to Armageddon: Canada, Hockey and the First World War," *The International Journal of History of Sport* 22 (May 2005): 315, 316, 337, 338 and Colm Hickey, "'For all that Was Good Noble and True': A Middle Class Martial Icon of Canadian Patriotism and British Imperialism; John Lovell Dashwood, Canada and the Great War," *The International Journal of History of Sport* 22 (July 2005): 722-744.

⁴ This Christian motive for enlistment is a direct reference to the popular Protestant notion of muscular Christianity, a phenomenon that gained popularity in the latter half of the 19th century. It stressed the link between Christian virtues, physical strength and self-control. See Norman Vance, *The Sinews of the Spirit: The Ideal of Christian Manliness in Victorian Literature and Religious Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 1.

what is most striking about these soldiers' accounts, and surprisingly absent from the historical literature on the topic, is that many volunteers enlisted on the spur of the moment and without much careful thought. For example, in the case of First Contingent volunteer Reginald Grant, author of *S.O.S. Stand To!*, it was the excitement at the outbreak of war, in combination with his friend's decision to enlist, that pushed him through the door of the recruiting office.⁵ On the day that recruiting for the First Contingent began, Grant, an eighteen year old office clerk, left his job to enlist. "We arranged to meet at the exhibition ground and, taking French leave of the office, I hastened to the camp where the recruiting was going on, picking up Burt on the way."⁶ In order to understand Grant's motives in the larger context of the CEF's layered "corps identity" we have to question how his recollections fit in with the heroic descriptions of patriotism and duty so popular in Canada during the war. Was Grant an exception, because he only briefly mentioned duty to Canada and empire as reasons for his enlistment, or were there many others who were as easily persuaded by their peers?

Despite the countless reasons volunteers may have had to join the CEF, most popular histories published during the war listed patriotism as the main reason for the initial success of recruitment. Canada was part of the British Empire, and this was the

⁵ Reginald Grant, *S.O.S. Stand To!* (New York, London: D. Appleton and Company, 1918), 1.

⁶ Ibid.

way in which society had rationalized the need for their service.⁷ *Thrilling Stories of the Great War*, written by Captain Howard-Smith and published in 1916, is a rather typical example of this type of literature. Howard-Smith emphasized Canada's imperial ties and explained why so many Canadians had gone to war.

[I]t was not the love of adventure which roused the Canadians. They have been first among the Imperialists from the beginning of their career as a confederation, but they have never been Jingo Imperialists. A democratic people has no mind for the tinkling cymbals of aggression; but there had grown into their sensitive and alert minds the deep conviction that, as Sir Wilfrid Laurier said on an historic occasion, if we did not come closer we must drift further apart.⁸

Howard-Smith's assumption that Canada united as a result of its enthusiasm for the war became a popular notion during the conflict. By focusing on the positive aspects

⁷ See for example, Aitken, *Canada in Flanders*; Logan Howard-Smith, *Thrilling Stories of the Great War: A Comprehensive Study of the Battles and Events of the World War* (Toronto: The John Winston Co. Limited, 1916) and Alfred Tucker, *The Battle Glory of Canada: Being the Story of the Canadians at the Front; Including the Battle of Ypres* (London, Toronto: Cassell and Company Limited, 1915). See also Sheftall, "The Glories," conclusion and Mosse, *Fallen Soldiers*, chapters 3 and 5.

⁸ Howard-Smith, *Thrilling Stories*, 204. In *Sense of Power* Carl Berger concludes that, from the 1860s until 1914, imperialism and Canadian nationalism often went hand in hand, even though Canadian imperialists viewed England with a mixture of affection and resentment. The appeal of this Canadian imperialism had according to Berger always been limited but more than 60,000 Canadian war-dead effectively killed it. See Carl Berger, *Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 264.

of Canada's war effort, the war became a constructive force in Canadian history; and the idea that Canada developed as a nation during the conflict became the standard interpretation of Canada's Great War.

That Canada united as a result of rampant patriotism at the outbreak of war is not only reflected in popular histories of the conflict, but also in a number of soldiers' memoirs. Just like Howard-Smith, Sergeant Ralph Sheldon Williams, a forty year old farmer from Hampshire, England, recalled the recruitment of the First Contingent as a heroic and glorious event. According to Williams, volunteers from all over Canada joined the CEF to come to the aid of empire. "On the tranquil farms and busy rivers of Ontario, Quebec and the Maritime Provinces, on the homesteads of the Prairies, and in the mines and forests of British Columbia, men 'left all' for the cause of right and freedom; and even the distant Yukon disgorged its thousands, inspired by a brighter and better lure than that of gold."⁹ Writing in 1940, Lieutenant Harold Hartney, much like Williams, had little difficulty in recalling the 'glorious' spirit of August 1914. "Ordinary civilian work stopped in its tracks. Political differences were forgotten. Patriotism boiled over everywhere. Everybody was sure the war would be over before he could take a glorious part in it and collect all his medals."¹⁰

⁹ Ralph Fredric Lardy Sheldon-Williams, *The Canadian Front in France and Flanders* (London: A&C Black Limited, 1920), 13.

¹⁰ Harold Evans Hartney, *Up and At 'Em* (Harrisburg, PA: Stackpole, 1940), 4. Hartney was a barrister according to his enlistment forms.

Despite the fact that both Williams and Hartney saw the successful recruitment of the CEF as an indication of the unifying impact of the war, a number of historians have pointed out that the war caused serious political friction between Quebec and the rest of Canada, helped to disillusion various minorities, and led to the persecution or imprisonment of thousands of Canadian enemy aliens.¹¹ While these recent publications are valuable additions to Canada's Great War historiography, they have done little to change the popular image of Canada's involvement in the war. Canadian historians writing about the CEF have generally explained the force's successful recruitment by pointing primarily to patriotism and the love of empire in the dominion. It was not until the 1970s and '80s that this notion became the topic of new research.¹²

¹¹ See Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart Limited, 1974), 229; James Farney and Bohadan S. Kordan, "The Predicament of Belonging: The Status of Enemy Aliens in Canada 1914," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 39, no. 1 (2005): 74-89; Lubomir Luciuk, "Ukrainians and Internment Operations in Ontario During the First World War," *Polyphony* 10 (1998): 27-31; Art Grenke, "The German Community of Winnipeg and the English-Canadian Response to World War I," *Canadian Ethnic Studies* 20 (1988): 21-44.

¹² See Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory*, 29, 30; N.M. Christie, *Winning the Ridge: The Canadians at Vimy Ridge, 1917* (Nepean, ON: CEF Books, 1998); Cedric Jennings, *Canada in the First World War and the Road to Vimy Ridge* (Ottawa: Communications Division, Veterans' Affairs, 1992); Bindon, *More Than Patriotism*, 21; Pierre Berton, *Vimy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986) and *Marching as to War: Canada's Turbulent Years, 1899-1953* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2001). For the changes in the war's general historiography see Jay M. Winter and Antoine Prost, *Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 7, 8.

In "Unrequited Faith: Recruiting the CEF, 1914-1918," Robert Craig Brown and Donald Loveridge provide us with a detailed analysis of the recruitment of the CEF. Brown and Loveridge argue that the Canadian government was completely unprepared for war and depended almost entirely on the private initiatives of its citizens for the recruitment of the First Contingent, as well as the half a million men Borden promised Britain in 1915.¹³ While this citizens' response proved powerful enough to create an army of almost 450,000 volunteers in the first three years of the war, conscription was needed by the end of 1917 to keep the CEF up to strength.¹⁴ According to Paul Maroney, the initial wave of volunteers came to an end in 1915, and upper and middle class Canadian citizens were forced to organize patriotic recruiting leagues to encourage more men to enlist.¹⁵ While the studies by Brown, Loveridge and Maroney have done much to explain how the CEF was recruited, they only offer the perspective of those recruiting; not of those recruited.

¹³ Robert Craig Brown and Donald Loveridge, "Unrequited Faith: Recruiting the CEF, 1914-1918," *Revue Internationale d'Histoire Militaire*, 54 (1982): 67.

¹⁴ According to historical geographer Christopher Sharpe, 607,072 men served in the CEF during the war. Of those 607,072 soldiers only 124,588, or 20.5% of the total, were conscripts. C.A. Sharpe, "Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1918: A Regional Analysis," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 18 no. 4 (1983-1984): 25.

¹⁵ Paul Maroney, "The Great Adventure: The Context and Ideology of Recruiting in Ontario, 1914-1917," *The Canadian Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (1996): 62. For a discussion of how these recruiting leagues worked and how much support they garnered see, R. Matthew Bray, "'Fighting as an Ally': The English Canadian Patriotic Response to the Great War," *Canadian Historical Review* 51, no.2 (1980): 141-168.

Perhaps one of the reasons why initial recruitment was so successful was because from the late nineteenth century the concept of “manliness” had become strongly connected to military service.¹⁶ Fictional adventure literature, directly aimed at boys and young adolescents through the creation of fictional soldier heroes may have led many young boys to join the Boy Scouts. This type of “Boys Own” literature had become increasingly popular within the British Empire by the turn of the century.¹⁷ According to Graham Dawson it was the fictional soldier hero, or the hero of empire, who became one of the most powerful forms of “idealized masculinity within Western cultural traditions since the time of the Ancient Greeks.”¹⁸ In Canada education and popular literature was not much different. In a study of the development of masculinity in pre-war Ontario, Mark Moss explains that even though the Canadian government may have been unprepared for war most Canadian young men were not, as they had been the prime target of this concept of “manliness”: that developed in the years before the war. In *Manliness and Militarism* he writes;

It is not too much to claim that, by 1914, most aspects of young men’s lives were orientated towards the military. Their natural aggressive tendencies were co-opted by the state to ensure the production of manly patriotic men who would willingly go to war.

¹⁶ Mike O’Brien, “Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1912-1914,” *Labour/Le Travail*, 42 (fall, 1998): 115-141.

¹⁷ Joseph Bristow, *Empire Boys: Adventures in a Man’s World* (London: Harper-Collins, 1991), 223-227.

¹⁸ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), 1.

As if in response to the threats to masculinity that men were facing, the society intensified its celebration of all things male even to the point of embracing the ultimate test of manliness: war. War was what young men and boys had been trained for, and when it came they embraced it with enthusiasm.¹⁹

This argument that men eligible for service in the CEF were bombarded with patriotic imagery, however correct, only strengthens the idea that Canadians in general viewed the war as a great patriotic struggle.²⁰ Yet, while there can be no doubt that pre-war society had tried to prepare young men for war, it remains to be seen to what extent the efforts and rhetoric of the varying recruiting leagues were internalized by the prospective volunteers. Society not only pressured these men to enlist, but also offered an ideological framework that rationalized their enlistment. Therefore, it is not surprising that works published during or shortly after the war often recalled patriotism as the main reason for their enlistment.²¹

Although the figures provided by Brown and Loveridge are staggering, we cannot automatically assume that these high volunteer numbers unambiguously reflect

¹⁹ Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2001), 146.

²⁰ For a discussion of how this imagery influenced hockey players during the war, see Wilson, "Skating," 315-343. See also the memoir of A.Y. Jackson who recalled in 1953 that he enlisted after seeing a recruiting poster. A.Y. Jackson, "Reminiscences of Army Life, 1914-1918," *Canadian Art* XI (1953): 6.

²¹ Maroney, "The Great Adventure," 62-98.

Canadians' patriotism. For example, in an article on recruitment, historical geographer Christopher Sharpe has pointed out that more than seventy-five percent of the First Contingent consisted of men born in the British Isles. Even by war's end almost forty percent of all volunteers were British-born.²² Why was this percentage of British born soldiers in the CEF so high? Were these British-born volunteers more patriotic than their Canadian counterparts?

Traditionally, the high number of British-born soldiers in the First Contingent has always been explained by the fact that they felt that it was their duty to King and empire to enlist. The memoirs of Sergeant Archie Gibbons, a Toronto Electrical Company employee, would seem to confirm this. After being taken prisoner, the Birmingham native found that his German captors could not understand why the Canadians had sailed across the ocean to fight in the war. "I tried to explain, going into the same details that I had done at least a hundred times before, 'that Canadians were patriots; our motherland needed help; she was in danger; we heard the call and so came to her aid.'²³ The call of the motherland was especially strong in Western Canada where many First Contingent enlistees were recent immigrants to Canada. According to Canadian Lieutenant Frederick Curry, a Haliburton-born chemist, Western Canada supplied nearly all the recruits in his battalion not because

²² Sharpe, "Enlistment," 15-29.

²³ Arthur Gibbons, *Guest of The Kaiser: The Plain Story of a Lucky Soldier* (Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1919), 148.

Westerners were more patriotic, but because the percentage of single, British-born males was much higher in the West than in the rest of Canada. Curry added that almost all early recruits were either British-born or sons of British parents²⁴

While patriotism undoubtedly played an important role in the recruitment of the First Contingent, it seems that many histories dealing with recruitment only examined that initial contingent. One wonders, therefore, how representative this motive was for the CEF throughout the whole course of the war. Ever since August 1914 Canadians had been devouring war news, but the need for adequate word about 'their boys' became even more pressing after the First Contingent sailed for England in October 1914. By the spring of 1915 Canadians were able to buy the first full length books on the war. While these early histories of the war often lacked analysis, they clearly depicted the urgency with which Canadians viewed their participation in the war. Between 1916 and 1918 alone twenty-one books written by soldiers were published in Toronto.²⁵ Although most of these memoirs were straight forward eyewitness accounts, as the war dragged on a number of memoirs were published in the deliberate hope of attracting more recruits. In 1917, for example, Private Harold Baldwin

²⁴ Fredric Crawford Curry, *From the Saint Lawrence to the Yser with the 1st Canadian Brigade* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1916), 27.

²⁵ The first books published on Canada's war effort were Mary Plumer's, *With the First Contingent* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1915); Tucker, *Battle Glory* and Andrew Merkel, ed. *Letters from the Front* (Halifax, NS: Ross Print, 1914). Toronto publishers, McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart went from publishing one soldier's memoir in 1915 to six in 1916, six in 1917 and nine in 1918. See Spadoni and Donnelly, *Bibliography*, 220-239.

published *Holding the Line*, a memoir of his war service. Baldwin, a British-born farmer without much formal education, idealized service in the CEF. The memoir's sublime writing style is an indication that it was heavily edited by the publishers in order to convince more Canadians to enlist.²⁶ The fact that, after the publication of his book, Baldwin was also asked to participate in a recruiting tour south of the border to boost enlistment only strengthens this assumption.

Edited or not, Baldwin's work contained a clear message for all men of military age in Canada. In his eyes, and perhaps those of his editors, Canada's first loyalty should be to empire, but at the same time Canadian-born volunteers should seize the opportunity to enlist and make a name for their country of birth.²⁷

From the time we left Saskatoon until we got into the great camp, I dare say there wasn't a man of us who gave a second thought to the idea that within six months' time we would have had such a share in the defence of the world's liberties as would make the name of Canada a household word wherever the English language is spoken, and cause a thrill of justifiable pride to run through the blood of every Canadian, aye, and every Britisher, because every Britisher takes almost as much pride in the feats performed by men from the another part of the Empire as he does in the deeds of the men from his own particular corner.²⁸

²⁶ Harold Baldwin, *Holding the Line: By Sergeant Harold Baldwin of the First Division Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Toronto: G.J. MacLeod, 1918), 292.

²⁷ For this idea of Canada First, see Berger, *Sense of Power*, chapter 10.

²⁸ Baldwin, *Holding the Line*, 5, 290. Baldwin wrote his memoir in Chicago where he was recuperating from the loss of his foot.

Just like Harold Baldwin's *Holding the Line*, Harold Peat's *Private Peat* was intended to boost faltering enlistment and enhance Canada's reputation. In his memoir, Peat, a twenty-one year old merchant, recalled how proud he was as a Canadian to be serving in the predominantly British-born First Contingent. "Personally I felt very proud because of the thirty-three thousand soldiers on these boats only seventeen percent were born Canadians; five percent Americans, and the other seventy-eight were made up of English, Irish and Scotch residing in Canada at the outbreak of the war."²⁹

Although material published during or immediately after the war often emphasized the Canadian character of the CEF, for a number of Canadian-born soldiers loyalty to empire was the overriding motive for enlistment. John Smith Stewart, a Brampton-born dentist, who had served on the Western Front as a young subaltern, insisted in the 1970s that his enlistment was a result of his British heritage.

When I was in the sixth grade, I think it was, there was a competition offered to the pupils, just prior to their entry to the high school, to write an essay on the greatness of the British Empire. In this competition I was one of the competitors, and among the many things that I had to say were these quotations from Miss Marshall, as given us in her classroom. One of them was, 'One flag, one throne, one Empire.' Another one was, 'There have been many great Empires in the past, but in this century there is only one that is truly great. It is the Empire whose boundaries reach from Pole to Pole, whose navy rides the mighty deep, and whose sons and daughters gladly proclaim the British Empire.' In this competition, for the county of Peel, my essay was judged first for which I received the high sum of five dollars. It is very easy under certain circumstances

²⁹ Harold Peat, *Private Peat* (Toronto: J.G. MacLeod, 1917), 6.

like that to feel that when the opportunity comes to a young chap, to serve in the Forces, he should take advantage of the opportunity.”³⁰

Although some Canadian-born soldiers, like Stewart, acknowledged they joined out of duty to empire, others were generally more ambivalent and often explained their enlistment by connecting duty to Canada with duty to empire. Overall, the patriotic reasons for these Canadian-born volunteers seem to have been a “curious mixture” of sentiment for empire as well as for Canada.³¹ In an article on Sir George Parkin, Terry Cook explained how love for Canada and love of empire could go hand in hand. According to Cook, Parkin was convinced that Canada was the best country in the world. Yet, at the same time, Parkin conceded that “a great imperial feeling – a sense of imperial responsibility and pride – is perfectly consistent with strong local patriotism, such as we know exists in Canada and Australia.”³²

³⁰ John Smith Stewart, *Memoirs of a Soldier*, ed. Ian Simpson (Lethbridge, AB: Robins Southern Printing, 197?), ii. See also the writings of Blenheim Ontario native Donald Harry Laird, *Prisoner Five-One-Eleven* (Toronto: Ontario Press, 1917-1920?), 1; Montreal native Lieutenant Clifford Almon Wells, letter to his father, 15 December 1915, *From Montreal to Vimy and Beyond: The Correspondence of Lt. Clifford Almon Wells, BA, of the Eighth Battalion, Canadians, CEF, November 1915- April 1917*. ed. O.C.S. Wallace (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1917), 37 and Nova Scotia native James Foster Johnson, interview 1970s, Gordon Reid, ed. *Poor Bloody Murder: Personal Memoirs of the First World War* (Oakville, ON: Mosaic Press, 1981), 9.

³¹ Berger, *Sense of Power*, 260. See also and Keshen, *Propaganda*, 3.

³² Terry Cook, “George Parkin and the Concept of Britannic Idealism,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 10, no. 3 (1975): 17.

This combination of loyalty to empire and strong local patriotism is clearly visible in the letters of Quebec- born engineer Maurice Pope. On 10 November 1914, Lieutenant Pope wrote his father to explain why he had decided to enlist. “You have never neglected any opportunity to point out to us boys our duty to empire, and if Canada is as much part of this Empire as is the County of Surrey, why then must Canadians not bear proportionally their share of the burden [*sic*].”³³ Ontario-born John Becker announced his enlistment in a letter to his mother as follows: “In fighting England they [the Germans] are not after English territory but British colonies and why not Canada, since that is the newest, largest and greatest colony. Then why should not Canadians fight for Canada.”³⁴

In a letter to his parents, Private Orrin Bishop from PEI explained how a sense of duty to God and his family had made him enlist. Still, duty to God and his loved ones was not his only motive. As a Canadian, Bishop felt it was essential to enlist. “I was a little sorry to leave dear old P.E.I. but I felt it my duty to go and fight (for) God and for my country and dear ones at home. And no young man is worthy to be called a

³³ Lieutenant Maurice Arthur Pope, letter to his father, 10 November 1914, in *Letters from the Front, 1914-1919*, ed. Joseph Pope (Toronto: Pope and Company, 1994), 7.

³⁴ Corporal John Harold Becker, letter to his parents, 1 September 1915, *Silhouettes of the Great War: The Memoir of John Harold Becker, 1915-1919; 75th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Mississauga Horse), Canadian Expeditionary Force*. (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2001), 2.

Canadian if he would not go and do his duty as he should.”³⁵ Writing to his mother, Lieutenant Armine Norris, a young student from Chapleau Ontario, confessed that he had had a difficult time deciding whether to enlist. However, once he had made up his mind, things seemed to fall into place.

I was thinking all of these things as I walked down to the Exhibition Camp that lovely bright morning. Have you ever seen your own country? I never had before; but somehow the sight of those rows of comfortable brick homes, with here and there kiddies playing round in front and the housewives about the porches, got under my skin, and it came to me then that Canada was worth dying for. It's a city of happy homes, my city and it's worth any suffering to keep those homes inviolate, to prevent those kiddies ever feeling humiliated or ashamed of the name "Canadian".³⁶

The letters quoted above, all written during the war, were not intended for publication. When we compare them to the public memoirs of Baldwin and Peat, what is most obvious is that, although service to Canada was an important motive for enlistment, the idea that the war was a chance for Canadians to make a name for themselves is absent from the soldiers' private correspondence. What is especially worth noting is that these letters use the term 'for King and Country' in a rather

³⁵ Private Orrin T. Bishop, letter to his parents, spring 1916, quoted in James Clinton Morrison, ed., *Hell Upon Earth: A Personal Account of Prince Edward Island Soldiers in the Great War 1914-1918* (Summerside, PE: J.C. Morrison, 1995), 5.

³⁶ Lieutenant Armine Norris, letter to his mother, in *Mainly for Mother: By 58073* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1919), 10.

flexible manner. While soldiers generally used the term 'for King and Country' to express to their readers why they enlisted, the term can be interpreted in three different ways; loyalty to Canada, loyalty to Britain, or, more often, loyalty to both.³⁷

Although the soldiers' sources do not reveal how these differences were defined, the outbreak of war certainly strengthened the Canadian identity of some volunteers. Writing to University of Toronto Professor James Mavor, Private Frank Prewett revealed not only his reasons for enlistment, but also his feelings about Canada.

I have felt hurt to see that those very men who are Canadians, if there can be said to be any Canadian nationality yet, men who have received all the advantages and more of the hardships of this country, are yet the men who are remaining home and permitting those who have a less careful physical and mental development to represent their country in this great war that is changing the whole of the world, and which in its change is going to determine to the eyes of all nations whether this Canada of ours is a colony or a great and distinct people independent and confident in thought feeling and action.³⁸

The fact that Prewett complained about his fellow university students' unwillingness to enlist is an interesting take on the state of enlistment in 1915. One would expect that young university students, or other well-educated youths, would have been the main

³⁷ Berger, *Sense of Power*, 259.

³⁸ Frank Prewett, letter to James Mavor, n.d., quoted in Andrew Coppolino, "While the Shells Crashed We Were Strong": The Life of War Poet 'Toronto' Prewett," *Canadian Military History* 8, no. 4 (1999): 34, 35.

targets of the pre-war cult of manliness. Yet, Prewett's letter seems to indicate unwillingness amongst these students to play their part.³⁹

Prewett's letter offers a hint that, even though patriotism played an important role in the enlistment of the British and Canadian born, it was certainly not the only reason why these men enlisted. Memoirs, letters, and diaries written by soldiers clearly indicate that reasons for enlistment were often fluid and closely related. Writing after the war, British-born Private William Pedden, for example, remembered not only the spirit of patriotism and adventure that made him enlist in August 1914, but also the excitement "of visiting their home-land and of seeing again, the parents and relatives they had left behind, when emigrating to Canada."⁴⁰ Another Scottish soldier, Robert Combe, recalled how British-born CEF volunteers had been anxious to get over since most men had not seen the 'Old Country' in more than ten years.⁴¹

While a free trip home may have been an important incentive for the British-born element of the CEF, the idea that the war would be an exciting adventure seems to have been equally as strong. Archie Gibbons was not only extremely proud of

³⁹ In his work on Robert Falconer, James Greenlee concludes that student enlistment was heavy in the first months of the war, and therefore it is difficult to explain why Prewett would complain about low enlistment numbers. Perhaps he was convinced that more could and should be done to strengthen the war effort. James Greenlee, *Sir Robert Falconer: A Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 221.

⁴⁰ William Peden, "memoir," <http://www.hcpconsulting.ca/granddad/hist002.htm> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁴¹ Granatstein and Hillmer, *Battle Lines*, 113.

Canada's patriotic support for the war, but also felt sorry for those who had to stay behind and miss the greatest of adventures. In his 1919 memoir he wrote:

Sometimes we felt sorry for those who were forced to stay behind. When we sailed away and saw the shores of Canada fading away in the distance, we felt that we were the lucky ones; we were the privileged ones, for were we not going to Europe to take part in the great adventure? Yes we felt sorry for you behind your desk, behind the counters, on the farms, everywhere, except with us.⁴²

Like Gibbons, Herbert McBride, an Indiana-born lawyer, listed quite specific, albeit not very patriotic, reasons for his enlistment. According to McBride, his enlistment had had little to do with early reports of German atrocities or the invasion of Belgium. "No it was simply that I wanted to find out what a 'regular war' was like. It looked as though there was going to be a good scrap on and I did not want to miss it. I had been a conscientious student of the 'war game' for a good many years and was anxious to get some real first hand information."⁴³

⁴² Gibbons, *Guest*, 196.

⁴³ Herbert W. McBride, *The Emma Gees* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1918), 2. McBride served as a highly successful sniper before he was commissioned. Apart from the *Emma Gees* McBride published an influential book on the art of sniping. See Herbert McBride, *A Rifleman Went to War* (Mt. Ida, AR: Small Arms Tech Publishing, 1935). Joanna Bourke has researched this desire "to be in it" in *An Intimate History of Killing*. According to Bourke martial combat has become an integral part of modern society and literature and films have provided potential soldiers with an exotic new script of life. See Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of*

With regards to enlistment, soldier sources suggest that romantic notions of travel and adventure played a more important role amongst many of the younger volunteers. According to historian Robert Wohl, the romance of war had its strongest hold on men aged between eighteen and thirty, just as they were advancing from adolescence to young manhood.⁴⁴ Eighteen year old Ottawa-native Victor Tupper, who had recently taken his Royal Military College entry exam, wrote his brother two days before the outbreak of war. "I want you to put my name down as a recruit. If there is any chance of having some excitement out of this war business, your little bro' doesn't want to miss it. See?"⁴⁵ Nineteen year old Subaltern Billy Gray from Toronto could hardly hide his excitement when he was about to leave Saint John for England. In a letter to his mother he simply wrote; "the great adventure is on."⁴⁶

Writing years after the war, many ex-soldiers still recalled the sense of adventure they had felt upon enlistment. When Robert Kentner sat down in the 1920s to compile

Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare (London: Granta Books, 1999), 15-30.

⁴⁴ Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1979), 217.

⁴⁵ Lieutenant Victor Reginald Tupper, letter to his brother 2 August 1914, in R.H.T (Reginald Hibbert Tupper), *Victor Gordon Tupper: A Brother's Tribute* (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), 5.

⁴⁶ Lieutenant Billy Gray, letter to his mother, 23 November 1915, in *A Sunny Subaltern: Billy's Letters from Flanders* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1916), 7. Gray's enlistment papers cannot be positively identified from the CEF files, without his place or year of birth.

the story of his war service he was not even thirty. Regarding enlistment the ex-sergeant wrote; “we were young and the romantic unknown appealed to us, we reveled, and we prided ourselves in our willingness and ability to face these unknown dangers.”⁴⁷ During an interview in the 1970s, Lindsay native Herbert McLellan admitted that in those days war was viewed as a noble and romantic undertaking. As a fifteen year old high school student and a member of the pre-war militia, McLellan marched through the streets of Lindsay every Friday until he joined for overseas service.

Each Friday we paraded up and down the main street with the band playing ‘Soldiers of the Queen’; then back to the armories for drill, with half the citizen’s of Lindsay looking on. Then the Commanding Officer asked for volunteers for overseas. Each week when men stepped forward to volunteer cheers went up. I understood this procedure was followed across Canada. Many high school boys suddenly became 18 in order to sign up.⁴⁸

⁴⁷ Sergeant Robert George Kentner, *Some Recollections of the Battles of World War I: As recorded by Sergeant R.G. Kentner, 46th Infantry Battalion, South Saskatchewan, Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Fredonia, NY: I Kentner Lawson, 1995), 3,4. Kentner was born in South Dakota, son of Canadian parents, and had moved back to Canada before he enlisted. Kentner listed lawyer’s clerk as his profession on his enlistment forms.

⁴⁸ Private Herbert McLellan, interview 1970s, in *Veterans’ Review: A Collection of War Stories by the Veterans of Sunnybrook Medical Centre* (Toronto: Veterans’ Review, Sunnybrook Medical Centre, 1983), 20.

Since most letters, diaries and memoirs that mention adventure as the main motive for enlistment were written by Canadian-born CEF soldiers, it seems likely that the exciting notions of travel and adventure were most influential amongst these volunteers.⁴⁹ British-born soldiers, however, viewed their enlistment with a different kind of urgency than most of the Canadian-born volunteers. While the Canadian-born seem to have been mainly concerned with getting to the front before the war was over, many British volunteers were eager to get overseas to help Britain stem the German tide that threatened their native country.⁵⁰ Even though the Allies stopped the German advance in September 1914, the war remained a lot closer to Britain than it was to Canada. While the people of Canada could go about their business unconcerned, in Britain the sound of gunfire from the front and the threat of zeppelins were constant reminders of the realities of war.

⁴⁹ For more examples of this longing for adventure amongst Canadian-born CEF volunteers see, Ontario native George Arthur Maguire's memoir, *Four Years of the War as Seen by a Buck Private: An Autobiography about World War One* (Ottawa: J.A. Maguire, 2004), 1; W.S. Lighthall's, *Adventure* (n.p., n.d.), 1 and Vancouver native Sandham Graves' *Lost Diary* (Victoria, BC: Printed by C. F. Banfield, 1940), 16. For an analysis of the adventure motive amongst PEI soldiers see Morrison, ed. *Hell Upon Earth*, xvi. It is of course possible that many of the Canadian-born soldiers had not been to Britain before and viewed the war as a chance to visit the country their teachers, ministers and perhaps even parents had so often talked about.

⁵⁰ Fred Strickland, *Fred Strickland's War Sketches: Impression of a World War I Soldier*, ed. Heather Smith (Moose Jaw, SK: Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery, 2001), 32. See also Private Alwyn Bramley-Moore, letter to Dorothy, 7 December 1915, in *Path of Duty: The Wartime Letters of Alwyn Bramley Moore, 1914-1916*, ed. Ken Tingley (Calgary: Historical Society of Alberta, 1997), 5.

Of course, not every qualified volunteer was willing to risk his life for patriotic or romantic notions. However, many volunteers were easily persuaded by the \$1.10 a day the Canadian government was willing to pay CEF recruits. According to Danish-born engineer Thomas Dinesen, who traveled half way around the world to fight the Germans, the \$1.10 a day was all the incentive some young men needed to join the army. "We are constantly getting new recruits from the town itself, from West Canada and from the States – young eager boys who have just reached the age of adolescence, or older fellows, chiefly out-of-work or otherwise "broke", to whom the \$1.10 a day represents the last source of salvation."⁵¹

When war broke out Canada was in the midst of a depression. Work was hard to find.⁵² According to Morton, the Canadian Government treated its soldiers better than many employers in Canada, and the promise of a \$1.10 was all the incentive some men needed to enlist.⁵³ In a detailed study of the war experiences of Quebec-born

⁵¹ Lieutenant Thomas Dinesen, *Merry Hell! A Dane with the Canadians; translated from the Danish work "No man's land"* (London: Jarolds, 1930), 45. Although British soldiers were paid considerably less than their Canadian colleagues, financial considerations, played a major role in the successful recruitment of the New Army battalions in England. See Winter, *Death's Men*, 33, 34. In researching the formation of the First Battalion Australian Imperial Force (AIF), historian Dale Blair has found that, very much like in Canada and England, Australian volunteers often enlisted for financial reasons. Blair, *Dinkum Diggers*, 17.

⁵² For the connection between the pre-war depression and enlistment see Brown and Cook, *Canada*, 219, 220, 267.

⁵³ For a discussion of soldier's pay, family allowances and the work of the Patriotic Fund, see Morton, *Fight or Pay*, chapter 2 and 3.

Frank Maheux, Morton points out that patriotism was never a factor in Maheux's enlistment. Maheux, who, according to Morton, knew little of the world around him, explained in a letter to his wife that his motives were entirely economic.⁵⁴ With the help of Maheux's letters Morton was able to establish that he and his wife would receive more than three times as much as the \$22.00 a month he did working in a lumber camp.⁵⁵ According to the *Labour Gazette*, an urban family needed \$60 a month to pay for food, rent and fuel. By joining the army Maheux increased his pay from \$22 a month to at least \$33 with the possibility of claiming another \$20 separation allowance and \$25 from the Patriotic Fund; well over the \$60 minimum an average family needed to make ends meet. Although Maheux improved his salary considerably, the raise in pay was, according to Morton, not the only incentive for him to enlist. "The government was a more generous employer than any lumber baron, handing out uniforms, socks, a razor, brushes, a fur cap."⁵⁶ So, not only did Maheux

⁵⁴ Desmond Morton, "A Canadian Soldier in the Great War: The Experiences of Frank Maheux," *Canadian Military History* 1 no. 1 (1992): 80.

⁵⁵ Ibid. and *When Your Number*, 50. In the latter Morton indicates that Maheux may have exaggerated a little in order to get his wife's permission for his enlistment. According to Morton CPF allowance differed by province and did not take into account inflation. For another discussion of Soldier's allowances see; Brown and Cook, *Canada*, 222, who suggest that to offset inflation allowances were raised from \$30.00 to \$50.00 by war's end.

⁵⁶ Morton, "Canadian Soldier," 80. Sources indicate that for some soldiers the \$20.00 separation allowance (for Privates) was a motive to enlist even though in order to receive separation allowance, soldiers had to assign at least half their pay to relatives at home. See Morton, *When Your Number*, 50, 51. While a prisoner of war Sergeant Edward Edwards often thought of home wondering whether his wife "was receiving

increase his wages by enlisting, but he also managed to decrease his own spending, leaving more money for his wife at home in Quebec.⁵⁷

Even without the added bonus of a separation allowance, James Johnston, a single farmer and logger from Saint John, New Brunswick, thought the \$1.10 a day was an excellent opportunity. "The way I looked at things then was that I only got twenty dollars in the woods and the army would pay me thirty-three, it should be a pretty good deal."⁵⁸ Like Maheux and Johnston, unemployed teamster Jack Malcolm Brown saw service in the CEF as a golden opportunity.⁵⁹ In March 1915, Ontario-born Brown left his family's homestead to look for work but without much success.

her separation allowance alright." George Pearson, *The Escape of a Princess Pat: Being the Full Account of the Capture and Fifteen Months' Imprisonment of Corporal Edwards of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, and his Final Escape from Germany into Holland* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1918), 145.

⁵⁷ See Desmond Morton and Cheryl Smith, "The Patriotic Fund, 1914-1918: Fuel for the Home Fires," *The Beaver* 75, no. 4 (August/September, 1995): 14, 15.

⁵⁸ James Robert Johnston, *Riding into War: The Memoirs of a Horse Transport Driver, 1916-1919* (Fredericton, NB: Goose Lane Editions and the New Brunswick Military Heritage Project, 2004), 18.

⁵⁹ The only exception with regards to this statement can be found in Private Goodwin's *Memories of the Forgotten War*. In his work Goodwin claims that army wage was low and that "nobody joined up for the big pay the army handed out." Yet unlike Maheux, Brown or Johnston, bachelor Goodwin received a steady income as an accountant/ bookkeeper before he joined up in December 1915. Vincent. E. Goodwin, *Memories of the Forgotten War: The World War One Diary of Private V.E. Goodwin*, ed. David Pierce Beatty (Port Elgin, NB: Baie Verte Editions, 1986), 5.

I came off the homestead on the end of March, and when I got into town there was not much work to get, and wages are poor also. I stayed around town for a few days and then I joined the Fifty Third Battalion here in Prince Albert. I like it fine in the Army. We have it pretty stiff on the marches sometimes, but the grub is good and we have some jolly good times.⁶⁰

It was, of course, not only the Canadian-born who enlisted in the CEF out of economic considerations. When Reginald Grant encountered a Scottish soldier in his unit who claimed he had fought during the retreat from Mons, he asked him how he had ended up with the Canadians. The Scot's answer is recorded in Grant's 1918 memoir. "Well, you see, after I was wounded in the leg and got my honourable discharge, as soon as I was well, I wanted to do my bit again, and knowing that you laddies get bigger pay than in the British army, I thought I would kill two birds wi' [sic] the one stone – get more money and get into the game again."⁶¹

⁶⁰ Private Jack Brown, letter to his sister Olga, 17 April 1915, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=856&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=109> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Brown was born in Delta Ontario but lived in Saskatchewan with his family when he enlisted at the age of twenty-two in December 1915.

⁶¹ Grant, *S.O.S.*, 14. The Canadians received almost six times the pay of a British Soldier. According to Denis Winter basic pay for a British "Tommy" was about a shilling a day, although even the most lowly Privates usually made slightly more and Winter estimates a more normal figure at 1s. 9d. In pre-war England, 4.5 d. bought one pint of beer, a potato pie, cheese and pickle and a twist of tobacco. Winter, *Death's Men*, 148. That Canadian soldiers made almost 6 s. a day, was a fact quite well known by civilians in both England and France. As a result Canadian soldiers often complained that they paid much higher prices for food and lodging than their British counterparts. Because of their much higher pay Canadian soldiers, had according to Archie Gibbons, earned themselves the nickname "millionaire soldiers"

Like the unidentified Scottish soldier, Alwyn Bramley Moore, a British-born member of Alberta's provincial parliament, first enlisted in an English battalion in 1915. However, not even six months later, with the help of Canada's Prime Minister Bennett, Moore managed to obtain a transfer to the PPCLI; his reasons entirely financial. In July 1915 he told his son William why he had asked for the transfer; "I am trying to make a move here, but it seems almost impossible to get anything done. I am anxious to join the Canadians as the pay is better and the times are so bad, but one never can get an answer; a letter is written and then gets lost, and week after week passes and nothing is done."⁶²

Despite clear evidence supporting the traditional arguments for enlistment; patriotic, economic and romantic, we need to be careful not to over estimate the importance of these as the only factors enticing men into the CEF. One of the striking aspects of Canadian Great War memoirs is that a substantial number of authors do not include specific explanations for their enlistment. Omitting reasons for enlistment can, of course, mean that a number of volunteers did not consider their service anything

early on in the war. In his diary Joseph O'Brien labelled England's shopkeepers a "mercenary lot". Gibbons, *Guest*, 25 and Joseph O'Brien, diary winter 1915/1916, in *Send out the Army and the Navy. . . Being the Personal Papers of Lieutenant William Joseph O'Brien (#89078) of the Canadian Field Artillery, Canadian Expeditionary Force, March 17, 1915 to May 9, 1918*, ed. W.H. O'Brien (Toronto: Privately Printed, 1986), 167.

⁶² Lance-Corporal Alwyn Bramley-Moore, letter to his son William, 10 July 1915, in *Path of Duty*, ed. Tingley, 42.

special.⁶³ In a society obsessed with notions of honour and duty, young volunteers simply answered the call as they were expected to do by their parents, ministers and teachers.⁶⁴

Scottish-born Private Frank MacDonald, for example, did not start his memoir, the *Kaiser's Guest*, until his battalion arrived in France after being in England for three months. According to MacDonald, the story of raising troops in Canada had been told over and over again. "So we can take that part of it as read."⁶⁵ Another example of how this service to empire was interpreted by enlisted men can be found in the memoirs of Lancashire-born Sapper Walter Brindle, a middle-aged boot manufacturer who enlisted in November 1915. Although Brindle does not provide us with a specific reason for his enlistment, his motives are apparent in a poem he included in his 1919 memoir.

*The Bugles of Empire had sounded
The call had been given to advance,
And many brave men who responded,
Lay dead now in Flanders and France.*

⁶³ See Miller, *Our Glory*, 193-199. See also Moss, *Manliness*, conclusion.

⁶⁴ Moss, *Manliness*, 3, 140-146.

⁶⁵ Frank Cecil MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, microfilm (Garden City, NY: Country Life Press, 1918), 5. While MacDonald's omission may have been a result of the publisher's pressure to give the memoir an edge over similar publications, the idea that CEF soldiers had joined the war out of a sense of patriotism was a very popular notion and would have been received very well by readers both during and shortly after the war.

*That brave little army of Britons
Hurled back by the merciless Hun,
Now lay in a fresh line of trenches,
Awaiting the help that should come.*

*A cry went out from the homeland
That surged like a wave to the shores
Of Canada, New Zealand, Australia,
Where men delved for rich, shining ores . . .*

*Some news just received a few days since,
Told how nobly the Canucks had stood
Till the last round of shot had been fired,
Then for Empire, gave life, limb and blood . . .*⁶⁶

Perhaps, like Brindle, many British-born Canadians thought their enlistment was only to be expected and needed little formal explanation. England was in need of men and it seems that most of the British-born in Canada, even if they were not excited at the prospect of going to war, felt in some way compelled to join the army. In September 1915, the already mentioned Bramley-Moore decided it was time to do his share for King and Country and he enlisted as a private in Saskatchewan at the age of 37. In a December 1915 letter, he wondered what the fuss was all about. "I don't see that it is anything so wonderful to be willing to fight for one's country. . . ."⁶⁷ Like Bramley-Moore, Frederick Strickland decided to enlist at the age of thirty-seven. In March

⁶⁶ Walter Brindle, *France and Flanders: Four Years Experience Told in Poem and Story* (St. John, NB: S.K. Smith, 1919), 19, 20.

⁶⁷ Private Alwyn Bramley Moore, letter to his daughter Dorothy, 7 December 1915, in *Path of Duty*, ed. Tingley, 95.

1918, Yorkshire-born Strickland left his home and job as a machinist in Washington State to enlist in Vancouver. “[M]ost of us were between 30 and 45 years old – all volunteers, and most of us joined up because we thought England was scraping the bottom of the barrel for men.”⁶⁸

While for a number of soldiers explaining their reasons for enlisting may have been nothing more than stating the obvious, we have to be careful not to expand this idea to the CEF as a whole. Even though soldiers’ memoirs often recall how they enlisted out of patriotism, or insinuate that they did so without actually writing it down, we have to be aware that these publications were also very much products of their time. With ample time to reflect upon his war service, Canadian-born Private Lew Perry realized that these memoirs offered a very one-dimensional view of recruitment in Canada. “There were just about as many reasons for being in the army as there were men in it. The general sweeping motive of patriotism was assigned to all of us in the volunteer forces. It took four years of soldiering to make me realize that the assignment was flattery to me – and it took the next fifteen years to make me big enough to admit it.”⁶⁹

That patriotism was often used as a “general sweeping motive” for enlistment is also evident in Private Will Bird’s 1930 memoir, *And We Go On*, in which he

⁶⁸ Strickland, *Fred Strickland’s War Sketches*, ed. Smith, 32.

⁶⁹ Private Lew Perry, *Pickenem-up-n-puttinem-down* (Washington State: Self-Published, 193?), Chapter 10 (copy contains no page numbers).

provided his audience with the tale of a soldier who had forgotten why he had enlisted in the first place. According to Bird, the conversation had taken place somewhere in France.

Howard was a big-boned man who had been a Sergeant in the brigade, and had reverted to the ranks to come to France. He was one of the few men that the Bull Ring had not changed; he seethed with the fervour of platform patriots.

At Le Havre he had heard Tommy raving about the methods of those in authority, and how he intended dodging everything he could. 'Be British', roared Howard. 'What did you come over here for?'

Tommy looked at him in an odd way. 'Damned if I know,' he said. 'Adventure mostly. How did your ticket read?'

'Adventure!' blared old Howard. 'I come to fight for my country, for the flag and for the right.

'Good boy', soothed Tommy, 'but how in the heck do you know you're in the right?'⁷⁰

Even though the incident described by Bird may be apocryphal in nature, it is quite possible that once soldiers had served in the trenches they sometimes wondered why they had signed up in the first place. Despite Maroney and Moss' claim that patriotic ideals, based on Christian duty and the cult of manliness, were popular before and during the war, Bird's memoir seems to indicate that for some volunteers they

⁷⁰ Private Will Bird, *And We Go On* (Toronto: Hunter-Rose Co., 1930), 21. Bird's attestation papers list his profession as 'grocery clerk'. However, in his memoir Bird recalled that he was working as a farm hand, somewhere on the prairies, when he received news of his brother's death.

were rather short-lived.⁷¹ While there can be no doubt that many young men joined the CEF because wartime propaganda convinced them to enlist, we have to consider that others may never have believed the message of the recruiting Sergeant. The fact that, despite the popularity of these ideals, a number of men had to be shamed into enlistment is an indication that not all young men were eager to do their ‘Christian and Canadian duty.’

A careful examination of the sources suggests that some young men had to be actively pressured into the recruiting office. One good example of this pressure can be found in the diary of Alfred Andrews. In it, Andrews, a twenty-five year old lawyer from Saskatchewan, recalled how in August 1914 his employer made it quite clear to him that service in the CEF was a duty for Canadian men and that this duty should not be taken lightly. Although Andrews tried to excuse himself by arguing that he had sustained a rupture playing football, the pressure on him to enlist never abated.⁷² Andrews, clearly, was not overly enthusiastic about enlisting. With the pressure building, however, he eventually gave in. “[P]eople kept asking me to enlist with them and others asked if I intended to go, until I couldn’t stand it any longer and on August

⁷¹ Maroney, “The Great Adventure,” 79-85 and Moss, *Manliness*, 1-20. For a discussion of the propaganda manufactured during the war see Peter Buitenhuis, *Great War of Words: British, American and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1987), 22.

⁷² Private Alfred Herbert John Andrews, diary 4 August – 20 January 1915, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=8086&warid=3&docid=2&collectionid=328> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Andrews was later commissioned.

27th, 1914, I made up my mind to enlist.”⁷³ What is interesting about Andrew’s diary is that, even while recruiting offices were inundated with thousands of volunteers, the pressure on eligible men to enlist was enormous. Like Andrews, Joseph O’Brien, a law student from Lindsay, Ontario, noted in his diary that he felt he had “hung back” as long as he could when he ‘finally’ enlisted in March 1915.⁷⁴

If the pressure on eligible men to enlist was this strong early on in the war, it only increased as the war dragged on and casualty lists grew longer. Young men without a uniform were suspect and were often accosted by strangers urging them to enlist. In a 1916 letter written from the trenches, Armine Norris explained to his mother why he had decided to enlist even though she had asked him not go.

And so I had waited till the papers started to print ‘Your King and Country needs you’ – waited until I was ashamed to walk on the street for fear other fellows were thinking of me what I was thinking of them. I fought it out many sleepless nights – what it meant to all of us if I enlisted. I wasn’t sure I wasn’t a coward; I thought I might repent having joined when lying in the rain and mud; I didn’t think I wanted to go – but let me digress right here and say that I have been glad every moment that I did join and only wish I had come over with the First Contingent.⁷⁵

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Corporal Joseph O’Brien, diary, March and April 1915, in *Send Out*, ed. W.H. O’Brien, 1. O’Brien received a commission later in the war.

⁷⁵ Lieutenant Armine Norris, letter to his mother, 1916, in *Mainly for Mother*, 10

The longer the war lasted, the more men were needed to replace those lost in the trenches. By the spring of 1917 the threat of conscription seems to have been an important factor in men's decision to enlist. In an August 1917 letter to his mother in Belmont, Ontario, Private Frank Cousins explained that he was rather glad he had joined before conscription came into effect later that year. "It seems as if Conscription is coming. You can see preparations being made here now. I will be mighty glad that I'm not included in that list for they will not be treated very well judging by appearances & talk."⁷⁶

For some young volunteers the painful memories of the pressure to enlist were not easily forgotten. Unlike Norris, Pierre Van Paassen never felt like a coward for not enlisting. As a Dutch citizen and a recent immigrant to Canada, Van Paassen, writing in the 1930s, felt that the war was none of his business and he clearly intended to stay out of it. Yet, when he returned to Toronto from his job as a missionary in Northern Alberta, he could hardly recognize the city. "Toronto was a changed city. It had caught the war fever thoroughly. Every second or third man you met on the streets wore a uniform of some sort."⁷⁷ Van Paassen blamed the exaggerated newspapers accounts of the war for this 'war fever'. According to him, the Canadian newspaper editors

⁷⁶ Private Frank C. Cousins, letter to his mother, 25 August 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=895&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=11> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Frank Cousins enlisted in July 1917.

⁷⁷ Pierre Van Paassen, *Days of Our Years* (New York: Garden City Publishing Co., 1939), 59.

“swallowed and reproduced the outrageous propaganda stories emanating from the Allied lie factories without the slightest compunction.”⁷⁸ Despite his strong personal and religious objections to the war, Van Paassen eventually enlisted in the CEF after a harrowing experience on a Toronto streetcar.

One afternoon I was accosted on the rear platform of a streetcar by a woman, who was dressed in mourning. She told me that three of her sons had been killed at the front. She showed me their photographs. Suddenly she began to talk very loudly. “Why aren’t you in khaki?” she demanded. “Why do you dare to stand there laughing at my misery? Why don’t you go over and fight? Fight, avenge my boys!” she screamed. “Madam,” I tried to calm her, “I am not Canadian.”

In order to avoid a scene, Van Paassen decided to jump off the streetcar; but things only got worse.

Somebody stopped me just at the moment when I thought of taking to my heels as the best way out of the predicament. I was immediately surrounded by a mob. A group of business men, who had managed to stay five thousand miles away from where the poppies grow, and who were at that moment emerging from the hotel, gallantly rushed to the woman’s aid and forced me to submit,

⁷⁸ Ibid., 62. Van Paassen argued that the lies fabricated by the allied press were so convincing that even in the 1930s many of these war myths were still readily accepted. “To this day [1930s], hundred of thousands of easy going citizens of the Dominion are firmly persuaded that the Asquith cabinet in 1914 was something like the shadow of God on earth, that Belgian babies were currently carried on the point of German bayonets, that Bavarian yodelers took a particular delight in cutting off the breasts of Flemish nuns. . . .”

as she pinned a white feather through my coat into my flesh: the badge of a white-livered cowardice.⁷⁹

Van Paassen enlisted the following day as an interpreter, but spent the rest of his army life in a pioneer battalion.

Like Van Paassen, Privates Gordon Morse and Charles Haddlesey recalled, in two separate 1970s interviews, how social pressure had eventually caused their enlistment. Morse enlisted in Ottawa in 1917 at the age of 17 because he simply had had enough. "I was big for my age and I was tired of being stopped by recruiting Sergeants on the street wanting to know why I wasn't in the forces. So, I went home and said to my mother, 'if they take me I'm gonna go.' 'Well' she said, 'I don't like the idea, but if you've made up your mind, you have to go.' I had the feeling that if I could go I should."⁸⁰

For Haddlesey, it was not the recruiting sergeants but the white feathers pinned on him by young girls that made him enlist at the age of thirty-four. In an interview with Gordon Reid he explained what had happened.

At that time all the girls were going around with white feathers.
They'd stick one of those feathers on you if you were not in

⁷⁹ Ibid., 64, 65.

⁸⁰ Private Gordon Morse, interview with William Horrocks, in William Horrocks, ed., *In their Own Words* (Ottawa: Rideau Veterans Home Residents Council, 1993), 2. Morse was employed as a clerk before he enlisted.

uniform. My brother and I went to enlist near the end of August 1916. The army took him, but they wouldn't take me. I went back to the recruiting office and complained to them, "Gosh. You walk down the streets here and somebody sticks a feather on you." The Lieutenant there said to me, "Do you want to go that bad?" I said, "Sure I do. My brother is going and I want to go with him." He said, "you be at the docks, take the boat to St. Catherines, go to a certain hotel in St. Catherines and I'll be there. I'll take you to a doctor that will pass you." That's how I got in. On Friday, the 13th of September, 1916, we pulled out of Halifax harbour.⁸¹

The pressure to enlist did not come only from recruiting Sergeants, military parades and women with white feathers. On 23 May 1915, Francis James Whiting, a young Saskatchewan farmer, explained in his diary how a discussion with his parents had forced him to enlist. "Decided to enlist. Last night, Dad, Mother, and I talked it over, and Dad said if I didn't go, he felt he should. Then of course, there was nothing else for it. Young Walter will drive my outfit, and with Dad to keep an eye on my place, production will go on as well as if I were home."⁸² Reflecting on his enlistment in the 1930s, Whiting admitted he was shamed into service as he had no real inclination to go to war. "I didn't want to go. It wasn't so much that I was afraid of what might happen to me – I just couldn't work up any hatred or dislike for the

⁸¹ Charles Haddlesey, interview with Gordon Reid, in: Reid, ed., *Poor Bloody Murder*, 15. According to his enlistment form Haddlesey was a driver before the war.

⁸² Private Francis James Whiting, diary 23 May 1915, quoted in his memoir, *Getaway*, ed. Jean MacKenzie (Victoria, BC: Trafford, 2000), 6. Whiting enlisted on 25 May 1915 in Saskatoon see <http://data2.archives.ca/cef/gpc017/670833a.gif> [accessed 1 April 2008].

Germans. But it would have been unthinkable for a young man of twenty to stay home while his fifty-year old father went off fighting.”⁸³

Perhaps the question of why there was so much pressure on men to enlist, so vividly remembered sixty years after the event, can be explained by the growing number of casualties and the decreasing numbers of volunteers willing to serve in the CEF. While the pressure on eligible men in Canada increased because of dwindling recruitment numbers, soldiers on active service wondered why more men would not join the fight.⁸⁴ In April 1917 Harry Morris, a Montreal electrician, wrote from a British hospital: “Why don’t the boys enlist? I see by the Canadian papers that recruiting has fallen off. We need men. What is death on the battlefield compared with what the poor French and English women in Belgium, also the Belgians themselves, had to put up with?”⁸⁵

While the standard historiography of the Great War suggests that Canadians jumped at the chance to serve their country, the fact that some men had to be shamed and pressured into enlistment is an indication that not all volunteers were so eager to

⁸³ Ibid., 6,7.

⁸⁴ For recruitment numbers see Brown and Loveridge, “Unrequited Faith”. For the difficulty of recruiting full fledged battalions after the initial rush, see Nikolas Gardiner, “The Great War and Waterloo County: The Travails of the 118th Overseas Battalion,” *Ontario History* LXXXIX (September, 1997): 219-236.

⁸⁵ Private Harry Morris, letter to Lillian, mother & son, 5 April 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1829&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=139> [accesses 1 April 2008].

serve in the CEF. For young men enlistment was often the only way in which they could escape social pressure. As a result, many volunteers enlisted without giving their future too much careful thought. While soldiers' writings suggest that Canadian-born volunteers were more susceptible to this pressure than British-born recruits, this phenomenon is not easy to explain. Perhaps the British-born Canadians had initially volunteered in such great numbers that a few years into the war there was only a small number left to be shamed into enlistment.

While some volunteers were driven into service by recruiting Sergeants, white feathers or family members, others were pressured by their peers. This peer pressure often caused volunteers to make rather impulsive decisions. In his diary, Ottawa-native Victor Swanston recorded how, in August 1914, he, his brother and a group of their friends left their farm jobs to volunteer for service.

A lot of the boys were in town and we heard that Canada was going to send some troops overseas, Ern, a veteran of South Africa with the Strathcona Horse, started right in getting recruits. We got a bunch together, Bill Rowan, myself and some others then all went over to the hotel to celebrate, stayed around there most of the afternoon. Then got some grub together all piled into the old Reo and beat it for the ranch, Ern driving.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Private Victor Swanston diary, August 1914, in *Who Said War is Hell: No. 12895, Private Victor N. Swanston, Fifth Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, World War I*, ed. Yvonne and Ted Burgess (Bulyea, SK: Yvonne and Ted Burgess, 1983), 9.

There is no doubt that Victor Swanston's decision to enlist was naïve and uninformed, but 'war fever', in combination with peer pressure, seems to have gotten the better of thousands of young men in the first few years of the war.

In *Memoirs of a Quiet Rebel*, Private Alfred Elvidge recalled how, on 5 August 1914, he tried to enlist with his 'chum' Percy. When they arrived at the recruiting office, the line was so long that they gave up, thinking the war would be over before they got through the door. A few weeks later, the young farmer tried again; this time alone. When he met up with Percy later that night his friend almost "blew his top." "What the hell fella, why didn't you tell me you were going. Now we might not get together. Anyhow I'm going first thing in the morning."⁸⁷ In a letter written in 1915, and published in his war memoir, Corporal John Harold Becker told his parents that he wanted to enlist and asked them for their consent. On 1 September Becker, a railway clerk from West Lorne, Ontario wrote: "I believe things have come to a culmination. You have read about the Elgin Company. There is a fellow from the office (Mitchell) going and my friend MacNaughton and a few more and I can restrain myself no longer. . . ."⁸⁸ Becker's first feelings of uneasiness had come within days of the outbreak of the war, when one of his close friends had signed up. In August 1914 Becker was working for the Michigan central Railroad in St. Thomas, Ontario. Had he

⁸⁷ Alfred Richard Elvidge, *Memoirs of a Quiet Rebel* (Guyon, QC: Chelsley House Publications, 1997), 32.

⁸⁸ Corporal John Harold Becker, letter to his parents, 1 September 1915, in *Silhouettes*, 12.

been in West Lorne, his place of birth, there would have been a good chance he would have enlisted in those first days of the war. Writing after the war, Becker admitted he wished he would have been able to resist the pressure to enlist.⁸⁹

Like Becker, Gunner Burton Rhude needed a little nudge from one of his friends to enlist. In his memoir, Rhude recalled that on 2 January 1916 Harold Payne, one of his friends and colleagues at the Sterling Bank in St. Catharines, “reminded me of our decision to join up sometime. He suggested that having survived the new year’s festivities, now was a good time as ever.” After work, the pair joined.⁹⁰ The already mentioned Albert Andrews, who felt his football injury would keep him out of the recruiting office, was eventually persuaded by his employer; and even had a friend join him. “Theo Gunn said ‘I’d enlist if anyone would go with me.’ I told him I was going to join the Fort Garry Horse in the morning and he said he’d come with me. I don’t think he wanted to go but he was game and wouldn’t back down.”⁹¹

Given the words of Andrews, Becker, Elvidge, and Rhude, it seems that a lot of volunteers enlisted spontaneously.⁹² By indicating that “he was game”, Andrew’s

⁸⁹ Becker, *Silhouettes*, 3.

⁹⁰ Burton S. Rhude, *Gunner: A Few Reminiscences of Times with the Canadian Field Artillery, 1916-1919* (Sydney, NS: 1981), 1.

⁹¹ Private Alfred Andrews, diary, September 1914, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=8086&warid=3&docid=2&collectionid=328> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁹² For more example of friends enlisting together see; Jack Munroe, *Mopping Up! A Dog Story of the Princess “Pats”*; by Lieutenant Jack Munroe; through the eyes of

friend Theo Gunn might have taken a step that he felt he could not retrace. Perhaps society's emphasis on duty and patriotism had helped him step into the recruiting office, knowing that he was doing the right thing. How important it was for young volunteers to do the 'right thing' is perhaps best summed up in Private Perry's 1930s memoir. Even though Perry had internalized and understood the pre-war ideals of patriotism, imperialism and manliness, he chose not to believe the notion that the war would be the ultimate test of his masculinity. "I didn't want to serve so much as I wanted credit for serving. To get credit, one had to go through the motions."⁹³

To receive the credit many men like Perry craved, simply enlisting was not enough. Letters, diaries, and memoirs indicate that a number of soldiers asked their superiors to be sent to the front.⁹⁴ Already a militia soldier in 1914, PEI-born Peter A. Hughes recalled how he did not want "to act the coward" when the 104th militia

Bobby Burns, Regimental Mascot (New York: The H.K. Fly Co., 1918), 27; J.M. Logan interview with William Mathieson, 21 July 1977, in William D. Mathieson, ed., *My Grandfather's War: Canadians Remember the First World War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1981), 12; John Smith interview, in Horrocks, ed., *In Their Own Words*, 21; John B. Mason, interview, in *Veterans' Review*, 83; James Elliott, letter to his mother, 9 April 1916, in *The Letters of Spr. H. James Elliott, 1916-1919*, ed. John Elliott (n.p., 1993), 1, and Grant, *S.O.S. Stand To!*, 1.

⁹³ Perry, *Pickinem-up-n-puttinem-down*, chapter 10.

⁹⁴ In "From Enlistment to the Grave" Mike Wert tells the story of a William Bates who enlisted at the age of 46, only to be discharged after eight days of active service because of a bad back. Three months after returning to Canada Bates re-enlisted, served in the Railway Construction Battalion, only to be discharged again. Bates died in 1934 and his death was attributed to his military service. Mike Wert, "From Enlistment to the Grave: The Impact of the First World War on 52 Canadian Soldiers," *Canadian Military History* 9, no. 2 (2000): 51.

regiment in Westminster BC called for all unmarried militia members to volunteer for active service. "Several did not and were socially ostracized around their home."⁹⁵

When Verschoyle Cronyn from London, Ontario had been in England for over a year, without ever seeing the front in France, he decided to discuss the situation with his Commanding Officer (CO). "I intimated that as a year had gone by since our arrival I should be in France, because absence from Canada for an extended period without being on active service was going to set me apart from my friends when I returned to Canada, and would be hard to explain."⁹⁶

After two full years in England, Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC) Warrant-Officer Guy Bagnall almost begged his CO to be sent to France in order to play a more active part in the war. Bagnall told his commander that he was willing to take a demotion to private just so he could get out of his hospital duty in England and over to France. The recollections in his 1972 memoir are rather vivid.

'Sir what I want to say to you, if you will allow me, is that both you and I are in one box; that is to say, that when the war is over and we return to Canada, we will each be regarded as 'yellow' from the crown of our heads to the soles of our feet because we were not in a theatre of war. It will not matter how important our work had been. The public verdict will be the same. . .'⁹⁷

⁹⁵ Peter A. Hughes, letter, quoted in Morrison ed., *Hell Upon Earth*, 6.

⁹⁶ Verschoyle P. Cronyn, *Other Days* (London, ON: 1976), 47.

⁹⁷ Guy P. Bagnall, *Making a Life Worthwhile* (New York: Vantage Press, 1971), 193. See also Raymond Massey, *When I Was Young* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart,

The fear of being left out seems to have greatly diminished once volunteers had put a certain amount of active service behind them. In his memoir, *And So We Joined the Army*, Sergeant Charles Henry Savage, an accountant's office clerk from Quebec, wrote that he joined the CEF because "no able-bodied" and "red-blooded" man could sit at home to let others do the fighting for him. However, once Savage had served in trenches, he was a quite happy to take his leave and let others do the fighting for him. "Had I been one of those to whom colonels and generals referred when they announced 'The men are eager to go back in the line', I would, of course, have refused my leave. Well, I wasn't; we had plenty of good sergeants; and London beckoned."⁹⁸

The soldiers' dread of being left out was also fuelled by their naïve perceptions as to what trench warfare was like. According to Hugh Monaghan, a Deseronto-born bank employee, it was difficult in those days for young men not to get swept up in the glory of it all. Monaghan's writing indicates how romantic notions had maintained their allure, even though soaring casualty lists should have been a clear indication that the war was not the glorious adventure many had expected it to be.⁹⁹ "Bands played,

1976), 119. Bagnall was an Irish-born accountant who worked as a farm-hand in Canada at the time of his enlistment.

⁹⁸ Charles Henry Savage, *And So We Joined the Army* (Grande Mère, QC, 1936), 33. Savage received a commission near the end of the war.

⁹⁹ Of course not all soldiers were swept up by the glory of it all. See for example the letters of R.A.L. "I guess I have made up my mind I'm going to France alright, but-it's a very different thing this volunteering to go now, to volunteering in Ottawa. The brass band accompaniment has all gone." See, R.A.L., letter, 9 November 1915, in

flags waved, and although casualty lists were to be seen in the newspapers, the names were from all parts of the country, and only occasionally was a local kid involved.”¹⁰⁰

Evidence of just how naïve some soldiers were can be found in a letter written by Ernest MacPhie, an engineer from West Bay, Nova Scotia. In February 1917, two and a half years into the war, Corporal MacPhie wrote his father: “The 85th left for France about a week ago, do not know when we will go. I guess about May but not before then. Getting tired of here, would like to get there so I could stop the war.”¹⁰¹ Another example of this naivety can be found in a letter written by Private Winthrop McClare. Writing to his mother, McClare explained why he had volunteered to go overseas. “Last Friday there was a Capt. (I forget his name) from the front here and he said that the men at the [front] are happy as can be. He made a long speech, told us how they live and everything about them. Said they had a Jolly time. All I need is you concent [sic].”¹⁰²

Letters of a Canadian Stretcher Bearer, ed. Anna Chapin Ray (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1918), 14, 15.

¹⁰⁰ Hugh Baird Monaghan, *The Big Bombers of World War I: A Canadian's Journal* (Burlington, ON: Ray Gentle Communications, 1976), 6. Monaghan enlisted as a private but was commissioned in 1918.

¹⁰¹ Corporal Angus Ernest MacPhie, letter to his father, 14 February 1917, in *Letters and Activities of Angus Ernest MacPhie (Royal Canadian Regiment) during World War One, March 1916 to September 1919*, ed. Hugh Leslie MacPhie (Kirkland QC: Hugh Leslie MacPhie, 1991), 12. Corporal MacPhie was commissioned sometime after this letter.

¹⁰² Private Percy Winthrop McClare, letter to his mother, in *Letters*, ed. D. McClare, 1.

Despite these rather casual motives for enlistment, most soldiers seem to have enjoyed the first few weeks of their army career. Life in the Canadian training camps was paradise in comparison to what the First Contingent would have to endure on Salisbury Plain that first winter of the war. According to Sergeant Savage, most recruits were in that “happy in-between state when we had been long enough in the army to recognize the difference between a general and a regimental sergeant-major in his peace-time uniform, but not long enough for our shield of adventure to become tarnished.”¹⁰³ However, as was to be expected for a number of young volunteers, this ‘happy in-between state’ did not last very long, and many soon found out that there were more rules than adventure in the army.

In November 1914, Corporal John Teahan noted in his diary that he was handed sixteen Canadian prisoners who had a number of charges against them at the same time. According to Teahan, the prisoners’ intention was to misbehave until the army got sick of them and sent them back to Toronto.¹⁰⁴ Captain James Belton recalled, in *Hunting the Hun*, how one of his soldiers tried to give him his resignation. “When I asked Duffy to state his business, he told me he wanted to give his resignation, as he had changed his mind about soldiering and thought it only fair to give us a week

¹⁰³ Savage, *And So We Joined the Army*, 3

¹⁰⁴ Corporal John Patrick Teahan, diary 1915, in *Diary Kid*, ed. Keenan-Prince (Canada: Oberon Press, 1999), 17. Teahan was commissioned into a British Regiment sometime in 1915.

notice. . . ¹⁰⁵ Seventeen year old bank employee George Broome wrote to his mother a few weeks after his enlistment and admitted that he might have made a mistake in joining up. Even before he had left Canada he wrote:

I have just got back from Winnipeg where I have been for a couple of days. I had a very nice time. I saw a lot of Mr. & Mrs. Leggett but I did not have to time to get around much. Both Mr. & Mrs. Leggett are upset about my enlisting and want me out of it. When I think it over possible [sic] I should not have done so. They have brought out a few points which [?] and made me very sorry for joining. I did not think about you at the time and I do not know yet if you cared about it but I am sorry I did act so hastily. If you think it over I should not go for many reasons which are hard to express. I thought only of honour & country but other things count and when I see all the able bodied men laying around the city doing nothing I feel that I am not needed. Possible you had better not send your consent and let me out. Two or three lines saying you do not wish me to fight will free me but it is as you wish.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁵ James Belton and James Odell, *Hunting the Hun: By Captain James Belton, late of the Canadian and British Forces, and Lieutenant E.G. Odell, late of the 24th Canadian Battalion, B.E.F.* (New York: Appleton and Sons, 1918), 75.

¹⁰⁶ Private George Albert Broome, letter to his mother, 1 July 1915.
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=832&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=108> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Broome was born in London but immigrated to Canada with his family when he was a teenager. He enlisted 19 April 1915 and went overseas in fall of that year. Interestingly enough, only four days earlier, Broome had written his parents to ask for their consent. "Will you write out yours and Fathers consent to my enlisting and send it to me. I should have had it before but I forgot about it." Peer pressure had almost certainly caused young Broome to enlist and it was only after discussing this decision with his parents' friends that Broome realised the seriousness of his decision. Letter to his mother, 27 June 1915,
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=831&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=108> [accessed 1 April 2008].
While Broome had good intentions to get out of the army he never did, see letters to his mother, 7 July 1915 and 17 September 1915,

Writing to his brother from Valcartier, Ontario-born fireman Roy Macfie advised his brother not to enlist. Although Macfie argued that he did not regret his decision, he was certainly not thrilled about being a soldier. "I hope you don't take the notion to come, till they need men worse anyways, I don't say this because I am getting tired of it or anything like that [*sic*] I like it fine, as long as we don't stay too long in one place[.]"¹⁰⁷

If some soldiers regretted their decision to enlist even before they left Canada, it is no surprise that a number of others cursed their impulsiveness after they had set foot in the trenches. Private William Henry Bell, a native of Chatham, Ontario, told his sister that he did not mind fighting for his country "but I don't want to fight all my life."¹⁰⁸ Nevertheless, Bell so often grumbled about the conditions at the front that everyone at home seemed to think he regretted his enlistment. "You people all seem to thing I am sorry I enlisted well I hate to say I am not but I ain't cause I would never of been contented at home if I hadn't but just you wait and see how contented I will be when I get back where a fellow can get three good meals a day and a couple of washes

<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=834&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=108> and

<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=836&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=108> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹⁰⁷ Corporal Roy Macfie, letter to his brother Arthur, 27 October 1914, in *Letters Home*, ed. John Macfie (Meaford, ON: Oliver Graphics Inc., 1991), 10.

¹⁰⁸ Private William Henry Bell, Letter to his sister, 15 December 1916
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=735&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=103> [accessed 1 April 2008].

and not be lousy and have a place to sleep”¹⁰⁹ Although Private McClare had been so eager to get into the action, his letters from the front must have created the impression that, like Bell, he had come to regret his decision. “I didn’t know I said I didn’t like this place, because I do; but, just the same, I will be glad when I get home again. We will all be glad of that. I have heard a lot of fellows say that they wish they were [in] Canada again and they would never leave it.”¹¹⁰

Writing from the front, soldiers constantly grumbled about the conditions in the trenches and often tried to discourage family members, or friends, from enlisting, despite the urgent need for replacements. Despite his insistence that he did not regret his decision to enlist, Private McClare, writing in December 1916, urged his sister not to let his cousin Herbert join the CEF. If he was there “he would knock the idea right out of him.”¹¹¹ Much like McClare, Private J. Carter wrote to his son Dick on 26 March 1918 and urged him not to enlist.

Dick, lad don’t even think of taking my place, my dear boy. You will be very, very foolish and surely Mother has suffered enough, bless her brave heart. I tell you the job is as good as finished, and

¹⁰⁹ Private William Henry Bell, letter to his sister, 3 April 1917 <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=742&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=103> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹¹⁰ Private Percy Winthrop McClare, letter to his sister, 11 September 1916, in *Letters*, ed. D. McClare, 29.

¹¹¹ Private Percy Winthrop McClare, letter to his sister, 6 December 1916, in *Letters*, ed. D. McClare, 71.

anyway Canada doesn't call for less than age twenty. Oh, Dick, if you only would know, you would never dream of it. There, I know you will wait till I'm home and if your King and Country need you later on, I shall be proud to be able to say, "My boy answered the call"-but I hope to goodness this is the last war ever; it's just awful lad-the cheapness of precious human lives.¹¹²

It is obvious from the letters above that soldiers sometimes doubted their judgement with regards to enlistment. What is striking, however, is that these outpourings of regret are only present in soldiers' private correspondence. They were omitted from memoirs published during or shortly after the war. These early publications were not only eye-witness accounts, but they also served as public memorials for those Canadians who had paid the ultimate price and, as such, there was little room for regret or anti-war sentiment.

Also omitted from Canada's Great War legacy are the contributions made by thousands of "hyphenated Canadians". In his discussion of hockey players turned soldiers, J.J. Wilson suggests that representation was an important motive for enlistment.

Moreover, when the call to arms came, many Canadian hockey players volunteered on the wave of patriotic feeling that had pervaded the Anglo-Protestant hegemony. At the same time, other

¹¹² Private J. Carter, letter to his son Dick, 26 March 1918, in Mathieson, ed., *Grandfather's War*, 96. It has been impossible to trace the place of birth of Carter but the letters home were sent to an address in Alberta.

players sought to proudly represent their own marginalised immigrant communities – hyphenated- Canadians who, on the battlefields of Europe and the ice rinks of the young nation, secured a place for themselves within the Canadian mosaic.¹¹³

Although Wilson's discourse is full of romantic imagery that most likely went over the heads of many young volunteers, his idea that the war was a chance for immigrant minorities to represent themselves is useful in explaining the extraordinary numbers of Black, Japanese and First Nation volunteers.¹¹⁴ Fitting in and winning entitlement seem to have been the most influential factors for these soldiers to enlist. In first instance, minority volunteers were rejected, but later on, with enlistment numbers dwindling, they were welcomed, although they rarely received the privilege of organizing their own units.¹¹⁵

Leaders of the diverse minority groups were hoping that service in the war would improve their status, but whether the volunteers paid attention to these political considerations is not clear as very few Black, Japanese or First Nation soldiers left a

¹¹³ Wilson, "Skating," 337.

¹¹⁴ James W. St.G. Walker provides the following volunteer estimates amongst these minority groups; 3500 First Nation, 1000 Blacks and several hundred Chinese and Japanese. James W. St.G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Historical Review* 70, no. 1, (1989): 25.

¹¹⁵ Cook, *Sharp End*, 30.

written record of their service.¹¹⁶ Even though sufficient numbers were recruited, Ottawa decided that it had no use for a Japanese-Canadian battalion. Japanese-Canadians could only enlist individually and many traveled to Alberta where it was easier to get accepted. Not surprisingly, the Japanese volunteers, who had trained in Vancouver and had hoped to travel overseas as a distinct unit, were frustrated with this decision. Yet, despite this disappointment, Tokyo-born fisherman, Private Sachimoro Moro-Oka was happy to be finally accepted into the CEF. "We have no uniforms but we feel like soldiers."¹¹⁷

Gordon Wilson, who joined the Black Construction battalion in Nova Scotia in 1918, expressed the same relief at finally being accepted when he was interviewed in the 1980s. "Black people refused to accept the attitude that it was a white man's war. As loyal citizens we wanted to serve our country. It was our duty our responsibility."¹¹⁸ Ironically, these volunteers from minority groups, who were so

¹¹⁶ See for example, Roy Ito, *We Went to War: The Story of the Japanese Canadians Who served During the First and Second World Wars* (Stittsville, ON: Canada's Wings, 1984), 18 and Calvin Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction 1916-1920* (Dartmouth, NS: Society for Preservation and Protection of Black Culture in Nova Scotia, 1986), chapter 1. See also Walker, "Race and Recruitment," 1-26 and Barbara Wilson, ed., *Ontario and the First World War, 1914-1918: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 167-175, cx-cxiv.

¹¹⁷ Private Sachimoro Mor-Oka, letter n.d., quoted in Ito, *We went To War*, 35.

¹¹⁸ Gordon Wilson, interview with Calvin Ruck, in Ruck, *No. 2 Construction Battalion*, 63. For enlistment attitudes amongst Métis and Native volunteers see, Dave Hutchinson, Anne Dorion and Rick Desjarlais, *Remembrances: Métis Veterans* (Regina, SK: Gabriel Dumont Institute of Métis Studies and Applied research Inc.

willing to enlist in 1914, became the biggest opponents of conscription in 1917. When they volunteered in 1914 and 1915 nobody wanted them, and now, not even two years later, the Government forced them to leave home and go to war.¹¹⁹ Although the soldiers' sources are thin with regards to Black, Japanese and Native Canadians, the fact that so many minorities were willing to come to the aid of a country that had treated them as nothing more than second-rate citizens indicates the pull of the war on young Canadians.

While recent publications on enlistment have enlarged our understanding of the successful recruitment of the CEF, the idea that in a period of less than four years more than 450,000 men volunteered out of patriotic duty to Canada and empire, romantic notions of travel and adventure and economic reasons, needs to be re-examined. For a number of soldiers who published a memoir of their war experience, it has been impossible to determine why they decided to enlist for the simple reason that they did not discuss it. For many British-born volunteers, omitting reasons for enlistment may have been a result of an unconditional loyalty to their country of birth and the more imminent German threat. However, we need to be careful not to extend this to the CEF as a whole. The letters and diaries written by soldiers paint a different

1997), 99, 102 and James Dempsey, *Warriors of the King: Prairie Indians in World War I* (Regina, SK: Canada Plains Research Centre, 1999), 33, 49.

¹¹⁹ Ruck, *No. 2 Construction Battalion*, 58 and Walker, "Race," 18, 19

picture, especially those penned during the war. A great number of volunteers made their decision to enlist on the ‘spur of the moment’, without much serious thought.

Although it is difficult to determine to what extent volunteers understood the patriotic messages of the various middle-and-upper-class recruiting leagues, the fact that so many young men had been taught by their teachers, parents and ministers that military service was the ultimate test of their manhood, may have contributed to the initial recruitment success.¹²⁰ Overnight, citizens became soldiers, and some volunteers seem to have regretted their patriotic decision even before they had arrived at the front. For others, patriotism for King, Empire, and Canada eroded quickly after they had been in the trenches for a few months. Of course, there was a certain romance in the whole “war business”, but this does not explain why soldiers stopped thinking before they enlisted. Printed casualty lists grew longer each week. Confirmation of the carnage at the front was there in black and white. Yet, while some prospective volunteers chose to ignore the evidence, others were perhaps spurred on by the growing casualty list and ever growing demand for men.

Even though a number of memoirs, written during or shortly after the war, echoed the message that the war was a great patriotic adventure, more often than not these sources convey that the decision to enlist was taken in a rush and under considerable peer-pressure. Unavoidable duty seems to have been the motto for a substantial

¹²⁰ For an example of complex philosophical defences of the war, aimed at undergraduates, but perhaps lost on the average man on the street, see Greenlee, *Sir Robert Falconer*, 212-219.

number of volunteers, and, as such, many young men enlisted with relatively few expectations. After some time in the trenches, soldiers realized only too quickly that the war was not the glorious affair the press had initially portrayed it to be. In order to cope with the horrors of war, many CEF volunteers looked for support from their fellow soldiers. Letters and diaries often express how happy CEF soldiers were to encounter fellow troops from their region or town, and it was not long until the maple leaf insignia on their uniforms became not only a symbol of Canada, but also of what they had left behind and so often longed for.

According to the “myth of the war experience”, most Canadian men had jumped at the chance to fight. The letters, diaries, and memoirs written by CEF soldiers, however, clearly show that patriotism was only one of many motives for enlistment. A sense of civic duty in combination with peer pressure, the fear of being left out, and the lure of a “buck ten” led many young recruits through the door of the recruiting office before they had a chance to carefully consider their options. Because enlistment lacked a clearly defined, single motive, the First Contingent that left Valcartier for England in October 1914 was a far from homogeneous unit. It was only in the rain and mud of Salisbury Plain that this heterogeneous group first developed an early sense of the CEF’s Canadian identity. Although this identity was initially little defined, interaction with British troops soon clarified the differences between Canadians and the rest. Within months of arriving in England the CEF acquired the reputation of an undisciplined mob. While this image was far from flattering, many CEF soldiers were

proud to be different and with “the Canadians.” This pride and confidence in the CEF would be strengthened by months of shared misery on the plain and would later form the first layer of the CEF’s growing “corps identity.”

Chapter 2, What We Are Is Just What We Think

The CEF's First Contingent was recruited, trained and sent to the front in less than seven months. Even though the new recruits came from all walks of life and had joined for numerous reasons, it was in these initial seven months of the war that they formed the first layer of the CEF's "corps identity." Letters and diaries, written after the Canadians had gone overseas, suggest that the troops identified not only with individual comrades, but also with the CEF as a whole. A collective identity, based on the independence of thought and resourcefulness of the Canadian citizen soldier, was being forged.¹

With regards to Canada's interpretation of the Great War, Jonathan Vance has argued that historical perceptions, even though they might have no factual status, "have a cultural or intellectual value that warrants attention."² One such perception was the notion that Canadian citizen soldiers were highly effective warriors, yet undisciplined troops. This stereotypical image has become an important part of the "myth of the war experience" in Canada. It is based on the assumption that CEF

¹ For a discussion of these special 'Canadian traits' see chapter 4.

² Vance, *Death So Noble*, 4.

soldiers were citizen soldiers who used their individual skills and penchant for initiative to turn the CEF into one of the most feared units on the Western Front.³

The origins of this stereotypical image can be traced back to the “Militia myth,” and the latter part of the nineteenth century. The “Militia myth” emphasized British military incompetence and suggested that the untrained Canadian citizen soldier was far superior to the “barrack-bred British regular.”⁴ This idea received a boost during the South African war, when British officers came to admire Canadian soldiers’ drive and resourcefulness, despite their frequent lack of discipline. Although the Canadian soldier’s self-image that emerged during the South African war shows many similarities to the one that developed early in the Great War, no CEF soldier makes reference of the war in their letters, diaries or memoirs.

As during the South African war, popular interpretation held that CEF soldiers were individualists who did not take kindly to the “spit and polish” required by the army. Although discipline in the CEF was probably just as strict as in other armies, this stereotypical self-image is visible in a number of soldiers’ sources.⁵ Letters and

³ Ibid., 36. For the reputation of the Canadians as excellent fighters see Shane B. Schreiber, *Shock Army of The British Army: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the War* (Westport, CN: Praeger, 1997), 140-142 and Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 217.

⁴ Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal: Canadian War Museum and McGill University Press, 1993) 9 and O’Brien, “Manhood,” 120.

⁵ See Losinger, “Officer-Man Relations,” 267 and Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, 172.

diaries written during the war suggest that, as early as the fall and winter of 1914, Canadian soldiers used this stereotype to carve out a form of collective CEF identity. No doubt, the image was based more on perception than reality, but the interesting point is that this preceded the development of the later “myth of the war experience.” Clearly, soldiers could be active agents where that myth was concerned. While the CEF won its greatest honours on the battlefield, soldier sources provide enough evidence to suggest that, even before they entered the trenches, they had established a rowdy, first layer of their “corps identity.”

One way to get an idea of how this stereotypical image developed is to establish first whether CEF soldiers, either Canadian or British-born, perceived themselves to be different from other allied soldiers around them. According to Stephen Conway, joining an army widened the horizons of young soldiers. Even though Conway’s argument is based on eighteenth-century British soldiers, we can use this idea of widening horizons to explain how Canadian soldiers substituted their individual pre-war identities with a new collective one.⁶ Traveling across Canada and the Atlantic, then enduring shared misery on Salisbury Plain, developed an *esprit de corps* that forced First Contingent volunteers to re-examine their ‘old’ local identities and to embrace a rudimentary form of collective identity. Canadian troops were

⁶ Conway, “War and National Identity,” 866. Conway is not the first one to view enlistment as a rite of passage. See Eric J. Leed, *No Man’s land: Combat and Identity in World War I* (Cambridge, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), chapter 1.

inexperienced with army rules and regulations. This often got those raw recruits in trouble with officers and British Military Police (MP). The upshot was an important element of this newfound identity. Thus, within months of arriving in England, Canadian troops had acquired a reputation as “wild colonials”, who were given to drink and the harassment of local civilians.⁷ However, rather than express concern over this, many Canadian soldiers’ writings suggest that they were rather pleased with what they construed as a rakish reputation for indiscipline.

While patriotism was perhaps not as important a factor in the recruitment of the CEF as has often been assumed, and while some soldiers wanted to get credit for serving more than they actually wanted to serve, the CEF was off to a good start in the first months of the war.⁸ Immediately after the outbreak of war, Britain had accepted Canada’s offer to raise 25,000 troops. By the beginning of September 1914 more than 36,000 volunteers had arrived in Valcartier, a newly built military camp in Quebec.⁹

⁷ Cook, *Sharp End*, 75.

⁸ See chapter 1.

⁹ For a detailed study of the recruitment of the First Contingent see A.F. Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919, vol. I: From the Outbreak of the War to the Formation of the Canadian Corps, August 1914-September 1915* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1947), 58 and appendix 86. According to Duguid the First Contingent consisted of 36,267 volunteers. Of those 36,267 soldiers, only thirty percent were Canadian-born volunteers. The majority, sixty four percent, was made up of British-born soldiers, while Americans (0.4%), Russians (0.4%) and other nationalities (5.5%) accounted for the remainder. See also Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 9-11. According to Jean Pierre Gagnon, French-Canadians made a modest contribution to the First Contingent. Of the 36,267 volunteers, 1,245 were of French-Canadian origin. Jean Pierre Gagnon, “Les Soldats Francophone du

Although Valcartier was a modern day marvel, the training of the new recruits was not. Despite the fact that the stakes were much higher in the summer of 1914, volunteers with militia experience indicated that training at Valcartier was not much different from the small militia camps held each summer. In his 1916 memoir, Lieutenant Frederic Curry, a pre-war militia officer, pointed out that these camps had done little to prepare Canada for war. "It requires the outbreak of the war to bring home the inevitable weakness of such a system, and when the Canadian parliament announced the intention of sending a contingent of thirty thousand men, even the most enthusiastic shrugged their shoulders and said impossible."¹⁰

Despite Curry's misgivings, training in Valcartier was taken up with enthusiasm as the new recruits were to be readied for war as soon as possible. However, since very few of the instructors had actual combat experience, this proved to be a difficult task. Of the senior officers, only Richard Turner, a newly appointed Brigadier General, had seen active service. Canada's only permanent infantry regiment, the Royal Canadian Regiment, was sent to Bermuda to replace the British Garrison there, while British reservists living in Canada were either on their way back to England, or training with

Premier Contingent Expéditionnaire du Canada en Empire," *Guerres Mondiales* 40, no. 157 (1990): 83, 84, 100, 101.

¹⁰ Curry considered Canada's short drill season, a two week camp in the summer, to be the main culprit in Canada's unpreparedness for war. Curry, *St. Lawrence*, 3.

the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) in Lévis.¹¹ According to Desmond Morton, Sam Hughes, Canada's minister of militia, saw no need to mix experienced British reservists with raw recruits, and only eighty instructors were on hand to train the 36,000 volunteers in Valcartier.¹² Experience was hard to come by.

The first contingent left Canada for Britain on 3 October 1914, not even two months after the outbreak of war. Despite the lack of experienced instructors, a lot had been accomplished. Valcartier had been built out of nothing. Meanwhile, the CEF's 1st Division had been outfitted and trained in rudimentary drill. Nevertheless, Alderson realized that very few of his soldiers were ready for war and decided that, after its arrival in England, the CEF would undergo more training before being sent to the front. Ten days before he was to embark for overseas Lieutenant Alexander Thomson acknowledged the Canadians' lack of training: "You can't tell how long this war will last, and we are in no shape to go into action, we will surely be held and drilled until we are soldiers in more than name. . . ."¹³

¹¹ Morton, *When Your Number*, 10 The Princess Patricia's Light Infantry was funded by Hamilton Gault. The battalion trained in Lévis, across the Saint Lawrence from Valcartier. The majority of the PPLI consisted of British reservists who had not been able to reach their regiments, but was led by mostly Canadian-born officers.

¹² Ibid., 11.

¹³ Lieutenant Alexander Thomson, letter to his mother, 24 September 1914, in *Battle Lines*, ed. Granatstein and Hillmer, 109. Without date and place of birth it has been impossible to locate Thomson's CEF file.

Despite their shortcomings, the Canadians were considered ready for active service by February 1915. On 14 February the First Canadian Division embarked at Avonmouth for France. Knowing that the Canadians were not quite prepared for front line service, Alderson and his staff decided to mix the inexperienced troops with veteran British soldiers. He hoped that the Canadians could learn what trench warfare was all about without having to make costly beginner mistakes.¹⁴ How CEF soldiers experienced their first 'supervised' visit to the front is difficult to say, as the sources make very little mention of this so called "sandwiching." One of the few soldiers to make substantial comments about his first visit to the front was Private Harold Peat. In his memoir, Peat recalled the instructions he had been given by his commanding officer, Captain Straight.

You don't know the first thing about this war. You've not had the opportunities of asking about it from wounded men. Now, boys, I know exactly what you are going to do to night when you get in those trenches. You are going to ask questions of these English chaps. YOU ARE NOT.¹⁵

Although it was commendable that Straight warned his troops about over confidence, his advice about how to behave in the trenches was not. According to

¹⁴ Peat, *Private Peat*, 75. See also, Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers*, 316 and Morton, *When Your Number*, 37.

¹⁵ Peat, *Private Peat*, 57.

Peat, Straight told them to hold their heads high; “March right in. Don’t stop for anything. Get close to the parapet. Look at the British boys; throw them “Hello guys!” and begin to shoot right away.”¹⁶ From his advice, we can assume that Captain Straight was just as green as he expected his soldiers to be. The Canadian First Division had arrived at the front less than seven months after the outbreak of war; their training limited and their leadership untested.

Harold Peat’s memoir, *Private Peat*, published in 1917, was part of the pro-enlistment literature published during the war that aimed at recruiting more men into the CEF.¹⁷ In general, these works were uncritical of the war effort and only served to further the heroic reputation of the CEF. From our perspective, it is significant that Peat publicly took pride in the lack of discipline amongst the “free spirited” Canadians and set them aside from the, in his opinion, more disciplined British troops. To emphasize this, Peat quoted an anecdote from a British newspaper in which a British sentry challenged the troops coming towards him in the darkness:

“Halt! Who goes there?” demanded the sentry
“The Irish Fusiliers,” was the answer.
“Pass, Irish Fusiliers; all’s well.”
Before long some more steps sounded . . .
“Halt! Who goes there?”
“The London Regiment.”
“Pass, Londons; all’s well.”
“Halt! Who goes there?”

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ For other examples of this type of literature, see introduction and chapter 1.

“Hic . . . mind your own damn business . . .”
“Pass, Canadians; all’s well.”¹⁸

The idea that Canadians were poorly disciplined soldiers seems to have accompanied them to the trenches in 1915. A letter published in his *Hell Upon Earth: A Personal Account of Prince Edward Island Soldiers in the Great War, 1914-1918*, confirms this assumption. Writing home in 1915, Captain A.R.B. Duck, a civil servant from Charlottetown, quoted the same anecdote as Peat, albeit in a slightly different version, possibly indicating that the anecdote had been told over and over again.¹⁹ Duck replaced the London Regiment and the Irish Fusiliers with the Black Watch and Dublin fusiliers respectively but added: “So you see, the Canadians have a name out here for being ready for anything even to answering a sentry.”²⁰

Although both descriptions of the Canadians’ behaviour are apocryphal in nature, they are also an indication that some CEF soldiers took pleasure in this reputation for indiscipline. The idea that Canadians were carefree and less disciplined soldiers provided them with a sense of uniqueness that set them apart from the non-Canadian troops around them. Of course, this is not to say that soldiers accepted everything that

¹⁸ Peat, *Private Peat*, 21.

¹⁹ Linda Colley has argued that by cross-referencing and corroboration of stories outsiders’ personal narratives can still have historical value. See, Colley, *Captives*, 82.

²⁰ Captain A.R.B. Duck, letter home 1915, quoted in Morrison ed., *Hell Upon Earth*, 241.

was written about them. Samuel Hynes has argued that soldiers often claim that one has to go through war to understand its proper meaning.²¹ Although Hynes' observation can explain why soldiers were often wary of propaganda aimed at them, the fact that the incident reported by Peat is present in other letters and memoirs is an indication that many Canadian soldiers not only cherished, but helped to cultivate this rowdy and, in their minds, unique reputation.

Whether the Canadians were, indeed, this independent and contemptuous of army discipline is of only marginal importance in the context of this chapter. What matters is their self-perception. In this regard, it is clear that the anecdote detailed by Private Peat would have only strengthened the emerging Canadian stereotype.²² That this stereotype survived the war is evident from Sergeant F.W. Bagnall's 1930s memoir, *Not Mentioned in Dispatches*. Bagnall, a young university student from PEI, remembered how a Canadian soldier was arrested in London for failing to salute a Guards parade on its way to Buckingham Palace.

²¹ Hynes, *Soldier's Tale*, 2. For soldiers reactions to press coverage of their actions, see Robert S. Prince, "The Mythology of War: How the Canadian Daily Newspapers Depicted the Great War" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1998), 12, 13. For a further discussion of Canadian troops and their opinions on the British and Canadian press, see chapter 4. On French soldiers and their relation with the press see, Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men At War, 1914-1918: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France During the First World War*, trans. Helen MacPhail (Providence, RI: Oxford: Berg, 1992), 92.

²² For a discussion of 'Canadian discipline', see J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 47-56.

The next morning in reply to the Colonel's questions what he had to say for himself, he stuttered, 'W-we Canadians didn't come here to s-salute, we came here to f-fight.' I will not enlarge on this, for everyone knows they made a name by their irregularities, those independent Canadians, many English born.²³

Perhaps one of the reasons why this stereotype of the rowdy Canadian soldier was so readily cultivated is the fact that enforcement of strict army discipline had been a problem for the CEF since August 1914. For most volunteers, training in Valcartier had been a pleasant experience. According to Desmond Morton, many of them were in a 'holiday mood.' The weather was beautiful, as volunteers enjoyed playing sports and watched movies in the newly erected cinema.²⁴ Military discipline was loose. As a result, many young, newly-appointed officers struggled to keep their men under control. Corporal Roy Mcfie expressed his concern about this mess in a letter home.²⁵ "We have a pretty poor bunch of officers in our company, if they take us to the front, I

²³ F. W. Bagnall, *Not Mentioned in Dispatches* (North Vancouver, BC: North Shore Press Ltd., 1933), 21. Identical anecdotes can be found in the history of the Australian Imperial Force, although the language is often a little more colourful. See for example, <http://www.diggerhistory.info/pages-discipline/discipline-ww1.htm> [accessed 1 April 2008].

²⁴ Morton, *When Your Number*, 19.

²⁵ Although almost seventy percent of the first contingent was British-born, most of the officers were Canadian-born. See Duguid, *Official*, 58.

think there will be some bad mixups[.] The Captain is a nice old chap in fact they are all too nice, the[y] just play around like a lot of kids and they can't keep order."²⁶

Soldiers with previous military experience were particularly disappointed. Concerned with the limited training and loosely enforced discipline at Valcartier, Private Frank Macdonald, much like Mcfie, wondered in 1918 how his troop leader had ever been commissioned. "How a man who gave evidence of so much innate stupidity ever got, or could hold onto, a commission was an enigma to us."²⁷ Writing twelve years after MacDonald, Private Dick Elvidge recalled how his friend, Private Noreling, always refused promotion, even though he had been an officer in the Territorial Army. Noreling observed: "A man should have far more training than we had, before undertaking the responsibility of leading others into battle."²⁸ He was convinced that the war would be far different than what he was used to calling "Saturday soldiering," and he wanted to experience some actual fighting before he would accept a promotion.²⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Charles Leonard Flick, a militia officer in the 31st B.C. Horse, was absolutely disgusted with the level of training and organization in Valcartier. In his diary, the British-born Colonel criticized Sam

²⁶ Corporal Roy Mcfie, letter to Jessie, 22 September 1914, in *Letters Home*, ed. J. Mcfie, 6, 7.

²⁷ MacDonald, *Kaiser's Guest*, 18.

²⁸ Elvidge, *Memoirs*, 42.

²⁹ *Ibid.*

Hughes for personally appointing senior officers over the head of more experienced ones.³⁰ Once overseas, Flick fully expected the First Contingent to train with a more experienced British force, so that British staff officers could teach the Canadians how to run their division.³¹

Private Thomas Dinesen, a Danish-born volunteer, was astounded to find, when he enlisted in the CEF in 1917, that military training in Canada had progressed little from the pre-war days.³² Dinesen, a professional soldier in the Danish army, had left Denmark to join the allied forces in order to fight the Germans. When he sat down in 1930 to write his memoirs, he recalled the disappointment at what he had encountered in August 1917: "The barracks were a disappointment. One would have thought that a wealthy country like Canada might have provided better quarters for her soldiers. We were billeted in some old disused factory building near the railway station"³³

Dinesen was even less impressed with the level of instruction. As time went on, it dawned on him that he really was not supposed to learn anything while in Montreal.

³⁰ Lieutenant Colonel Charles Leonard Flick, diary, 8 September 1914, in *Just What Happened: A Diary of the Mobilisation of the Canadian Militia 1914* (London: Privately Printed, 1917), 26.

³¹ Lieutenant Colonel Charles Leonard Flick, diary, 10 and 17 September 1914, in *Just What Happened*, 28, 35.

³² For Dinesen's enlistment date see his enlistment papers, <http://data2.archives.ca/cef/gpc002/295235a.gif>. [accessed 1 April 2008]. Dinesen enlisted as a Private and was commissioned later in the war.

³³ Dinesen, *Merry Hell!*, 33.

Even the physical part of the drill was sub par, and he was far from impressed with his own form. It was not nearly as good as after a season of summer sports in Denmark.

The instructors, both officers and NCO's, were the worst, however.

Our N.C.O.'s have no special training themselves for one thing; they are only promoted to their present exalted rank on account of their prowess and good behaviour, etc., and they'll have to start all over again like the rest of us when we first get to England. Even our officers, who, I fancy have never learnt anything beyond drilling us in platoons on the parade ground, will have to undergo a long course at an English school for officers before being sent to the front.³⁴

In an October 1914 letter to his wife, Private Harry Hillyer, a British-born civil servant from Montreal with years of military experience, made similar comments about his superiors. "There seems to be a prejudice existing amongst the NCOs & Junior officers here against ex-service men. They all know we've forgotten more about soldiering than they'll ever know & they don't like it. They make some awful blunders some times."³⁵

To be fair, the instructors did not have an enviable task, as only months of front line service could provide recruits with the experience needed to survive in the

³⁴ Ibid., 45.

³⁵ Private Harry Hillyer, letter to his wife Jennie, 12 October 1914, in *Dear Harry: The First Hand Account of a World War I Infantryman*, ed. Norma Hillyer Sheppard (Burlington, ON: Brigham Press, 2003), 19. See also, R.J. Manion, *Life is an Adventure* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1936), 158. Manion was a surgeon.

trenches.³⁶ Officers and NCO's tried to instill proper discipline, but the CEF was in organizational disarray. Thus, they often found that there was no way of enforcing disciplinary measures. In his diary, Private Victor Swanston recalled a "scrap" between two drunken soldiers that took place en route to Valcartier. The Regimental Sergeant Major came in the car and broke up the fight. After the soldiers gave him some lip, he decided to stop the train, strip them of their uniforms and discharge them from the army. However, when Swanston marched into Valcartier, amongst the first soldiers he encountered were the two who had been kicked off the train. "They had taken the first passenger train and were joined up with some artillery outfit by the time we arrived."³⁷ In 1915, Gunner Frank Byron Ferguson, a Nova Scotia-born machinist, noted in his diary that the Canadians were given barrack leave to see their friends one last time before going overseas. "The natural result of this was that when the 'fall-in' was blown at 2 p.m. the greatest crowd of drunks that ever disgraced the King's uniform lined up in wavering ranks – every one ready to 'do his bit for King and country.'"³⁸

³⁶ See for example, Denis Winter, *Death's Men*, a detailed history of the Kitchener Armies.

³⁷ Private Victor Swanston, diary, August 1914, in *Who Said War is Hell*, 9.

³⁸ Gunner Frank Byron Ferguson, diary, November 1915, in *Gunner Ferguson's Diary: The Diary of Gunner Frank Byron Ferguson, 1st Canadian Siege Battery, Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1918*, ed. Peter Rogers (Hantsport, NS: Lancelot Press, 1985), 6, 7.

The move to England did little to improve discipline amongst the Canadians. If anything, disciplinary infractions multiplied because of the atrocious conditions on Salisbury Plain. In the first four months the Canadians spent on the plain, it rained for two days out of every three, making training almost impossible. Most of the training on Salisbury Plain, much as in Valcartier, was based on pre-war manuals and little was done to improve it.³⁹ Arriving in England two years after the First Contingent, Gunner Ernest Black found few things had changed. In his memoir, the young law student from Hamilton recalled that his entire training, both in Canada and England, had been conducted without the use of live ammunition. Only a few weeks before he went over to France, sometime in 1916, did he fire with live ammunition for the first time. "All of our training so far had been without live ammunition, and a gunner of course is not gunner until he has fired his gun."⁴⁰

While on the plain, soldiers grasped every possible opportunity to escape the mud, and most Canadians spent their leave in London.⁴¹ In his diary, Corporal John Patrick Teahan went as far to refer to London as "the Happy Hunting Ground of the colonial soldier."⁴² Although CEF soldiers were paid almost six times as much as British soldiers, they often managed to gamble and drink away all their money while in

³⁹ See Morton, *When Your Number*, 24 and Cook, *Sharp End*, 74.

⁴⁰ Ernest Garside Black, *I Want One Volunteer* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965), 61.

⁴¹ Corporal John Patrick Teahan, diary, n.d., in *Diary Kid*, ed. Keenan Prince, 16.

⁴² Ibid.

London. According to Teahan, the behaviour of the Canadians there was absolutely disgraceful. On 6 December 1914 he noted in his diary:

The wonder is that half the Regiment has not deserted! London is full of deserters. I saw in the London papers that a Sergeant from the Canadian Contingent was arrested for begging on the streets. The boys who have been in London say that they are afraid to meet soldiers with Maple Leafs in the caps, as half of them ask for handouts.⁴³

Private Frank Walker, a PEI-born stretcher-bearer, noted in his diary how soldiers from his unit disappeared from camp whenever they felt they were entitled to a break from the mud, as inexperienced NCO's had given up trying to discipline their troops. "We do pretty much as we like, go where we please, and generally one half of the camp is away on 'French Leave' at any given time. The unit is scattered all over the British Isles."⁴⁴ A 1916 letter written by Private James Howard Bennett, a farmer from Spencerville Ontario, indicates that almost two years into the war the CEF still had difficulty controlling and disciplining new recruits. Writing in July of that year,

⁴³ Corporal John Patrick Teahan, diary, 6 December 1914, in *Diary Kid*, ed. Keenan Price, 20. For reference to the Canadians as 'millionaire soldiers', see Gibbons, *Guest*, 25 and Harold Simpson, letter to his mother n.d., in *World War I Letters from Harold Simpson to his Family in Prince Edward Island, March 1915–April 1919*, ed. Anita Hagen (Toronto: Anita Hagen, 2003), 14. For a discussion of pay see Morton, *When Your Number*, 87, 88.

⁴⁴ Private Frank Walker, diary, 4 December 1914, in *From a Stretcher Handle: The World War I Journal and Poems of Pte. Frank Walker*, ed. Mary F. Gaudet. (Charlottetown, PE: Institute of Island Studies, 2000), 43.

Bennett told his brother that every pay day soldiers would take French leave and disappear to Belleville and Smith Falls, only to be brought back under guard a few days later.⁴⁵

With many soldiers doing as they pleased, it did not take long for the CEF to develop a reputation as an undisciplined mob. Gunner Robert Hale, a molder in civilian life, noted in a March 1915 letter that when the boys went to town, trouble seemed inevitable.

All the boys went to town last night and one of them got into trouble because he said something to an Englishman about pushing some girls to get on a car. So he came back disgusted and mad. The bloke must have said something to him. I think the first Contingent got the Canadians a rather bad name here although the regulars around here seem very decent.⁴⁶

Three years later, in his memoir *Sunset Night and Dawn*, Lieutenant Harry Milsom, a land surveyor from Ireland, echoed a similar sentiment. Milsom recorded a conversation between a First Division officer and another who had arrived in England with a later unit. According to Milsom, the newly arrived officer was at a loss to

⁴⁵ Private James Howard Bennett, letter to his brother, 17 July 1916, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=2998&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=180> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁴⁶ Gunner Robert Hale, Letter to Alice, 9 March 1915, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1417&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=123> [accessed 1 April 2008].

understand how the Canadians had acquired such a poor reputation with regards to discipline. “What in the world did your first contingent men do anyhow in London? We are having a devil of a time living down your name here!”⁴⁷

Despite CEF officers’ best efforts to try and control their subordinates, news of the First Contingent’s adventures soon spread to Canada. In his memoir, Sergeant Alexander McClintock, a naval student from Lexington Kentucky who enlisted in November 1915, explained how family matters had made him overstay his first home leave by five days. When he returned to Canada, McClintock expected to be punished for being absent without leave, but his company commander did not even reprimand him. “All that my company commander said to me when I got back was that I seemed to have picked up Canadian habits very quickly.”⁴⁸ The fact that McClintock was accused of having picked up “Canadian habits” as early as November 1915 not only indicates the strength of the CEF’s “rowdy” reputation, but also that this element of the “myth” originated with the troops themselves, rather than with the press.

Of course, it was not only the CEF officers who were aware of these “Canadian habits.” An example of how quickly the reputation of CEF as poorly disciplined troops had spread amongst British officers can be found in T.D. Hallam’s 1919 memoir.

⁴⁷ Harry Gordon Milsom, *Sunset, Night and Dawn* (Camden, NJ: Margrath Printing House, 1918), 13.

⁴⁸ Alexander McClintock, *Best o’ Luck: How a Fighting Canadian Won the Thanks of Britain’s King* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1917), 14. For his enlistment papers see; <http://data2.archives.ca/cef/gat4/134691a.gif> [accessed 1 April 2008].

Soon after his arrival with the First Contingent, Private Hallam, who had flying credentials, went to the Admiralty to find out about the possibility of becoming a pilot officer in the newly founded Naval Flying Service. At the Admiralty, Hallam was “informed that Colonials were not required as they made indifferent officers, that the service had all the fliers they would ever need, and besides all this, that I was too old.”⁴⁹ A few weeks later, after the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) had put him on a six-month wait list, Hallam tried again. This second time, dressed in a civilian suit instead of his Canadian private’s uniform and carrying letters of recommendation, Hallam was more successful. In December 1914, he was officially commissioned as a Royal Navy pilot.⁵⁰

Whether the Admiralty, early in the war, honestly believed colonials made indifferent officers is difficult to verify. However, in his study of the South African War, Carman Miller concludes that the behaviour of Canadian soldiers had often shocked regular British army officers. Discipline amongst the Canadians was lax, and more than half of the volunteers were returned to Canada. Thus, before the “expiry of their service, 133 of them having been dismissed and the other ‘persuaded’ to

⁴⁹ T.D. Hallam, *The Spider Web: The Romance of a Flying- Boat Flight in the First World War* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1919), 12.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 14, 15.

resign.”⁵¹ Although British officers were impressed with the military prowess of the Canadian troopers, they never viewed the Canadians as soldiers, only as fighters in action and brawlers at rest.⁵²

While soldier sources provide no direct evidence that this image had preceded the Canadian contingent to England in 1914, the behaviour of Hallam’s fellow soldiers as a whole had certainly shocked British civilians and officers alike. Soon after the first contingent’s arrival, the pubs around Salisbury Plain were declared out of bounds for Canadians wearing khaki, with of course the exception of officers.⁵³ Yet, despite the ban, a number of CEF soldiers soon found ways to get out of the rain and back into the pubs. In his diary, Private Victor Swanston noted how his brother, Ernest, always managed to get a drink in a pub.

Ern hasn’t got a uniform yet, still goes around in his old Mackinaw and Stetson hat. Lucky for him too, they have put all the pubs out of bounds to Canadian troops in khaki and when the pub keepers ask Ern if he isn’t a Canadian, he says, ‘No I’m a Mexican breaking horses for the Canadian Army,’ get away with it too, when they see his hat. Officers, being “gentlemen” (Ye Gods) are allowed to go in the pubs as often as they like and now, every other Son of a Gun in our outfit has an Officers cap and raincoat for the sole purpose of obtaining “Booze”. A young Lieutenant from “Kitchener’s Army”

⁵¹ Carman Miller, “The Unhappy Warriors: Conflict and Nationality among the Canadian Troops during the South African War,” *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 23, no. 1 (1992): 77.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 81, 88, 89.

⁵³ See Morton, *When Your Number*, 28.

said to me, 'Blimey, you seem to have more bloody officers in your Mob than men, Old Chap.'⁵⁴

Like Ern Swanston, Vincent Goodwin and his friends always found their way into a bar. After having dinner in the local pub, the young bookkeeper from Nova Scotia discovered a number of British officers drinking Bass Ale and decided to try to order some beer. However, when the Canadian private ordered a round of draft beer for his friends, he was refused service. According to Goodwin, the Canadians were incensed: "Well, after all, Canadian national honour lay at stake, so like any other red-blooded Johnny Canucks we got up without paying and left the bartender holding several heaping plates of vittles."⁵⁵

Drink was undoubtedly the most serious problem CEF officers had to deal with while on Salisbury Plain. At Sam Hughes' insistence, the Canadian camps on the plain were not allowed to operate 'wet canteens', leaving CEF soldiers no other choice than to swarm the camps' surroundings looking for a drink. According to Tim Cook, the Canadians often fought amongst themselves and terrorized civilians living around the camp. Only after General Alderson insisted that beer should be available in camp did the drink problem become less of an issue. "There may have been a lot of beer drunk, but at least it was beer and not hard liquor. Tighter restrictions and the lower alcoholic

⁵⁴ Private Victor Swanston, Diary 9 November 1914, in *Who Said*, ed. Burgess, 10.

⁵⁵ Goodwin, *Memories*, 185.

content of beer meant that soldiers in it were more manageable. Moreover drinking was confined to camp.”⁵⁶

In the eyes of enlisted men, the multitude of disciplinary infractions was generally a result of the Canadian soldier’s inexperience with military law and discipline.

Writing in 1918, American-born Lieutenant Arthur Hunt Chute argued that the Canadians had drawn criticism from British officers and the press because they lacked tradition and training.

Much of the criticism that is meted out to us was due to the misunderstanding of opposite types. Englishmen could not see their time honored traditions murdered by these “bally Colonials” without registering a kick. Old army officers were shocked at the sight of Canadian officers and rankers rolling about London arm in arm. These good English officers were unconscious of the fact that in Canada, before they donned the khaki, these two chaps were simply Bill and Don, and now, despite the fact that one wore officer’s stars and the other a corporal stripes, they are still Bill and Don.⁵⁷

Incidents described by Swanston, Chute, and Goodwin suggest that, by the end of 1914, many Canadian soldiers were aware of their reputation as independent and

⁵⁶ Tim Cook, “Wet Canteens and Worrying Mothers: Alcohol, Soldiers and Temperance Groups in the Great War,” *Histoire Sociale* 35, no. 70 (2002): 319, 320.

⁵⁷ Arthur Hunt Chute, *The Real Front* (London: Harper Brothers, 1918), 226. Chute had been a journalist before the war. Miller suggests that during the South African war Canadian soldiers equally cherished their informal officer-men relationships. Miller, “Unhappy,” 98.

poorly disciplined troops. Yet, instead of taking offence, they seem to have been rather proud of ‘murdering’ age-old British army traditions.

A number of Canadian soldiers not only believed that they were far less disciplined than their British counterparts, but also that army rules and regulations were enforced rather differently in the CEF. In his memoir, Private Dick Elvidge recalled an incident in which a Canadian Sergeant stripped off his uniform and challenged a “know it all” Private to a fight. During the ensuing fight, the Sergeant gave the Private, who had harassed him for weeks, a thorough beating. When the fight was over the Sergeant shook hands, and told the private to quit his “beefing.”⁵⁸

Similarly, in his 1960s memoir Sgt. Gordon Scott Howard still vividly recalled how he had once dealt with a troublemaker in a very ‘Canadian’ way, even though he was not a ‘real Canadian’ himself. While on guard duty, the Surrey-born farmer encountered a fellow soldier who was not only drunk, but also completely out of control, kicking and punching at anyone near. Howard decided to hogtie the drunkard and put him in a cell for the night. “That was the last we heard of it and he did not resent it either. This, of course, was not according to the book, and not the British army style, but real Canadian.”⁵⁹ The fact that Howard chose to emphasize the independent nature of the

⁵⁸ Elvidge, *Memoirs*, 40. Later on in the war Elvidge was refused entry in a British hospital. According to the matron the Canadians that had been there before him drank too much and had behaved terribly. See chapter 4.

⁵⁹ Gordon Scott Howard, *The Memoirs of a Citizen Soldier: 1914-1945* (n.p., 1960s?), 23. On his enlistment forms Howard listed his father’s British address under next of

CEF soldiers by underlining “Canadian,” is a clear sign of the image’s strength and longevity.

One of the reasons why Canadian soldiers were generally little concerned with this reputation was that most of the incidents described above were rather harmless in nature. According to Elvidge, the overall record of the First Division was not impressive, but the lack of discipline was a result of the CEF’s limited training and he clearly saw room for improvement. “We Canadians of the First Division were considered to be of a tough nature and sometimes called an undisciplined mob, yet there was plenty of pride in the outfit and in time we got quite proficient.”⁶⁰ When Lieutenant Harry Milsom arrived in London, he found that the people were at loss to know how the Canadians with so little discipline would fare in the trenches. “One man in England asked me, as one being born in the British Isles, what I thought these men would do under the test, and I could not hesitate in telling him that I knew they would be equal to the best.”⁶¹ That both Milsom and Elvidge were so confident in the abilities of their fellow Canadians is interesting in and of itself, but what makes these

kin indicating that Howard had only immigrated to Canada as an adult, not as a young child with his family. He was commissioned later in the war.

⁶⁰ Elvidge, *Memoirs*, 63

⁶¹ Milsom, *Sunset*, 12.

statements even more intriguing is the fact that neither Elvidge nor Milsom had been born in Canada, allowing them to make a more unbiased assessment.⁶²

Canadian soldiers often minimized the seriousness of their offences by making a clear distinction between what they called essential and non-essential discipline. Having a dirty and unusable rifle in the trenches was unacceptable because it endangered the lives of the soldiers around the offender. However, having to clean a rifle that was barely dirty, because some ‘brass hat’ intended to inspect the troops, was the kind of rigid discipline most Canadians could live without. Notably, it was only resistance against the latter kind of discipline these soldiers so often celebrated.

In *Pen Pictures of the Trenches*, Sergeant Ralf Sheldon-Williams offers evidence of the CEF soldiers’ distain for what they considered non-essential discipline. About his training in France the Hampshire-born farmer wrote:

Yes we certainly did hate the non-essentials. In the “bull-ring” at Ruelles, the Havre training camp, we on occasion drilled with, or were pitted against, the British drafts. They were the pink of propriety silent and alert, while we, the “mob”, drove the hard-bitten instructors to dumb madness by our dislike of regimentalism. But we could hold our own with anybody, Imperial pick, over the assault course, in gas-masks or without, and never minded a casualty or two in the “wood” or at the last trench. Withal we were clean where cleanness matters, even if we refused for a week at a time to “spit and polish,” yet for a formal parade could turn out and go through

⁶² It is difficult to determine when Elvidge and Milsom came over to Canada and how much time they had spent in Canada before they enlisted. (Milsom was a land surveyor and Elvidge a farmer). Both Milsom and Elvidge seem to have felt at home in the CEF, possibly as a result of the CEF’s new collective identity, see Milsom, *Sunset*, 31.

the stunts as if we had been doing the movements for years instead of weeks.⁶³

Sheldon-Williams was not, of course, the only soldier to complain about the enforcement of non-essential discipline. In his diary, Private Albert Andrews noted how annoyed he was with the constant cleaning and polishing required by his officers. His diary entry for 25 August 1915 reads: "We had a rifle inspection tho [*sic*] for all the use we made of our rifles it seemed a useless job. We carried our rifles like emergency rations. I only fired mine about 3 times in 8 months at Messines."⁶⁴ Like Andrews, Private Frank Maheux was of the opinion that he had come to Europe to fight, not to obey silly orders. In a 1918 letter, Maheux indicated to his wife how fed up he was with 'spit and polish'; "Dear wife with all the Danger and Hardship in France I preferred to be there than here it is a steady shining of your buttons and your Boots. [*sic*]"⁶⁵ Private Alwyn Bramley-Moore hated what he saw as unnecessary parade ground drill. In a 1915 letter to his son, William, he wrote: "'Present arms' won't save France, but England and Canada are not in the enemies [*sic*] possession, so

⁶³ Sheldon-Williams, *Pen Pictures*, 9.

⁶⁴ Corporal Albert Herbert Andrews, diary 25 August 1915.
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=8087&warid=3&docid=2&collectionid=328> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁶⁵ Private Frank Maheux, letter to his wife, 13 March 1918, quoted in Morton, "Canadian Soldier," 86.

they have time to play at soldiers, and it does seem to please some of the dudes!! but not the soldiers.”⁶⁶

In a letter written a few months after the end of the war, Gunner Harold Simpson, a teacher from PEI, explained that Canadians had generally been quite willing to accept the hardships of trench warfare. However, the type of discipline described by Bramley-Moore often instigated a strong Canadian reaction.

The Canadian will never kick about hardships when they are necessary but when they could be avoided and when the authorities refuse to let him spend a part of his own money to make himself more comfortable he has too much go in him to take it sitting down and when he finds camp limits are unheeded he strikes and strikes hard for his rights.⁶⁷

Although the opinions of Andrews, Maheux, Bramley-Moore, and Simpson were not written for publication, the idea of the Canadian soldier as wary of army discipline was popularized in Canada in a variety of war narratives and memoirs, such as *Private Peat, Canada in Flanders, With the First Contingent* and *Canada's Glory*.⁶⁸ However, it was not until the CEF's reputation was well established amongst its soldiers in

⁶⁶ Private Alwyn Bramley-Moore, letter to his son William, 19 October 1915, in *Path of Duty*, ed. Tingley, 67.

⁶⁷ Gunner Harold Simpson, letter to his sister Clemmie, 9 March 1919, in *World War I Letters*, ed. Hagen, 168.

Europe that F.A. MacKenzie, a journalist who had traveled extensively with Canadian troops, openly ridiculed the unnecessary discipline to which Canadian soldiers were sometimes subjected. "There was Bill back from the trenches. His officer came round on parade and looked at him, 'the third button on your coat is not properly polished.' And he had him up for it. Do they think a man fights Fritz better because he polishes the third button of his coat properly? Ugh!"[sic]⁶⁹

From the material written during the war, we can conclude that many CEF soldiers resisted non-essential discipline because they believed it was not going to help shorten the conflict. At the same time, this resistance to unnecessary discipline became the CEF soldier's new badge of identity. Regardless of the pride the Canadians took in resisting "spit and polish" or parade ground discipline, after spending a few months in the army and after being docked pay a few times, they finally started to behave in a more disciplined manner, accepting parade drill and other chores as part of army life.⁷⁰ Second Ypres had hammered home the need for discipline under fire and, despite

⁶⁸ See Harold Peat, *Private Peat* (1918); Max Aitken, *Canada in Flanders* (1916); Mary Plumer ed., *With the First Contingent* (1915) and Alfred Tucker, *Canada's Battle Glory* (1915).

⁶⁹ F.A. Mackenzie, *Through the Hindenburg Line: Crowning Days on the Western Front* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 419. Identical passage can also be found in his *Canada's Day of Glory* (Toronto: William Briggs, 1918), 334.

⁷⁰ According to the Adjutant of the Simcoe Regiment, Leslie Frost, the Canadians were warned sometime in the fall of 1916 to "salute all officers and particularly Allied and naval officers. Being new they had not learned the old soldier's habit of saluting anyone, and so they conscientiously saluted everyone wearing gold braids, including the doormen of the hotels and restaurants." Leslie Miscampbell Frost, *Fighting Men* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1967), 84.

heavy losses, Private William Mitton thought that the battle had been a good thing for the Canadians. In a letter home, the stained glass worker from Dutton, Ontario explained how the battle had taught officers and men that they could rely on each other to get the job done. "This big battle has been a good thing for us, both officers and men. We have found that officers are all right and I guess they have found out that the men are not so bad after all."⁷¹ The fact that enlisted men had learned to trust their leaders did not mean, however, that these officers were given *carte blanche* when it came to enforcing discipline.

While Second Ypres had somewhat tamed the CEF soldier's free-spirited attitude, many soldiers continued to grumble about the enforcement of non-essential discipline. It can be argued, of course, that soldiers of all armies grumble about the strict enforcement of 'spit and polish' discipline. However, what seems to have set the Canadians aside was the perception that the CEF was a different kind of army. According to Sergeant Sheldon Williams, the average Canadian soldier, unlike his British counterpart, was perfectly capable of making the distinction between necessary and unnecessary on his own. "The Canadians were 'there were with goods' when the goods were wanted, and would no more let our officers down on the parade ground, when it was really important, than in the field."⁷²

⁷¹ Private William Roderick Mitten, letter 3 June 1915, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=4802&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=281> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁷² Sheldon-Williams, *Canadian Front*, 10.

Did Canadian soldiers become more disciplined once they had served in the trenches?⁷³ Private Arthur Macfie definitely seemed to think so in 1916. Writing from England, the farmer and logger from Dunchurch, Ontario, acknowledged that the men around him were quite different from the First Contingent soldiers; “But its [*sic*] a lot different from the time of the first Con[tingent] everything is ‘discipline’ now the Canadians are a tamer lot . . .” According to Macfie, one of the reasons for the more disciplined behaviour was that, by 1916, the soldiers knew what to expect once they arrived at the front.⁷⁴ Lieutenant Arthur Chute agreed with Macfie and argued that it was Second Ypres that had instilled pride in the First Divisions fighting abilities. According to Chute, it was after Ypres that the Canadians “converted to discipline” once and for all. “Under my own eyes, through discipline, I saw this division [First] transformed from and incorrigible mob into one of the most splendid fighting forces of the war.”⁷⁵

Even though discipline improved, once the Canadians had served at the front and had seen the need for obeying orders, most Canadian soldiers remained convinced that discipline in the CEF was less strictly enforced. This notion was based primarily on the assumption that the CEF was a citizens’ army. When a young Raymond Massey

⁷³ According to Tim Cook the CEF became one of the most disciplined units on the Western Front. Cook, *Sharp End*, 73.

⁷⁴ Private Arthur Macfie, letter to Frank and Mary, 17 December 1916, in *Letters*, ed. J. Macfie, 81.

⁷⁵ Chute, *The Real Front*, 225.

first reported to his battery near Ypres in 1916, a Corporal provided some background information on the battery's officers. "'Captain George Drew ('Uncle George'), Mr Curtis and Mr Powell,' the corporal said, 'there are three officers who really know their bloody jobs. Mr Powell's an Englishman, but he's been in Canada quite a while.'"'⁷⁶ The fact that Powell had spent time in Canada before the war qualified him as a good and decent officer. Based on this perception, CEF soldiers sometimes treated British officers differently than their own. In an October 1918 letter, John Harold Becker highlighted the differences between the CEF and BEF. "Our fellows will positively not 'toady' to a high faluting English officer of the obvious old army type. If one is seen looking for a particularly smart salute on the street, he's the guy who doesn't get one. We are glad to salute a one or two star or higher rank if he can be 'one of us'."'⁷⁷

In its own eyes, the CEF was made up of volunteers from all walks of life, from lawyers to farmers, and it was obviously impossible to turn this "heterogeneous mass" into a disciplined unit overnight.⁷⁸ Looking back at the war from a more mature age, some officers wondered how they had managed to control their men without any military experience. Junior officers had to wield authority from the moment they took

⁷⁶ Raymond Massey, *When I Was Young* (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild & Stewart, 1976), 122.

⁷⁷ Corporal John Harold Becker, letter to Pauline, 3 October 1918, in *Silhouettes*, 243.

⁷⁸ Chute, *Real Front*, 225. See also Milsom, *Sunset*, 6; McBride, *Emma Gees*, 98 and chapter 4.

command, while realizing that their authority meant little without having earned it. When Lieutenant Harold Hartney first took command of his troops in September 1914, he was careful not to over-exert the authority of his unearned insignia. "In armies made up of soldiers who have never known peacetime freedom, officers had to enforce discipline with a strong hand, [b]ut something told me it would not work with those high-minded, patriotic intelligent Canadian boys. And it wouldn't."⁷⁹

In general, these young junior officers, dealing with their soldiers on a daily basis, seem to have had sympathy for their men, despite the latter's undisciplined behaviour. While on Salisbury Plain, A.L. Critchley, a professional Canadian Dragoon officer, spent most of his time acting as a policeman. In one particular incident, Critchley was ordered to restore order in the village of Market Lavington where Canadians were believed to have caused a small riot. After he managed to get the situation under control, he reported back to his senior officer to tell him that the Canadian soldiers had all gone back to camp and that the village was once again quiet. When asked whether he had taken the names of the rioters, he answered: "certainly not." Furthermore, Critchley told his superiors that he was asked to clear up the riot, not to arrest the rioters. In Critchley's eyes the Canadians "were quite a decent bunch of fellows, really, but simply fed up to the teeth with conditions on the Plain."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Hartney, *Up and at 'em*, 6. See also Vance, *Death So Noble*, chapter 5.

⁸⁰ A.L. Critchley, *Critch: The Memoir of Brigadier General A.L. Critchley* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1961), 55.

Like Critchley, Captain Francis McLorg seems to have been quite sympathetic to the plight of his men when it came to what he called “foolish” parade ground discipline. In a January 1916 letter, the Saskatchewan barrister recalled discussing the merits of his Canadian soldiers with an officer of a Scottish battalion.

Reggie [the Scots officer] said they [the Canadians] were undisciplined and though plucky would probably get out of hand and were always wanting to do mad things in the trenches, and he had nothing but praise for his own Scots in comparison. Now since we have been over here I have found the men are hard to discipline only in matters of parade stuff that looks and frequently is foolish. They work and work magnificently when there is work to be done, and that so far has been all the time.⁸¹

Based on the assumption that the CEF was an entirely volunteer force, a number of Canadian soldiers seem to have expected a more lenient attitude from their own officers.⁸² When Private Louis Keene left camp without a pass he was unfortunate enough to bump into his Lieutenant. “When he saw me he said; ‘How the hell did you get here?’ ‘Oh just swam across.’ ‘Well, if you get caught it’ll be the guard room for

⁸¹ Captain Francis Harold McLorg, letter to his family, 9 January 1916, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=2719&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=185> [accessed 1 April 2008]. McLorg seems to have missed the fact that until December 1916, when Britain adopted conscription, the BEF was also an entirely volunteer force.

⁸² For a more in depth discussion of the CEF as a more egalitarian and democratic force see chapter 4.

you.’ I said ‘Never mind, we’ll have company.’ He is a pretty good sport.”⁸³ While walking through London, Private Will Bird was reading a book and failed to salute an officer. The officer ordered Bird to drop his book and salute him. Bird put the book away and gave the unknown officer his “snappiest” salute, but it was not good enough. “My man! My Blood boiled. Four times I had to pace backward, advance and salute that smirking monkey, a weak-chinned Lieutenant, and then he dismissed me with the sharp warning to look out when I next met him. And he a Canadian, at least he wore Canadian badges!”⁸⁴

In his 1967 memoir, Private Black recalled an incident in which a friend drank more service rum than was good for him. While staggering through the pitch black trench, Black’s friend offered some rum to two unidentified soldiers. Both soldiers refused a drink and ignored the drunken soldier, but Black’s friend tried again. Only when the moon came out a little later did the drunken soldier realize that the unidentified soldiers were a British Staff Officer and his batman. Perhaps, as a result of his friend’s behaviour, Black was not surprised to find that imperial officers often considered the colonials a rather ‘queer’ bunch.

⁸³ Louis Keene, *Crumps: The Plain Story of a Canadian Who Went* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1917), 30. Keene was a cartoon artist from London England. He received a commission later in the war.

⁸⁴ Bird, *And we Go On*, 142.

He has often wondered since why he did not land in the clink that night. If he had been in the Imperial lines he would most certainly have been in the guardhouse in no time at all. But the Imperial staff officer was in Canadian Lines and felt perhaps that it was none of his business. Likely he had the general Imperial feeling that the Colonials were a queer lot who in spite of their apparent lack of discipline always seemed to pull their weight when they were needed. I have seen traces of smiles around the corners of the eyes of Imperial officers more than once, which I am sure were followed by amusing anecdotes later in the mess.⁸⁵

The idea that Canadian officers were more easy-going when it came to discipline created a bond between officers and men that strengthened the Canadian identity of the CEF. In the eyes of many Canadian soldiers, the CEF was an independent force in which troops, whether Canadian or British-born, could expect to be treated according to the more 'liberal' Canadian standard.⁸⁶

Whether discipline was much more of a problem in the CEF than in other armies is impossible to determine from studying Canadian sources alone. In *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War*, G.D. Sheffield suggests that, in the Australian and Canadian armies, officer-man relations were relatively informal. Discipline was not as strictly enforced as in British units, although the differences should not be overstated.

⁸⁵ Black, *I Want One*, 118.

⁸⁶ For an answer as to what this more 'liberal' Canadian standard entailed and how it influenced the CEF soldier's behaviour see chapter 4. See also Miller, "Unhappy," 99.

“The Dominion approach was rather more, and the British rather less, formal than is commonly believed, with the Canadian style perhaps more closely resembling the British than the Australian.”⁸⁷ Looking back in 1918, Sergeant Arthur Chute realized that the Canadian First Division had had become one of the best units in the war because they had learned to accept essential discipline. “To-day the First Canadian Division is known as one of the finest fighting divisions on the western front. They have won that proud title because they are one of the best disciplined divisions in the army.”⁸⁸ Within days of arriving in Belgium, Gunner Bagnall realized that things would be forever different.

All things had a very grim meaning now and orders were carried to the letter. No more answers to challenging guards: “Who goes there?” “Who the ---wants to know?” to which the challenging English sentry was supposed to say “Pass Canadian; all’s well.” This was the first time we had been detailed to a duty in France. We felt that this was the culmination of all our training and we were determined to put Canada on the map. England during 1914-1915 thought we were a wild reckless fearless lot but something had to be done to keep us from developing blue mold in that quagmire of Salisbury Plains.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, 172.

⁸⁸ Arthur Hunt Chute, *The Real front*, 20, 21.

⁸⁹ Bagnall, *Not Mentioned*, 26.

However, when Canadian soldiers wrote about what they considered non-essential discipline, most of them differentiated between the level of discipline in the CEF and the stricter discipline in the British army. Despite the fact that discipline may not have been enforced any differently in the CEF than in the British army, the perception that there was a difference was enhanced by the fact that it was often British officers, NCO's, and military police who stopped, questioned, and punished Canadian soldiers for allegedly breaching regulations. Although Canadian soldiers could sometimes count on the sympathy of their own officers, they were on their own when caught by these 'outsiders'.

In a 1959 memoir, titled *Unknown Soldiers, By One of Them*, the author recalled how the Canadians' failure to salute was often discussed at the officer training school he attended in 1918. While still a Corporal, he had been reprimanded for failing to salute a British officer in London. ". . . I heard a chirper (one whose voice had not broken during puberty) behind me asking in a pained voice, 'Don't you Kineydians ever salute?'" After apologizing and assuring the officer that it would not happen again, he had escaped without punishment, but the incident bothered him so much that he used the experience as a guideline as to how officers should not behave. In his opinion, a good officer should never find a soldier at fault in public.⁹⁰ One of Private William New's fellow soldiers even refused to salute an English subaltern because the

⁹⁰ *Unknown Soldiers: By One of Them* (New York: Vantage Press, 1959), 130.

rank was unknown in the CEF. "Officers in our army wear two pips," he said, "you have only one."⁹¹

While waiting for his train from London to Ramsgate hospital, Private Dick Elvidge decided to go for a stroll in St. James' Park. In the park an officer passed on his left and, although the officer glanced at him, Elvidge walked on without saluting. When he had taken a few steps, he was told to halt. Facing the officer, Elvidge saluted with his left arm. After returning the salute, the officer asked him why he had not saluted him in the first place. "Right arm injured, could not give correct salute, Sir" I replied, noting that he was a Canadian officer. 'Oh I'm sorry,' he said, 'you see I am CO of the 4th Battalion, and you have our badge on, so had to check you.'" After Elvidge explained how he had received his wounds, the Colonel offered him a cigar and wished him good luck.⁹² A few moments later Elvidge was stopped again, and this time he was not so lucky.

Now some way off, too far to hear what was said, a portly old Warrant Officer, British, saw me stopped by the Officer. "Halt," he said to me, "have you a pass?" I said, "No." "Well come along with me," he said, "I must turn you in to your Canadian guard room." "How come?" I said feeling a bit hostile. "Improperly dressed (no puttees), loitering and failing to salute an officer. Hurry up and say 'Sir' when spoken to. Now I knew in K.R. & R., Warrant officers only got 'Sir' by courtesy, and it was not a crime to omit it. Quite

⁹¹ William T. New, *Forgotten War* (n.p., 1982), 50. New was a clerk who had enlisted in Toronto in 1916.

⁹² Elvidge, *Memoirs*, 71.

calmly I said, "I only say 'Sir' to a gentleman. Furthermore if *you* want me to hurry, call a taxi and pay for it." The old goon nearly blew a gasket, growling fiercely about undisciplined Colonials.⁹³

Elvidge's encounters with the Canadian Officer and the British Warrant Officer took place within a few minutes of each other, and it is striking how differently both incidents are portrayed. Note, especially, the way in which Elvidge emphasized the fact that the Warrant Officer was British, not Canadian.

Perhaps even more hated than imperial officers were the red hats of the British Military Police. When Sergeant William O'Brien and his friend Dick were taking a stroll along the quay, before they went over to France, they were stopped by an "officious" looking British Military Policeman. According to the M.P., Dick's uniform was missing a bandolier, and, since Dick was a gunner, he was in breach of military law going around without one. "Long months of red tape in the English hospitals since being wounded last fall had brought his temper to the status of a boil on the neck. He told the red-hat everything he knew about the British, the discipline, the bandolier and the red-hats generally." Only when O'Brien lied, claiming that Dick did not have to carry a bandolier because of wounds, was a confrontation prevented.⁹⁴

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Sergeant William Joseph O'Brien, diary Friday 16 February 1917, in *Send Out*, ed. W.H. O'Brien, 79. O'Brien received a commission later in the war.

In his diary, Gunner Frank Ferguson noted on 13 May 1916 how some of the “gang” had decided to stay out after last post. Unfortunately for those who had decided to stay out, one of the Imperial units stationed in camp was on guard duty that night. Soon, the “blinking Cannydians were paying through their nose [*sic*] for their sins.”⁹⁵ Even in *Holding the Line*, a memoir obviously written to boost enlistment and published in 1918, Sergeant Harold Baldwin admitted to the fact that Canadian soldiers would sneak up on British Military Police men and knock them over in the mud as “the Canadian idea of discipline had not yet become acclimated to the stern routine of the Imperial Army.”⁹⁶

Baldwin’s words, once again, substantiate the claim that, from early on in the war, many Canadian soldiers perceived the CEF as a different kind of army. The majority of infractions, whether real or alleged, seem to have taken place while the soldier in question was away from the front. While at the front, most Canadians realized that fighting discipline was essential to win the war. For those soldiers who still decided to disobey army regulations, the punishments were severe. Already in February 1915, Major Agar Adamson, of the PPCLI, wrote to his wife in Canada:

⁹⁵ Gunner Frank Byron Ferguson, diary, 13 May 1916, in *Ferguson’s Diary*, ed. Rogers, 33.

⁹⁶ Baldwin, *Holding*, 59. For more incidents between CEF soldiers and MP’s see, Rhude, *Gunner*, 50 and New, *Forgotten*, 49.

The military discipline is very severe; men absent or drunk or found out of bounds are tried by Court Martial and several men have been shot for straying away from Camp. One was shot this morning. If another is to be shot while I am here I will get permission to take my men to the spot as I think it would be the only thing that would impress upon them the seriousness of the whole affair and the meaning of discipline. I suggested to the Commandant having a Court Martial on one of my men and shooting him, He said he would not like to be responsible for the execution of a Canadian . . .⁹⁷

Not surprisingly, Canadian soldiers who were subject to this severe discipline were not nearly as blood thirsty as Adamson. Privates Will Bird and Lew Perry agreed that the penalties for minor offences were often far too severe, even if they were committed in the front line. While resting just outside the line, Bird struck up a conversation with a soldier from the 7th battalion. When they discussed patriotism, the '7th' man said that it was not a password in his company. He continued by saying that loyalty was a word they sneered at, and "discipline with the death penalty behind it, a canker we could not cure."⁹⁸ After seeing a number of Royal Canadian Regiment soldiers tied spread-eagle

⁹⁷ Major Agar Adamson, letter to his wife, 16 February 1915, in *Letters of Agar Adamson, 1914 to 1919: Lieutenant Colonel, Princess Patricia's Light Infantry*, ed. N.M. Christie (Nepean, ON: CEF Books, 1997), 20. Adamson was the CO of the P.P.L.I. and his battalion was part of a British Division. Although Canadian courts-martial sentenced 222 soldiers to death, the CEF only executed twenty three offenders. See Teresa Iacobelli, "Arbitrary Justice? A Comparative Analysis of Canadian Death Sentences Passed and Death Sentences Commuted during the First World War" (paper presented at the annual Canadian Historical Associations conference, London, ON., May, 2005) and Desmond Morton, "The Supreme Penalty: Canadian Deaths by Firing Squad in the First World War," *Queen's Quarterly* 79, no. 13 (1979):345-352. For the generally low executions rates in the British forces see also, Ferguson, *Pity of War*, 230-248.

⁹⁸ Bird, *And We Go On*, 65.

to cart wheels, Bird himself also admitted that the disciplinary measures in the army were much too severe. After all, the Canadians had come as volunteers “to fight for right and loved ones.”⁹⁹ Writing in the 1930s, Perry recalled how he had once wondered what he had gotten himself into after he was ordered to guard one of his fellow soldiers with a bayonet. “Who were we fighting in this damn war anyway – the Germans or our own officers? Where was the real front?”¹⁰⁰

Although Perry and Bird were adamant that CEF soldiers should not be subjected to harsh and unfair punishment for minor infractions, there were, of course, soldiers who hated the “larrikin” reputation of the CEF, especially since punishment for breach of regulations was sometimes given to the entire unit to which the defaulters belonged. The author of *Unknown Soldiers* recalled sarcastically in his memoir how, en route to the Somme, many Canadian soldiers visited a brothel in Rouen. “Every day, Canada’s finest could be seen seated on the curb waiting to enter a house where sturdy girls would relive them of their spunk and small change.”¹⁰¹ By the end of the war, almost one in nine Canadians had contracted venereal disease (VD). Since the CEF considered VD more a disciplinary problem than a health problem, the infected were

⁹⁹ Ibid., 66.

¹⁰⁰ Perry, *Pickin’em-up-n-puttin’em-down*, chapter 6.

¹⁰¹ Unknown Soldier, *Unknown Soldiers, By One of Them* (New York: Vantage Press, 1959), 81.

separated from their fellow soldiers and docked pay for the days they were not on duty.¹⁰²

According to Gunner Bagnall, the misbehaviour of other Canadians, at times, made his own life more difficult. "We often felt very bitterly against those few who misbehaved and thus brought down undue restrictions as one could not discriminate too much, and there must be general rules for all, though the majority suffered."¹⁰³ In his diary, Toronto-born machinist, Private George Kempling echoed somewhat similar sentiments when he admitted to feeling left out because he did not drink, smoke, or gamble: "They are a nice bunch of fellows but so many get drunk every night."¹⁰⁴ Both soldiers' misgivings about this behaviour seem to have been based primarily on their religious beliefs, as Bagnall was a Quaker, while Kempling was a Methodist who read his bible everyday.¹⁰⁵

While Bagnall and Kempling were not overly impressed with the behaviour of their fellow soldiers, neither of them seems to have been concerned with the reputation of the CEF as a whole. In an essay about the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), Dale

¹⁰² Morton, *When Your Number*, 200.

¹⁰³ Bagnall, *Not Mentioned*, 87.

¹⁰⁴ George Kempling, diary, Wednesday, 19 July 1916.
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1484&warid=3&docid=2&collectionid=129> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹⁰⁵ Bagnall's memoir was published under the pseudonym "Ex-Quaker". Kempling's religious denomination can be found in his CEF file.
<http://data2.archives.ca/cef/gpc008/433075b.gif> [accessed 1 April 2008].

Blair has argued that, early in the war, some Australian soldiers were quite concerned with the behaviour of their comrades and took offence to C.E.W. Bean's description of the Australian soldier as "slovenly" and "dirty."¹⁰⁶ According to Blair, First Battalion soldiers tried to shift the blame for their poor disciplinary record onto the battalion's British-born element, even though the majority of its soldiers were Australian-born. Blair sees these responses as an indication of "how sensitive these men had become to their Australianess."¹⁰⁷ Although we have to keep in mind that Bagnall and Kempling wrote about their experiences after the CEF had made a name for itself at Second Ypres, Canadian soldiers were clearly much less concerned with the CEF's unruly reputation. This lack of concern can perhaps be explained by pointing to the harmless nature of most Canadian offenses. While the Canadian First Division was on its way to glory at Ypres, AIF soldiers burnt down brothels and caused a full blown riot in Wazzir, Egypt, before they had been anywhere near the front.¹⁰⁸

In general, we can conclude that CEF soldiers were not concerned about being labeled an 'undisciplined mob.' On the contrary, they expected a bit of leeway from their officers when it came to the enforcement of parade-ground discipline. When

¹⁰⁶ Dale Blair, "'Those Miserable Tommies': Anti-British sentiment in the Australian Imperial Force, 1915-1918," *War & Society*, 19 no.1 (2001): 74.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid. It was only after the Anzacs had made a name for themselves on the beaches of Gallipoli that this concern began to dissipate.

¹⁰⁸ Glenn Wahlert, *The Other Enemy: Australian Soldiers and the Military Police* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1999), 28.

caught by British Officers, NCO's, or Military Police, most Canadians had a difficult time hiding their disgust with the enforcement of non-essential discipline. Although there was, most likely, very little difference in the enforcement of discipline between the CEF and the British army, Canadian soldiers continuously highlighted the perceived differences, both in diaries and letters written as early as November 1914, as well as in memoirs published long after the war.

By highlighting these differences, and despite their varied motives for enlistment, soldiers had created a collective CEF identity before they even arrived at the front. Although the foundations for this collective identity were laid in England during the winter of 1914, when Canadian soldiers shared the mud and misery on Salisbury Plain, soldiers joining the CEF after 1914 were not excluded from its embrace. For most, enlistment was a rite of passage, the start of a new adventure. Indeed, in many ways entering the army can be compared to initiation into a fraternity or sports team. In the eyes of Conway, enlistment widened soldiers' horizons and often led them, at least partially, to replace their old local identity with a collective, almost national, one. The fact that a large number of volunteers had joined the CEF with few or no expectations made this transition towards a collective soldier identity even easier to accept. When writing memoirs, a number of CEF soldiers used anecdotes to self-identify with their fellow soldiers, but also to distinguish themselves from other troops around them. That a number of these writers, perhaps, never even witnessed the particular episodes

discussed in this chapter mattered little. Repeating these incidents became an important part of the CEF's lore and "corps identity."

The CEF soldiers had not jumped into uniform *ex nihilo*. Indeed, there was an existing militarist ideology in Canada which favoured citizen soldiers over professional mercenaries. However, while popular interpretations of Canada's involvement in the war may have echoed sentiments about citizen soldiers' strengths and abilities, the soldiers themselves make no mention of this connection. While some elements of this new collective CEF identity were perhaps based on the "Militia myth" and Canada's involvement in the South African war, the CEF was not the Militia. Considering the fact that almost seventy percent of the CEF was of British birth it is only natural that many soldiers were not particularly mindful of prior Canadian military experiences. At the same time we need to remember that, while CEF soldiers might have borrowed things from the past, there was no precedent of comparable scale and nature upon which its member could draw as the CEF evolved into a mass national army, under pressure of a novel kind of warfare.

By joining the CEF, volunteers created a common goal and, by accepting their new identity as soldiers, they also accepted that a certain amount of discipline was necessary to achieve that goal. Looking back in the 1930s, Private Perry admitted it had all been quite simple. "You can figure it out for yourself. Take one thousand men, from all walks of life – the down-and-outer, the high-grade chap, and everything in

between – put them in a group – dress them alike – teach them to act alike, and in time they think alike – and what we are is just what we think.”¹⁰⁹

Although it was not until after Second Ypres that the image of ‘Johnny Cannuck’, the rowdy, ill-disciplined soldier, became a staple of Canadian Great War publications, private material written during the war suggests that many Canadian soldiers already celebrated this image. After the war, this idea of the poorly disciplined, yet intelligent, citizen soldier became an important element of the “myth of the war experience” in Canada. This perception is best reflected in the memoir Lieutenant Harold Hartney published in 1940. Rather than being driven, Hartney was convinced that CEF soldiers should be led:

If your thousands of men have become accustomed to discipline and routine in their civilian work or in previous regular army service, their commander should be a driver and a disciplinarian even to the point of being a martinet. If, however, the majority have been independent businessmen, or other types of individualists who have always done their own thinking, they cannot be successfully driven. They must be led.¹¹⁰

Although Morton and Granatstein have argued that many young recruits brought with them the “rigid discipline of pre-1914 industrial society,” where there was little room

¹⁰⁹ Perry, *Pickinem-up-n-puttinem-down*, chapter 3.

¹¹⁰ Hartney, *Up and at 'em*, 5.

for individualism and initiative, most CEF soldiers seem to have treasured their reputation as resourceful and intelligent fighters. Not only did it give them a reason to be proud of the CEF and their war service, but, perhaps more importantly, it provided Canadian troops with a sense of unique identity.¹¹¹

The creation of a collective CEF identity, through disregard of military rules and regulations, is only one part of the citizen soldier equation. It was not until Canadian soldiers reached the battlefields of France and Flanders that they added another, more positive, layer to this collective identity. In *Shock Army of the British Empire*, Shane Schreiber argues that, by November 1918, the CEF had become one of “the most successful, if not *the* most successful Allied corps on the Western Front.”¹¹²

According to Schreiber, the Canadian Corps was better organized than their allied counterparts. While British divisions were moved from corps to corps, the Canadian Corps was a truly distinct, truly coherent unit, one that stayed together throughout the war. This facilitated the development of the Corps’ own doctrine, training schools, organization and operational procedures. Being engaged in almost every major battle after 1916, the Canadians also had the added benefit of being able to refine tactical and operational abilities.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Morton and Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon*, 52.

¹¹² Schreiber, *Shock Army*, 140.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 139-141.

A number of Canadian military historians have argued that it was it was during these major battles that Canada came of age as a nation internationally, even though the war caused deep divisions at home. According to Hector Massey, Canada went to war “as a ‘junior clerk’ in the imperial firm, but it emerged in the end as a partner, one deserving a great deal of respect.”¹¹⁴ Since the unveiling of the Vimy memorial in 1936, the nationalistic interpretation of the “myth of the war experience” has mostly been associated with the battle for Vimy Ridge. Before 1936, reference was most often made to the Second Battle of Ypres.¹¹⁵ In any event, during those battles, Canada’s undisciplined citizen soldiers finally had a chance to show the world what they were made of. Writing shortly after the battle for Passchendaele in 1917, Lieutenant Armine Norris told his mother that the awful reputation the Canadians had acquired in England in 1914 meant nothing in comparison to the reputation they had acquired at Second Ypres and Vimy. “There are stories”, he wrote, “of how the First Contingent behaved in England but amongst all the things they did there wasn’t a cowardly crime. They defied morals and discipline as they defied despair and death, and when they sinned it

¹¹⁴ Hector J. Massey, ed., *The Canadian Military: A Profile* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1972), 35. See also Stacey, *Canada*, 1, 238,239; Stanley, *Canada’s Soldiers*, 444; Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 143 and Stephen Harris, “From Subordinate to Ally: The Canadian Corps and National Autonomy,” *Revue Internationale d’Histoire Militaire*, [France] 54 (1982): 112. For the development of the nation building idea as a form of memory, see also Sheftall, *Glories*, chapter, 3 and Vance, *Death*, chapter 8.

¹¹⁵ According to Andrew Iarocci it was the Second battle of Ypres, April 1915, that was the focus of the nationalistic interpretation of the “frontier legend”, until it was replaced by Vimy after 1936. Iarocci, “1st Canadian Infantry Division,” 11-14.

was frankly and openly and they did not the sort of things the Germans did in Belgium.”¹¹⁶

¹¹⁶ Lieutenant Armine Norris, letter to his mother, 23 November 1917, in *Mainly for Mother*, 164.

Chapter 3, Corps Experience

In *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918*, J.G. Fuller suggests that lack of discipline, in combination with success in battle, created a unit loyalty amongst dominion troops that distinguished them from other soldiers around them.¹ Letters, diaries and, memoirs, written both during and after the war, suggest that it was this success in battle that would eventually add another, more positive, layer to the CEF's "corps identity." Although early in the war Canadians were predominantly known for their rowdy behaviour, by the end of it excellent battlefield discipline had turned the CEF into one of the most effective fighting forces on the Western Front.² During the three and a half years the CEF spent in the trenches, the Canadian Corps went from an amateur force to a highly professionalized army.³ When the war was finally over, Canadian soldiers could be proud of their battle record. That record, from Second Ypres through the Hundred Days, needs to be surveyed from the troops' perspective, if its contribution of a new layer to the CEF's "corps identity" is to be understood.

¹ Fuller, *Troop Morale*, 50-52. While Fuller establishes the notion that unit loyalty helped forge a collective identity for the colonial troops, he does not elaborate what the characteristics of this identity were.

² Schreiber, *Shock Army*, 1 and Cook, *Sharp End*, 49, 73.

³ Rawling, *Surviving*, conclusion.

One of the consequences of the CEF's battlefield successes was that its achievements were often exaggerated by Canadians at home. As a result of these inflated accounts, the notion that Canada came of age as a nation on the battlefields of Western Europe became a key element of the "myth of the war experience." Initially, the focus of this nation-building idea was on Second Ypres. However, by the time of the unveiling of the Vimy monument in 1936, Easter Monday 1917 had become the unofficial birthday of the Canadian nation.⁴ Letters written from the trenches clearly show that many Canadian soldiers were aware of the impact their successes would have on the Canadian nation, but it is not always clear which battle CEF soldiers considered to be more important. While some suggest that Vimy was the most significant Canadian achievement of the war, others point to Second Ypres as an equally important milestone. In any case, it was on the battlefields of the Western Front that Canadians finally had a chance to show the world they could be exceedingly well disciplined and highly effective soldiers when it counted most.

⁴ See Jonathan Vance, "Battle Verse: Poetry and Nationalism after Vimy Ridge," in *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment*, ed. Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci and Mike Bechtold (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press), 275. Vance suggests that the rebirth of Christ was often compared with the birth of the nation. See also Iarocci, "1st Canadian Infantry Division," 28. For other examples of the battle of Vimy Ridge as the birth of a nation see, for example, Jack Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, *From Empire to Umpire, Canada and the World to the 1990s* (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994), 62, 63; Christie, *For King and Empire*, 1; R. Douglas Francis, Richard Jones and Donald B. Smith, *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation* (Toronto: Holt Rinehart & Winston, 1998), 198 and J.M. Snell, "Vimy Ridge 1917: A Canadian Easter," *Army Quarterly and Defense Journal* 123, no. 4 (1993): 432. P. Whitney Lackenbauer has suggested that what Vimy was for Canada, Beaumont

One of the reasons why Vimy has become a key element of Canada's nation-building myth is that the battle was the first major Canadian offensive success on the Western Front. At the same time, it also marked the first time all four Canadian Divisions attacked together, united in one Canadian Corps. According to Pierre Berton, the victory at Vimy had been won by soldiers from all over Canada, from the Yukon to the Maritimes, and was, therefore, worthy of being called the birth of a nation.⁵ In contrast, at Second Ypres only the CEF's First Division was engaged. Since at least seventy percent of that division was made up of soldiers born in the British Isles, Vimy was indeed a more 'national' victory. By the time CEF soldiers were ready to storm Vimy Ridge in April 1917 nearly three years of war had strengthened the Corps' collective identity so much that some soldiers no longer referred to their fellow troops as Albertans or Nova Scotians, but only as Canadians. For example, CEF veteran Tom Spear leaves no doubt in his memoir that Vimy was the place where Canada first achieved nationhood. Using the words of a journalist covering the eightieth anniversary of the battle, Spear suggests that Vimy was the battle which "first stood Canada tall in the world's eyes."⁶ Like Spear, Lieutenant Gregory Clark recalled the important impact Vimy Ridge had had on him and Canada.

Hamel was for Newfoundland. P. Whitney Lackenbauer, "War, Memory and the Newfoundland Regiment," *Newfoundland Studies* 15, no. 2 (1999):189.

⁵ Berton, *Vimy*, introduction.

⁶ Tom Spear, *Carry On: Reaching Beyond 100; an Autobiography by Tom Spear with Monte Stewart* (Calgary: Falcon Press, 1999), 5.

In an interview with *Legion Magazine*, Clarke explained the excitement he had felt immediately after the battle. "As far as I could see, south, north along the ridge there were Canadians. And I experienced my first sense of nationhood."⁷

Although revealing, the remarks made by Spear and Clarke present us with an important interpretive problem. In 1997, as one of the few remaining Canadian Great War veterans, Spear was invited by the Canadian government to attend the eightieth anniversary of the battle in France. He participated in the ceremonies at the foot of the Vimy monument, and, although he had never served there, he self-identified with the victory as one of the most important moments in Canadian history.⁸ Likewise, Clarke's remarks were made fifty years after the war, and seem to have been heavily influenced by Canada's Great War legacy.⁹ Despite this influence, the Vimy memories of both Spear and Clarke can help clarify how Canadian soldiers experienced their war. Not only do these two recollections speak to the importance of Vimy for the CEF's battlefield reputation; they also speak to the collective Canadian consciousness CEF soldiers embraced during the four years of war.

⁷ Mark Clarke, interview, *Legion Magazine*, 1967, quoted in Pierre Berton, *Vimy*, introduction. In his interviews with members of the Tenth Battalion in the 1970s, Dean Duncan found that almost all soldiers agreed to the symbolic importance given to the CEF's victory, since the war. Dean N. Duncan, "Maple Leaf and Mud: a Story of Soldiering in World War I, as Told by Members of the Tenth Battalion CEF" (master's thesis, Washington State College, 1973), 28.

⁸ Spear, *Carry On*, 5. Spear did not arrive at the front until the spring of 1918.

⁹ See chapter 2 and introduction.

A review of recent Canadian Great War publications makes it apparent that Clarke's ideas about the significance of Vimy Ridge not only fit in with the "myth of the war experience," but also with the standard historiography of Canada and the Great War. Indeed, as late as 1999, eighty-one years after the end of the war, historians Jack Granatstein and Norman Hillmer, selected the battle of Vimy Ridge as the most important achievement of modern Canada. That same year, a millennium survey by the *Globe and Mail* ranked Vimy among the top five of most important events in Canadian history.¹⁰ Yet, while there is an undeniable relationship between the CEF's exploits on the battlefields of Western Europe and Canada's greater 'national' autonomy after the war, we have to be careful not to automatically equate Vimy with the birth of the Canadian nation.

In "The Great War Soldier as Nation Builder in Canada and Australia," historian Jeff Keshen has suggested that this link has been "constructed upon glorified accounts of Canada's Great War soldiers – accounts first articulated by wartime propagandists."¹¹ While this suggestion may have value, Keshen does not provide us with any evidence of these glorified soldiers' accounts, but instead chooses to focus on

¹⁰ Vance, *Death So Noble* and Sheftall, "Glories." For Granatstein and Hillmer's quote on Vimy see, Keshen, "Great War Soldier," in *Canada and the Great War*, ed. Busch, 4. For the *Globe and Mail* Survey Results, see, Kirsty Robertson, "'We Stand on Guard for Thee': Protecting the Myths of Nation in 'Canvas of War,'" *Journal of American and Comparative Cultures*, 24, no. 3/4 (2001): 101.

¹¹ Keshen, "Great War Soldier," in *Canada and the Great War*, ed. Busch, 4. For a critique of Keshen's view of the home front, see page 69-71 of this chapter, and Copp, "Canada," in *Canada*, ed. MacKenzie, 6.

the work of the propagandists. So, where does the 'pan-Canadian' interpretation of Clarke fit in?

When discussing the influence of famous battles on the "myth of the war experience" in Canada, Vance has pointed out that these battles were popularized in Canada during the war through the publication of books, poems, memoirs, and numerous war memorials. Rather than focus on the loss of life during major engagements, Canadians chose to focus on the CEF's achievements, and, as a result, most of these engagements were remembered in a traditional, rather romantic fashion.¹² According to Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, "healing was the order of the day in the aftermath of the carnage of the war."¹³ One of the ways in which Canada could heal from the destruction and loss of the war was by celebrating its successes at Second Ypres and Vimy.

During the war, the CEF spent more than three and a half years in France and Flanders, but Canadian military historians have generally focused on four large-scale campaigns: Second Ypres, Vimy, Passchendaele, and the Hundred Days. Second Ypres will forever be remembered for the gas that was unleashed on Canadian soldiers. Narratives of the battle became an instant hit in Canada, not only because

¹² Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble*, 257-265. For a discussion of the popular interpretation of the war in Australia, Canada and England, see, Sheftall, "Glories," conclusion. For an in depth examination of the portrayal of the war in the Canadian press, see Prince, "Mythology of War," 486-512.

¹³ Winter and Prost, *The Great War in History*, 183.

Canadians at home craved news of the war, but also because the heroic defence at Ypres had evoked national pride.¹⁴ Slightly less than two years later, CEF soldiers made international headlines once again by storming Vimy Ridge.

Although Second Ypres and Vimy Ridge are clearly the CEF's two most famous battles, Canadian historians have focused quite extensively on Passchendaele and the campaigns conducted during the last three months of the war, often called the Hundred Days. In and around Passchendaele, the Canadians fought both the enemy and waist deep mud. Since the war, photographs of duckboards, stretching over an endless sea of mud, have become a symbol of the misery and horrors of the Great War. The battles that took place during the Hundred Days form a stark contrast to Passchendaele. The attack on Amiens yielded major gains and forced the Germans back on their heels. After Amiens, the allies, with the Canadians most often spearheading the drive, pushed them back into Belgium, where the fighting ended on 11 November 1918.

Although it could be argued that the battle for Amiens was the beginning of the end, the battlefield reputation of the CEF had a far more humble beginning, three and a half years prior, when First Division soldiers faced the first gas attack of the war,

¹⁴ News of the battle broke in Canada on 24 April 1915, when the battle was still raging. See Copp, "Canada," in *Canada*, ed. MacKenzie, 41. For the legacy of Second Ypres see Tim Cook, "Documenting War and Forging Reputations: Sir Max Aitken and the Canadian War Records Office in the First World War," *War in History* 10 (2003): 266-276 and Vance, *Death So Noble*, 165. For the military aspects of Second Ypres see, Timothy H.E. Travers, "Allies in Conflict: The British and Canadian Official Historians and the Real Story of Second Ypres (1915)," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24, no. 2 (1989): 301-325.

just outside the Belgian town of Ypres. On 23 April 1915 German troops unleashed chlorine gas towards the Canadian trenches. With nothing to protect them from the poison gas, the Canadians managed to hold the line, albeit barely. What was most impressive about the Canadian resistance was that the battle near Ypres was the CEF's first full-scale operation. Units that had never served together fought side by side, and officers, who had never heard a shot fired in anger, managed to control their men. According to Tim Travers, Brigadiers Richard Turner and Arthur Currie made some vital mistakes that proved to be costly for their soldiers. However, he also suggests that, since Second Ypres was the CEF's first major engagement, both generals did as well as could be expected under the difficult circumstances.¹⁵

Whether Canadians actually managed to 'save the day' at Second Ypres is difficult to substantiate. However, it is clear that Canadians at home were proud to have such excellent soldiers in the field. In the fall and winter of 1914, rumours of the CEF's poor disciplinary record had worried the people on the home front, but after the First Division's heroic stand near Ypres, these rumours could finally be put to rest.¹⁶ The

¹⁵ See, Travers, "Allies in Conflict," 301-325 and Andrew Iarrocchi, "First Canadian Infantry Brigade in the Second Battle of Ypres: The Case of the 1st and 4th Canadian Infantry Battalions, 23 April 1915," *Canadian Military History* 12, no. 2 (2003): 5-16. See also Daniel Dancocks, *Welcome to Flanders Fields: The First Canadian Battle of the Great War; Ypres, 1915* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988); Timothy H.E. Travers, "Currie and 1st Canadian Division at Second Ypres, April 1915: Controversy, Criticism and Official History," *Canadian Military History* 5, no.2 (1996): 7-15 and Cook, *Sharp End*, 152-59.

¹⁶ Lieutenant Armine Norris, letter to his mother, November 1917, in *Mainly for Mother*, 164. See also Copp, "The Military Effort," 41.

soldiers themselves seem to have had few worries about how the CEF would perform in battle. After only two weeks in the trenches, Captain O. Lobley, a Canadian Bank of Commerce accountant, boasted that the Canadians had done extremely well.

“Needless to say they acquitted themselves in every respect in a manner worthy of Canada.”¹⁷ About a week before Second Ypres, and without ever leaving his training camp in England, a young Quebec farmer, Lieutenant Charles Wilcox, assured his brother-in-law that with the Canadians everything would be okay. “For us boys are yearning of our homes and loved ones far away. We will show them what the Canadians are made of when our chance comes which will not be long.”¹⁸ Wilcox never did make it to the front in time for Second Ypres, as the battle started only four days after he finished his letter.

Although Canadian soldiers showed little surprise about the outcome of the encounter at Ypres, a number of letters written immediately after the battle displayed a growing self-confidence as a result of it. Writing less than a week after the battle, Captain R.S. Robinson, from New Liskeard, Ontario, felt that the First Division “had done Canada proud.” In a letter, later published in the *New Liskeard Speaker*, he

¹⁷ Captain O. Lobley, letter 6 April 1915, in Charles Lyon Foster, ed., *Letters From the Front: Being a Record of the Part Played by the Officers of the Bank in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Southam Press, 1921-22), 6. Lobley was born in Bournemouth, England.

¹⁸ Lieutenant Charles Wilcox, Letter to his brother-in-law Harry, 19 April 1915 <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=825&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=105> [accessed 1 April 2008].

wrote: "The Canadian Division has borne the brunt of the first onslaught in a very admirable manner and all loyal Canadians may rest assured that the men of this division will prove worthy representatives of our fair Dominion, whenever the occasion arises for them to deliver the goods."¹⁹ Although Robinson's letter was edited before publication, he was not the only soldier to voice this sentiment. Much like Robinson, New Brunswick-born Captain, Donald Mackenzie Moore, was convinced that First Contingent soldiers had done well.

We were under heavy shell fire nearly all the time. It was very much like you read about but I didn't seem to mind it much. We were in support of a French Brigade with a British Indian Division on our right. We saw the Germans make an attack on the British [?] only about half a mile away. We could smell it quite plainly but not enough to bother us. I am sure I am not going to like the gas [?] but I don't think I will mind the rest very much. The whole Canadian Division is now back in France having a rest and reorganizing. We are attached to the 16th Batt. 3RD Brigade. Canadian Division B.E.F. and this will be my address in future. This is the celebrated Canadian Scottish Brigade, and they are good fighters all right, but no better than the rest of the Canadians.²⁰

¹⁹ Captain Robinson, letter, 29 April 1915. Originally published in the *New Liskeard Speaker*, 21 May 1915, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=2265&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=142> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Robinson's profession is unknown

²⁰ Captain Donald Mackenzie Moore, letter to his brother Arthur, 11 May 1915. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1752&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=137> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Moore was a leading figure in British Columbia's cannery industry.

Writing from the 'firing line' a few weeks after the battle, Private Enos Grant tried to explain what it was like to be in combat. The Canadians had sustained heavy losses, yet they had done well and repelled the Germans.

Dear Ones at Home:

I received your letter a few days ago and was very glad to hear from you as I haven't heard for a long time. But I guess it was the fault of the mail for it has been mixed up the last few weeks.

Well we got in a scrap with the Germans at last, on the 23rd of April. You will know about it, you will have seen about it in the papers. They got a lot of us Canadians, but I think they got it as hard as we did, if not harder. But we didn't have any chance for we had to advance about half a mile over open country. But we got a few of them. But just wait until we get a chance at them again, then we will be ready to go to Dear Old Canada. We are having a rest now but think we will be in the thick of it again soon. When we were advancing to the German trenches, after the French had retreated, bullets were flying all around me. Many of our men fell all around me, but it seems I wasn't made to stop German bullets; but it is hard to say, as I may get it the next time. But I am not afraid of them. The only thing I regret is that I couldn't get a chance to bayonet some of them, but hope to get chance next time, then maybe we will get some of our own back again.

I have heard that the Second Contingent will soon be over here. The General told us to-day that if the Second Con. is half as good as the First, they will be all right, so that is something for us.

I will write to you again next week.²¹

²¹ Private Enos Grant, letter, 8 May 1915. Grant's profession is unknown.
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=2267&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=142> [accessed 1 April 2008]. See also letters by Captain James Wells Ross, 3 May 1915

<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=3246&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=202> [accessed 1 April 2008];

Private Albert Edward Roscoe letter to Mrs. Caleb Bateman, 13 May 1915

<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=2129&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=149> [accessed 1 April 2008] and

Grant's letter indicates that he was not only delighted with the CEF's performance, but also very proud to be Canadian.

Of course, not all soldiers' descriptions of Second Ypres were written in such heroic and glorious terms. Writing in April 1915, Cobourg native, Sergeant E.L. MacNachtan, claimed that, even though the Canadians had made an "undying name for themselves," the battle had been a terrible struggle, killing and wounding thousands of Canadian soldiers.²² In a letter home, Private Stanley Rutledge, a lawyer from Fort William, wrote about the determination of "our men (your boys, your husbands)" to stand firm, but also about the sickly green gas clouds.²³ In his diary, Private Harold Smith, a shipper from Belton, Ontario, mentioned the effect this sickly coloured gas had on his fellow soldiers and French civilians who were near. "It was the worst sight I ever saw. Men, women and children, as well as French soldiers, gasping and choking and struggling to get away from the thick, yellow mist that permeated everything." Smith also recalled wandering around the battlefield for three

Private William R. Mitton, letter 3 June 1915
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=4802&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=281> [accessed 1 April 2008].

²² Sergeant E.L. MacNachtan, letter, 30 April 1915, in *Let us Remember: Lively Letters from World War One*, ed. Percy Climo (Colbourne, ON: P.L. Climo, 1990), 168. The same letter was published in the *Cobourg World* on 21 May 1915. MacNachtan was employed as a surveyor before the war.

²³ Private Stanley Rutledge, letter, in *Pen Pictures from the Trenches* (Toronto: W. Briggs, 1918), 53. The letter was later published in a Fort William newspaper. Private Rutledge was commissioned in January 1917.

days trying to find his battalion, a far from heroic battle narrative.²⁴ After returning to Belgium in December of 1915, Major Agar Adamson complained to his wife how the PPCLI's return to Ypres had brought back unwarranted claims that the Canadians had saved the day, nearly eight months earlier. "Another Staff major relieved himself of the edifying remark, 'Christ if it were not for we Canadians, the Germans would be in Calais'. I am all for modesty and Canada and regret that some that are here were there and also that some that are there were here. [sic]"²⁵

Despite the contents of Smith's diary and Adamson's letter, it is fair to say that, for most First Contingent soldiers, the defence of Ypres constituted an important Canadian success. In a speech made directly after the battle, General Edwin Alderson, the commander of the CEF, told his troops that he had "never been so proud of anything in my life as I am of my armlet with 'Canada' on it."²⁶ While Anderson obviously made his speech to bolster morale, Australian historian Dale Blair points out that generals often "talked their troops" up over others, and that this not only endeared

²⁴ Private Harold Smith, diary, n.d., in *Veteran's Review*, 43. For another description of the horrors of Second Ypres, see for example; Wallace Chambers, letter to Maude, 4 May 1915, in *A Lovely Letter from Cecie: The 1907-1915 Vancouver Diary and World War I Letters of Wallace Chambers*, ed. John Graham Gillis (Vancouver: Peanut Butter Press, 1998), 3.

²⁵ Major Agar Adamson, letter to his wife Mabel, 20 December 1915, in *Letters*, ed. Christie, 116.

²⁶ General Edwin Alderson, speech to his troops, May 1915, quoted in Gibbons, *Guest*, 91.

them to their soldiers, but also “imbued them with self confidence.”²⁷ In this case, the words spoken by Alderson, an Englishman, only added credibility to the Canadians’ achievements at Ypres. A few days after the battle, George Robert Skilton, another British-born CEF soldier, suggested in a poem that Second Ypres would forever be Canada’s battle.

St. Julien, April 22, 1915

*It is a famous story,
Proclaim it far and wide,
And let your children’s children,
Re-echo it with pride.*

*How the gallants sons of Canada,
Their name immortal made,
When they crushed that German gas attack,
On that dreadful April day.*

*There was not a thing in orders,
About the infernal stuff,
But they held the line secure,
Though the fight was really rough.*

*The British Tommies cheered them,
For their mighty staying power,
In the gallant stand they made,
This was their finest hour.²⁸*

²⁷ Blair, “Anti-British Sentiment,” 73. See also Peat, *Private Peat*, 172 and Wallace Chambers, letter to Maude, 4 May 1915, in *Lovely Letter*, ed. Gillis, 3.

²⁸ Robert George Skilton, “St. Julien, April 22, 1915,” quoted in *Veteran’s Review*, 32. Skilton was an electrical operator before the war.

Apart from Skilton's poem, memoirs published during the war are another indication that Second Ypres had been an important milestone for the dominion. Sergeant Harold Baldwin's description of the battle reads like a page out of a book on the Crimean war. In *Holding the Line*, Baldwin recalled his emotions after the battle. "The glorious charge of the Tenth and Sixteenth had taken place and it is now eternal history for Canada. Just think of it that thin line of men with no artillery to cover them, holding back the mass of the enemy ten times their number."²⁹ Baldwin's 1918 book was, of course, published with the intention of spurring recruitment in Canada. Still, even memoirs published after 1919, when this imperative no longer existed, glorified Second Ypres in a similar vein. For Sergeant Sheldon-Williams, Second Ypres was the battle that had set the standard for the Canadian army for the rest of the war. "Whatever men of the later divisions experienced and saw, they must forever give precedence to the men of Ypres, that second battle of the name which had no parallel in the war, before or after."³⁰ Major Frederick McKelvey Bell, a doctor with the First Canadian Hospital in France, had observed the battle from a distance, and, in his opinion, the Canadians had made a daring and gallant stand. "All that night our plucky men fought them off, driving them back through the woods. They retook four captured

²⁹ Baldwin, *Holding the Line*, 155.

³⁰ Sheldon-Williams, *Pen Pictures*, 4.

guns. All the next day, thousands without food or water fought side by side with unconquerable spirit.”³¹

That the material written by Skilton, Williams, Baldwin, and McKelvey Bell is filled with romantic metaphors is not surprising. The weapons used at Second Ypres might have been modern, but the language of war remained traditional. By referring to CEF soldiers as “gallant sons” with “unconquerable spirit,” these authors justified and validated the Canadian sacrifices at Ypres. At the same time, they portrayed CEF soldiers as gallant and capable individuals, rather than the hapless victims of an industrial war. Even if some letters and diary excerpts written shortly after Second Ypres may not be as polished, they too portrayed the battle as a glorious and historically important event; one that had instilled confidence in the abilities of both the CEF and the nation.

That, writing shortly after the battle, many soldiers viewed Second Ypres as an important Canadian achievement is apparent. However, what is missing from these first hand battle-accounts is the “pan-Canadian” theme that would become so manifest in historical literature published on Vimy. The fact that the battle only involved the First Division, of which at least seventy percent was of British birth, is one way to explain why this theme is not present in these accounts. However, in *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War*, Tim Cook suggests that not too much should

³¹ McKelvey-Bell, *First Canadians*, 299. See also Ernest Butland, *Is Live Worth Living* (Montreal: Printers Limited, 1918), 80 and Nasmith, *On the Fringe*, 83.

be made “of the high initial content of British-born in the ranks. Canada was a land of immigrants, and men who were born in Britain but had come to Canada and settled here for fifteen or twenty years – who thought of themselves as Canadians – would have been classified as British-born.”³²

Perhaps a better way to explain why this “pan-Canadian” theme is not present in soldier sources is to look at Second Ypres as an important steppingstone for the Canadians Corp’s battlefield reputation later in the war. Second Ypres not only set the standard for all the CEF’s future operations, but also furthered the Canadian identity of its soldiers. Writing in 1936, Sergeant Charles Savage expressed how important Second Ypres had been for the morale and self-confidence of the Canadians.

At Langemarck and St. Julien, five miles north-east of Ypres, the First Canadian Division early in 1915 paid dearly for the honour of laying the foundation stone of the battle-reputation of the Canadian Corps. Undoubtedly the example set by this Division helped immensely in establishing the strong offensive morale that characterized the Canadian troops.³³

The CEF’s “strong offensive morale” was tested again on Easter Monday 1917, when thousands of Canadian soldiers found themselves facing the well-defended slopes of Vimy Ridge. For three consecutive years Vimy had been the scene of fierce

³² Tim Cook, *Sharp End*, 29.

³³ Savage, *And So We Joined*, 24.

battles, and the German positions on the ridge were considered impregnable. In 1914 the Ridge had fallen into German hands as a result of the 'Race to the Sea', as German and French troops tried to outflank each other all the way to the Belgian coast.³⁴ Germans occupying the ridge had a commanding view of the surrounding area, and the nearby town of Arras was in constant danger from accurate German artillery fire. Efforts by the French to dislodge the Germans, in May and September of 1915, had ended in total failure.³⁵

The First Canadian division arrived in the Vimy sector in the fall of 1916 and was joined by the other three Canadian divisions before the end of that year. Shortly after his arrival in the Vimy sector, Sir Julian Byng, the newly appointed Corps Commander, was informed that the Canadians were to attack Vimy Ridge sometime in the spring of 1917.³⁶ As soon as Byng received his orders for the impending attack, he sent one of his division Commanders, Arthur Currie, to Verdun to observe the French.

³⁴ There are a great number of works that deal with the battle for Vimy Ridge, April 1917. In general these descriptions are rather consistent in nature. See, Norm M. Christie, *For King and Empire: The Canadians at Vimy, April 1917, Arleaux, April 28, 1917, Fresnoy, May 3 1917; A Social History and Battlefield Tour*, (Winnipeg: CEF Books, 1993); Brereton Greenhouse and Stephen J. Harris, *Canada and the Battle of Vimy Ridge, 9-12 April 1917* (Ottawa: Canada Communications Group, 1992); Kenneth Macksey, *The Shadow of Vimy Ridge* (London: W. Kimbler, 1965) and Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 87.

³⁵ See also Arthur Bishop, *Canada's Glory: Battles that Forged a Nation* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1996) Chapter 9 and Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 138-141.

³⁶ See Christie, *For King*, 14 and Bishop, *Canada's Glory*, chapter 9.

Currie returned to his division at the end of 1916 with many new ideas that would be beneficial to the upcoming attack.³⁷ When the battle commenced at 5.30 on the morning of 9 April 1917, the assaulting troops faced no easy task, but thorough preparations and the training conducted in the weeks before the battle at least gave the Canadians a decent chance at victory.³⁸ Although all four divisions suffered heavy losses, most of the objectives were reached well before dark. At nightfall only the extreme top of the ridge, nicknamed 'the Pimple', was still in German hands. When the 10th Brigade attacked again on the early morning of the 12th, they managed to finally drive the Germans off the entire ridge.³⁹

While the attack on the ridge was considered an enormous success, some military historians have blamed the collapse of the German defence on the incompetence of its

³⁷ Mark Osborne Humphries, "Old Wine in New Bottles: A Comparison of British and Canadian Preparations for the Battle of Arras," in *Vimy Ridge*, ed. Hayes, Iarocci and Bechtold, 67.

³⁸ According to Currie the attackers should no longer attack in slow moving lines but should charge across no man's land in platoon formations as quickly as possible. Soldiers should be issued maps and aerial photographs, while objectives should be "obvious natural features that the men could easily find." A principal point taken from his observations of the French was that attacking units should be rested before the attack, with engineer and pioneer units doing all the pre-battle preparations. New fuses for high explosive shells ensured that the German wire could be cut in the opening barrage. Under guidance of Andy MacNaughton, the Canadians also perfected the counter battery techniques. Granatstein and Morton, *Marching*, 141 and Schreiber, *Shock Army*, 18. For a discussion of Byng and Curry's subordinates see, Patrick H. Brennan, "Julian Byng and Leadership in the Canadian Corps," in *Vimy Ridge*, ed. Hayes, Iarocci and Bechtold, 87-104.

³⁹ Christie, *For King and Empire*, 22, 23 and Granatstein and Morton, *Marching*, 143.

commander, who refused to deploy his troops in an elastic defence.⁴⁰ Although there is some value to this argument, most Canadian military historians have, nevertheless, portrayed Vimy as the first major offensive victory of the war. What was especially important, according to these historians, was that Canadian troops had scored a victory where the powerful armies of France and Britain had failed. Canada had outdone its much stronger imperial partner and now it demanded recognition, not only as a military power, but also as a nation.⁴¹ According to Stephen Harris, the battle for Vimy Ridge was an important milestone for Canada. “Even if the Canadian Corps’ legend has not provided ‘the stuff’ of which nations are made, its very existence had an enormous impact on the political initiatives that helped transform the British Empire into a Commonwealth of autonomous states.”⁴² Canada’s bargaining position within the empire had been strengthened by the CEF’s battle exploits. Indeed,

⁴⁰ Brereton and Harris, *Canada*, 69, 70 and Andrew Godefroy, “The Germans at Vimy Ridge,” in *Vimy Ridge*, ed. Hayes, Iarocci and Bechtold, 230-31. For a definition of elastic defence see Schreiber, *Shock Army*, 9-14. The purpose of an elastic defence, or defence in depth, is to delay rather than prevent the advance of the enemy. Defence in depth does not rely on one defensive line, but rather on a number of small outposts that can be yielded to the enemy in order to absorb the energy of the initial attack. Once the attacker has lost its momentum counter attacks should be mounted to drive them back.

⁴¹ Macksey, *Shadow*, 80, Norm Christie, *Winning the Ridge, Canadians at Vimy Ridge, 1917* (Nepean, On: CEF Books, Nepean, 1998) vii and Granatstein and Morton, *Marching*, 144.

⁴² Harris, “From Subordinate to Ally,” 112. Vance also makes this point. Thus, while he sees “nation building” as a flop domestically, he concludes that it succeeded at the level of international recognition. See Vance, *Death So Noble*, 226-228, 266.

according to Harris, Prime Minister Borden used this strengthened bargaining position to secure a Canadian seat at the Versailles peace conference in 1919.⁴³

Soldier sources provide clear evidence that, by the end of March 1917, most Canadians were aware that a big ‘scrap’ was about to take place. Until Vimy, Canadian troops had generally been kept in the dark with regards to future offensives, but Currie’s recent innovations required soldiers to train for the upcoming battle on a scale model of the Ridge. In a letter home, R.A.L., an unidentified stretcher-bearer from “the old country” wrote:

This time, unless I am mistaken, the Canucks are going to open up the game; but it’s going to be a very, very different from the Somme in many ways. All the way back here, the ground is marked out with tapes and flags, arranged according to our pictures exactly as Fritz has his trenches in front of the particular battalion which will take that section. So if the officers get killed, the men know just what to do. The battalions have been made familiar with them. I have been over some of them; they seem very complicated. Fritz must know what is coming.⁴⁴

R.A.L.’s letter, written a few days before the battle, was published in January 1918. How this letter, full of classified material, got past the censor is difficult to determine. However, Jeffrey Keshen’s suggestion that correspondence written at the

⁴³ Harris, “From Subordinate to Ally,” 112.

⁴⁴ R.A.L. letter, just before Easter 1917, in *Letters*, ed. Chapin Ray, 160.

front were not always properly censored, may explain how R.A.L.'s letter made it to Canada.⁴⁵ R.A.L. was not the only CEF soldier to write about the battle before it took place. Two days before the battle, Chatham, Ontario native, Private William Henry Bell, wrote: "We are out of the trenches training to go over the top but we'll be doing the real thing in a couple of days but I don't think we'll have much fighting cause the germans [*sic*] are coming over and giving themselves up."⁴⁶ Bell's letter to his mother turned out to be his last. He was killed in action on 10 April.

In works published after the war we can find similar, albeit more specific, examples of the extensive training Canadian soldiers underwent before they were sent into battle. A number of soldiers, for example, make reference to the maps and aerial photographs that were issued a week before the battle, while they were resting in comfortable billets behind the line. Lieutenant Sandham Graves, an Irish-born university student, remembered the battle as a rehearsed attack. In *Lost Diary*, he recalled the famous white tapes over which battalions were to plan and rehearse their upcoming operations.⁴⁷ If, despite all the evidence that Vimy was a 'rehearsed'

⁴⁵ Keshen, *Propaganda*, 155.

⁴⁶ Private William Henry Bell, letter to his mother, 7 April 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=743&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=103> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Private Bell had farmed with his family in Innisfree, Alberta before the war.

⁴⁷ Graves, *Lost*, 56. See also, William Breckenridge, *From Vimy to Mons: A Historical Narrative* (Sherbrooke, QC: W. Breckenridge, 1919), 19 and Private Cook, interview, 1 November 1978, in *My Grandfather's War*, ed. Mathieson, 116.

assault, soldiers were still unaware that a big attack was soon to take place, the two-week artillery bombardment prior to the battle must have been a clear indication that an offensive was coming.⁴⁸

Because of the scale of the attack, we can assume that by 12 April 1917 almost every Canadian soldier in France was aware of the successful storming of the Ridge. Yet, despite the astonishing victory, a substantial number of diaries and collections of letters make no mention of the battle. In this regard, it is possible that the battle was not purposely omitted from the correspondence, but that some letters were lost, either on the way to Canada, or long after the war. The absence of references to the battle for Vimy Ridge in diaries and collections of letters covering the period from April to June 1917 is more difficult to explain. However, in an effort to describe what takes place in the heat of a fight, philosopher Glenn Gray has used the term “tyranny of the present” to describe life during battle. Writing about the Second World War, Gray concluded that in battle, neither past nor future existed, just the present, resulting in a rather limited view for soldiers.⁴⁹

For example, an excerpt from Private Victor Swanston’s diary, written only one day after the start of the battle, reads: “Big scrap on and the boys reached their

⁴⁸ See for example Archie William Gray, *The Towers of Mont. St. Eloi* (Rodney, ON: Gray Print Co., 1933), 121 and Black, *I Want One*, 59.

⁴⁹ J. Glenn Gray, *The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 119. See also Keegan, *Face of Battle*, 322.

objective alright, there are hundreds of prisoners coming back.”⁵⁰ The entries for April 9 and 10 in the diary of Private Deward Barnes, a Toronto factory worker, are quite similar in tone:

April 9, 1917: The 19th Battalion took the German Third line trenches at 5.30 a.m. It took them forty-five minutes to reach their objective. The Canadians took three thousand prisoners that day. I saw the prisoners as they were sent back and caged in. A good many could speak English. I first saw at close view that day three armed planes (allies).

April 10, 1917: The 19th went over-the-top twice more. I was out of that. Vimy was an artillery victory. The guns swept everything. I did two hours fatigue that day and was put into “A” Company, No. 2 Platoon, in the Lewis gun section. Went down to Camblain-L’Abbe, a small town where Sarah Bernhardt had a big chateau and where fifty camps stayed on her grounds⁵¹

In stark contrast to the writings of Swanston and Barnes, and despite Gray’s ‘tyranny of the present’, there are plenty of soldier accounts, written during or shortly after the battle, that portray Vimy as an important and historic event. While for some

⁵⁰ Victor Swanston, diary, 10 April 1917, in *Who Said War is Hell*, ed. Burgess, 41.

⁵¹ Private Deward Barnes, diary 9 and 10 April 1917, in *It Made You Think of Home: The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes, Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1916-1919*, ed. Bruce Cane (Toronto: Dundurn Group, 2004), 60. More matter of fact descriptions can be found in the memoir *Unknown Soldiers, By One of Them*, and the diary of Private, later Lieutenant, Donald MacPherson. *Unknown Soldiers*, 89 and Private Donald MacPherson, diary, 9 April 1917, in Donald MacPherson, *A Soldier’s Diary*, 56.

soldiers Vimy was just another big battle, others describe it not only as the greatest event of their life, but also as the greatest event in Canadian history. On 20 April 1917, graduate student turned soldier, Lieutenant Clifford Wells, wrote to his mother in Montreal, telling her how proud he was to have played a part in the battle. "To me it is the most thrilling letter I have ever written you. I hope you will find it the same. The greatest victory of the war has been gained, and I had a small part in it."⁵² A week after the battle, Private Percy Winthrop McClare explained to his mother that he had come through the fray in one piece. "I was in the whole battle and it was hell. I got a small splinter of shrapnel through the fleshy part of my shoulder. It was very slight and I went through it all with it. It was some battle and I am glad to say that I was through it [*sic*], as it will be one of the biggest things in Canadian history."⁵³ R.A.L. was equally excited: "I was in the big scrap, right from the beginning. Am writing this in an underground cave. I have no paper or anything. This should be the greatest letter I ever wrote you"⁵⁴

Just like McClare, R.A.L., and Wells, Agar Adamson, the CO of the PPCLI, found it difficult to hide his excitement about the Vimy engagement. On the day before his

⁵² Lieutenant Clifford Wells, letter to his mother 20 April 1917, in *From Montreal*, ed. Wallace, 305. Unfortunately for Wells his most thrilling letter was also his last one. Clifford Wells was killed later that month.

⁵³ Private Percy Winthrop McClare, letter to his mother, 16 April 1917, in *Letters*, ed. D. McClare, 107.

⁵⁴ R.A.L., letter to Lal, shortly after Easter Sunday, 1917, in *Letters*, ed. Chapin Ray, 164.

battalion was to go back into the line Adamson wrote his wife: "Like the 9th of April, the 28th promises to be a day in Canadian history and God grant it may it be to our credit."⁵⁵ Although it had been a hard and dangerous job, Lieutenant C.B.F. Jones, writing from a captured German trench, was confident Canada could be proud of the CEF.

The strenuous work of April 9th is over, and the Canadians – at least the division to which we belong – are resting on the field wrestled from the Hun. The Battle of Arras and the taking of Vimy Ridge by the Canadians will long remain a Red Letter Day in Canadian history. We took from the Germans the coveted ridge which the French had attempted to take in 1915, and where they had lost many thousands in the attempt, and I can tell you the people of Canada have every reason to be proud of their boys out here. . . .⁵⁶

While both Jonathan Vance and Mark Sheftall have suggested that the idea of Vimy Ridge as the symbolic birth of the Canadian nation was a post-war invention, there can be no doubt that many soldiers involved in the attack were aware of the battle's historical significance, even before it was publicized in Canada.⁵⁷ The fact that French and British attacks on the ridge had failed earlier in the war only added to

⁵⁵ Lieutenant-Colonel Agar Adamson, letter to his wife Mabel, 27 April 1917, in *Letters*, ed. Christie, 278.

⁵⁶ Lieutenant C.B.F. Jones, letter, 15 April 1917, in Foster, ed., *Letters*, 200. Jones was an employee of the Canadian Bank of Commerce in Winnipeg. His date and place of birth are unknown.

⁵⁷ Vance, *Death So Noble*, conclusion and Sheftall, "Glories," introduction.

the soldiers' excitement about the outcome of the battle.⁵⁸ In an April 1917 letter, R.A.L. explained the historical importance of the victory for Canada. After moving his rest-camp across the Vimy battlefield to reach the new Canadian lines, he wrote:

Today as I looked around, it suddenly occurred to me I stood on historical ground. For two and a third years, the lines have never moved. France lost thirty thousand men and on this very spot. England tried to take it and failed. And now Canada walks over it and digs about in it, uses old French rifles, torn up out of the ground by shell fire, for its dug out supports, and machine gun shields as roofs. One day you must walk over the trail from Neuville St. Vaast to Vimy and remember – indeed it would be impossible to forget – that here Canada made herself ace high with France.⁵⁹

Since R.A.L.'s letters were edited for publication, it is possible that this exciting missive was altered before printing. However, this does not necessarily mean that his opinions were not shared by other soldiers. In a number of letters, written directly after the battle, we can even find some evidence of the "pan-Canadian theme" so apparent in Lieutenant Clarke's 1967 interview with *Legion Magazine*. In a letter published by the *Island Farmer* on 30 May 1917, an unidentified soldier from PEI emphasized how soldiers from all over Canada had played a part in the attack:

⁵⁸ According to Michael Boire these previous attacks facilitated the job in April 1917. Michael Boire, "Vimy Ridge: The Battlefield before the Canadians, 1914-1916, in *Vimy Ridge*, ed. Hayes, Iarocci and Bechtold, 51.

⁵⁹ R.A.L., letter, 27 April 1917, in *Letters*, ed. Chapin Ray, 178, 179.

At last hell breaks loose and the good old [25]th Nova Scotians with their comrades from all over Canada on either flank, leap over the parapet with a yell. Two of our pipers have volunteered to play the battalion over and with their pipes shrieking 'Bonnie Dundee' and ribbons flying in the breeze they strut over the shell swept ground and again the boys cheer and yell. Now some of Canada's best are starting to fall and everybody sees red and nothing can stop us now.⁶⁰

Writing only one week after the battle, Sergeant Percy Charles Wilmot, a native of Birmingham who had moved to Cape Breton at the age of seven, also emphasized the unifying nature of the battle.

As the guns spoke, over the bags they went – men of CB, sons of NS & NB – FC's [French Canadians] & westerners – all Canucks. Within 14 minutes the first trench was captured, & within an hour & 15 minutes the whole ridge, 4000 prisoners & many guns were in our possession. So far it was the most decisive, the most spectacular and the most important victory on this front since the Marne and Canada may well be proud of the Achievement.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Unidentified soldier, letter, n.d., quoted in James Clinton Morrison, "Bloody Easter: Island Soldiers at Vimy Ridge," *Island Magazine*, 31 (1992): 32. Letter was published in *Island Farmer*, 30 May 1917 and must have been written somewhere between 9 April and the beginning of May to allow for mailing and printing time.

⁶¹ Sergeant Percy Charles Wilmot, letter to his sister Dorothy, 16 April 1917, in *A Cape Bretoner at War*, ed. Brian Douglas Tennyson (Sydney, NS: Cape Breton University Press), 162. Wilmot received a commission in the fall of 1917.

In many ways these two letters, written almost ninety years ago, resemble the romantic and heroic battle descriptions published during and shortly after the war, and emphasize the unifying aspects of Vimy Ridge. Regional identities still existed, hence the soldier's reference to the Nova Scotians, but they seem to have been subsumed in a larger, shared Canadian Corps consciousness. Despite their limited view of the battle, many soldiers were capable of grasping the importance with which Canadians would view their achievements in the future. Perhaps the experience of Second Ypres had provided Canadian soldiers with an interpretative framework and heightened sense of Canadian consciousness that allowed them to gauge the significance of the battle for Canada.

The heroic efforts of the “dauntless Canadians” at Vimy were equally prominent in memoirs published during, or directly after, the war. In 1920 Sergeant Sheldon-Williams remembered the battle as the most important Canadian victory ever.

So From Monday's dawn till midnight of Friday, the battle raged, and we only turned over our new positions to the relieving Imperials when drunk with the job and the need of sleep. Throughout the week, with us had raged the storm, at times at blizzard strength, so that hourly the toil had become harder, and snow and mud made every step purgatory. But we were the masters of our fate, filthy but triumphant, and had scored as signal a victory as ever crowned Canadian arms.⁶²

⁶² Sheldon-Williams, *Pen Pictures*, 53.

Evaluating the significance of Vimy Ridge in 1918, Sergeant Reginald Grant not only recalled how the Canadians had “swept the gray [*sic*] clad hords of Huns from the land of Sunny France,” but also that the battle would have an important impact on the history of the dominion.⁶³

Not surprisingly, memoirs published after the fiftieth anniversary of Vimy Ridge, almost without exception, portrayed the battle as the decisive turning point of the war. Ready to publish his old World War One diary for publication in the 1980s, British-born stenographer, Victor Wheeler, added an extra paragraph to the original to further emphasize the significance of Vimy. With the benefit of hindsight, and after having lived in Canada for at least seventy years, the battle, about which he had only made minor remarks in his diary at the time, became the success story of the war.

Little did we realize that the unexcelled performance and coordinated teamwork of all units and branches of the Canadian Corps – none less vital than the other – in the April 1917 Battle of Vimy Ridge would become such a brilliant page in the military history of the Great War. World military leaders still continue to study the amazing tactical and strategical skills that were displayed in those epic Vimy battles by the dauntless Canadian Corps, under the superb, over-all Command of Lieutenant General the Honourable Sir Julian H.G. Byng (later, Baron Byng of Vimy).⁶⁴

⁶³ Grant, *S.O.S. Stand To!*, 283.

⁶⁴ Wheeler, *No Man's Land*, 130.

When asked about the significance of Vimy in a 1960s interview for CBC radio, A.E. Wright remembered Vimy not as the place where thousands of his fellow soldiers had died, but only as the place where Canada was born.⁶⁵ With the CEF's growing "corps identity" in mind, it is perhaps easier to explain how a battle that claimed the lives of so many CEF soldiers can be remembered in such a glorious and romantic fashion. After months, perhaps years, of living, sleeping, and fighting in the trenches, Canadians had come to realize that their efforts on the battlefield had immortalized the CEF as Canada's first national army and that their endless suffering would never be forgotten. The honours heaped on the CEF after Vimy not only helped CEF soldiers to cope with the horrors and carnage of war, but also provided them with a reputation based on their qualities as soldiers, rather than mere brawlers.

While the evidence above suggests that the victories at Ypres and Vimy had strengthened the CEF's *esprit de corps* and helped forge a 'national' identity amongst Canadian troops, it is, of course, possible that part of this identity was influenced by exaggerated press coverage of Canadian successes. Prior to Vimy, the Canadian press had portrayed Second Ypres as Canada's finest moment of the war and, according to Max Aitken, whose press-releases were widely read throughout the dominion, Canada

⁶⁵ A.E. Wright, interview CBC Radio, *On Flanders Fields*, Script no. 9, (Ottawa, 196?), 29. Wright was on a hospital ship when news of the battle broke. Wright's rank, place of birth and profession are unknown.

had every reason to be very proud of the achievements of its soldiers overseas.⁶⁶ That Canadians at home, who had to rely on the press for news about the war, were easily influenced by Aitken's press-releases is clear. However, letters and diaries written during the war indicate that it was not only Canadian civilians who eagerly read the newspapers. Soldiers did, as well.

In general, we can assume that Great War soldiers had a rather limited view of the battlefield.⁶⁷ In her work on Pickett's Charge, an assault performed during the last day of the battle of Gettysburg, historian Carol Reardon notes that, during battle, only "the most exceptional event" would leave a lasting impression in a soldiers' mind. In order to reconstruct what had transpired, soldiers often looked to the press to provide them with answers.⁶⁸ A 1918 letter, written by Corporal John Harold Becker, indicates just how little had changed fifty-five years after Pickett's fateful charge. "There is nothing I can say in connection with the present great battles. We know only what we see in the papers about the general aspect of the thing."⁶⁹ Luckily for Becker, Canadian

⁶⁶ Aitken's *Canada in Flanders* sold more than a quarter million copies. See Tim Cook, "Quill and Canon: Writing the Great war in Canada," *American Review of Canadian Studies*, 35, no. 3 (2005): 503-530 and Cook, "Documenting War," 273.

⁶⁷ Carol Reardon, *Pickett's Charge in History and Memory* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 1, 2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 12, 39.

⁶⁹ Corporal John Harold Becker, letter home, 1918, in *Memoir of John Harold Becker, 1894-1956: World War I Recollections* (Minneapolis: J.B. Monroe, 1998), 148. See also Lieutenant Clifford Wells, letter to his mother, 20 April 1917, in *Montreal*, ed. Wallace, 304. Major James Lloyd Evans, letter to his wife, 4 June 1918, in *My*

soldiers received ample numbers of newspapers and, after almost every battle, had a chance to read up on their own successes. While it is understandable that Canadian soldiers eagerly read about their exploits in the press, the question remains as to how they interpreted this coverage.⁷⁰ If CEF soldiers depended so heavily on the press for ‘factual’ information, is it possible that these accounts published early on in the war not only influenced the self-image of the Canadian soldier, but also formed the inspiration for the pan-Canadian depiction of Vimy Ridge two years later?

In *Propaganda and Censorship during the Great War*, Jeffrey Keshen claims that most Canadians never realized how horrifying trench warfare was, simply because the Canadian press only offered a highly romantic, glorified version of the war. Letters written from the trenches did little to alter this perception of the war. “At the front most letters, if not emphasizing valiant conduct, downplayed dangers to satisfy censors, ease family concerns and to act out the manly role.”⁷¹ While Keshen’s claim

Darling Girl: Wartime Letters of James Lloyd Evans, ed. Susan Evans Shaw (Hamilton: Susan Evans Shaw, 1999) 92.

⁷⁰ For Vimy and the press see John Pierce, “Constructing Memory: The Idea of Vimy Ridge,” (master’s thesis, Wilfred Laurier University, 1993) and Dave Inglis, *Vimy Ridge, 1917-1992: A Canadian Myth over 75 years*, (master’s thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1995). See also a letter by Gunner Howard Norman McIntosh, a steel worker from Cobourg, who assumed his family, had seen the newspaper reports on the battle before they would receive his letter. “I suppose you have seen by the papers of the battles that have taken place, and the credit the Canadians have earned for themselves.” Gunner Norman McIntosh, letter home, 19 May 1915, in *Let Us Remember*, ed. Climo, 173.

⁷¹ Keshen, *Propaganda*, 165.

that letters written during the war were not a genuine reflection of realities at the front seems valid, not all letters were as sanitized as he would like us to believe. In *Our Glory and Our Grief, Torontonians and the Great War*, Ian Miller contradicts Keshen's assertion that the gruesome details of trench warfare were never published in Canada. Miller argues that Torontonians were equally familiar with the cost, as well as the glory, of war, because censors could do little to stop the publication of private letters, detailing the horrible conditions at the front.⁷² Even though soldiers were careful not to upset loved ones at home, they were sometimes quite honest about the war they faced, and often criticized the portrayal of that war in the Canadian press.

As early as February 1915, Private William Harry Jennings, from Forrest, Ontario, complained to his mother about newspapers' refusal to adequately describe conditions at the front.

Now just a word to the war. It is absolutely worse than the people ever imagine. The weather is not as cold as Canada of course but it rains or sleets every day nearly. Raw and miserable and the trenches are a terror. Actually water over the knees have I stood in for 2 days and nights and kept my back humped up and my head down below the trenches all the time. And then when we come out had to cut my boots off my feet they were so swollen. This is what the papers don't tell and are not allowed to tell, so don't show this letter around. And Belgium, village after village, and they are only a matter of a few miles apart here absolutely blown to pieces. And the people where they are, goodness only knows. And France isn't much better a country of old, young and cripples If people only realized what a war such as this meant to the country, where it was

⁷² Miller, *Our Glory*, conclusion.

waged it would mean that the world would turn to socialism in no time.⁷³

Writing about the period shortly after the Battle of Vimy Ridge, Sergeant Robert Kentner wrote in his memoir: "Nothing could equal the optimism which was so general amongst the Canadian troops after the Battle for Vimy. There were exaggerated accounts of the successes of the allied troops and most impossible expectations of a speedy end to the war."⁷⁴ In a 1916 letter to his mother, Lieutenant Armine Norris rejected the image of the immortal warrior, capable of charging through machine gun fire without getting hurt.

We think it too bad that the Canadian papers do not stick a little closer to the facts and not attempt to glorify us so much. We did well enough but you know men are mortal and can't charge 'through volleys of machine gun and rifle fire,' because if a machine gun is in action at our range, it's down we go. It isn't a question of bravery, for the bravest man can't stop bullets without going down. We don't want press agents, and we're neither better nor worse than the 'Tommies', yet in every advance that Colonials are lucky enough to

⁷³ Private William Harry Jennings, letter to his mother, 22 February 1915, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=2770&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=197> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Jennings served in the PPLI, who arrived in France in October 1914. See also Reverend William Beattie, letter to *Cobourg World*, 27 October 1916, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=8845&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=350> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁷⁴ Kentner, *Some Recollections*, 47.

get a chance, our papers, and the English papers too, seem to give us
all the credit,⁷⁵

Perhaps one of the reasons for the criticism by Jennings, Kentner, and Norris was that the Canadian press only paid attention to its soldiers when they were engaged in a major battle. In his diary, Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrea blamed the Canadian press for covering only the first four days of Second Ypres.

Newspapers which arrive show that up to May 7th, the Canadian public has made no guess at the extent of the battle of Ypres. The Canadian papers seem to have lost interest in it after the first four days; this regardless of the fact that the artillery, numerically a quarter of the CEF, was in all the time. One correspondent writes from the Canadian rest camp, and never mentions Ypres.⁷⁶

While newspaper headlines had brought the Canadians fame, it seems as if many soldiers had always been a bit suspect of the press. Being dependent on newspapers

⁷⁵ Lieutenant Armine Norris, letter to his mother, 22 October 1916, in *Mainly for Mother*, 115.

⁷⁶ John McCrea, diary, Friday 28 May 1915, quoted in *We Wasn't Pals: Canadian Poetry and Prose of the First World War*, ed. Barry Callaghan and Bruce Meyer (Toronto: Exile Editions, 2001), 124. Like McCrea, R.A.L. blamed the newspapers for only focusing on major battles, thus creating a very uneven image of what life in the trenches was all about. On 8 July 1917 he wrote: "The newspapers ring with the wonder of the Vimy achievement, yet I haven't heard one say a word about our trip in May, when we held the line just by sitting, day after day and night after night, getting killed without firing a shot – just holding on." R.A.L., letter, 8 July 1917, in *Letters*, ed. Chapin Ray, 235.

for information certainly limited Canadian soldiers' view of the war. Nevertheless, the material above clearly suggests that, in their eyes, the authority to question this popular memory should lie with the soldiers, not with the press.⁷⁷ Although some exaggerated news accounts, often connecting major battles with Canada's status as a more independent nation, found their way into a number of soldiers' letters and diaries, this does not mean that soldiers purposely misled their family and friends about the realities of trench warfare.⁷⁸ On the contrary, most CEF soldiers were quite prepared to accept the cost of war, as long as their sacrifices were not in vain.

That, despite the horrors of the trenches, the majority of Canadian soldiers preferred to focus more on success, rather than cost, is not surprising. The experience of Vimy and Second Ypres had not only professionalized the CEF, but also provided Canadian soldiers with a reputation of which they could be proud. Indeed, as the war dragged on, this reputation played an increasingly important role in the creation of a

⁷⁷ For this divide between 'participants and spectators' see the examples given by Hynes, *Soldiers' Tale*, 1-3. See also Prince, "Mythology of War," 2 and Winter and Prost, *Great War*, chapter 1.

⁷⁸ See for example, Private Donald Fraser's diary entry for Monday, April 9, 1917. This entry is almost ten pages long and describes in great detail what took place and what unit was where at what time. From the length and detail of the description it is clear that popular accounts of the battle had coloured Fraser's recollections of the war. While Fraser's work is based on a diary he kept during the war, the final draft may, according to Reginald Roy, the editor of his diaries, not have been written until the summer of 1918, when Fraser was recovering from wounds sustained in battle. See Donald Fraser, *Journal of Private Fraser, 1914-1918, Canadian Expeditionary Force*, ed. Reginald Roy (Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1985), introduction, 18, 19.

distinct CEF identity. In a 1916 poem, Private Frank Walker marked the anniversary of Second Ypres. In it he focused on the glory of war, rather than the horror of the trenches.

God's Acre: Ypres Salient,

*No Dogmas can the truth confound,
Each sodden patch of hard-won ground,
Each dingy cross, each rude shaped mound,
Their soldier-mead
Proclaims a glory sought and found,
And stamps a creed.*

*Who might not bide, whate'er befall,
When the dead trumpet summons all
They mighty – host when Gabriel's call
Sounds God's Parade –
If he with them stand or fall
Shall be arrayed!⁷⁹*

Exactly one year after Second Ypres, Lieutenant William Joseph O'Brien remembered the battle in his diary, even though he had still been in Canada when the battle was fought. "'Stood to' twice this morning. This is the anniversary of the German's discomforture [*sic*] at Ypres and we are more than ever vigilant."⁸⁰

⁷⁹ Frank Walker, "God's Acre: Ypres salient (On the Anniversary of April, 1915)," in *From A Stretcher Handle*, ed. Gaudet, 86.

⁸⁰ Lieutenant William Joseph O'Brien, diary entry 22 April 1916, in *Send*, ed. W.H. O'Brien, 17. For the importance of Second Ypres during the war, but published in works after the war see, Inglis, *Reminiscences*, 69 and Bagnall, *Not Mentioned*, 18.

While important milestones for the CEF's battlefield reputation, Passchendaele and the Hundred Days have received far less attention from both historians and soldiers. Letters, written during the fall of 1917 and the summer of 1918, clearly show that CEF soldiers were far less excited about Passchendaele and the Hundred Days than they had been about Vimy and Second Ypres. By the time the Canadians battled for Passchendaele, in October and November 1917, the CEF had been in the trenches for more than two and a half years. Meanwhile, Vimy seems to have left the Canadians with little sense that they had much to prove. They had become experts at their craft and, rather than approach upcoming battles with excitement as they had done early in the war, they now faced them with dogged determination, vowing to see it through until the war was finally over.⁸¹

Not even seven months after their historic victory on Vimy Ridge, the Canadians were ordered to attack the small hamlet of Passchendaele in the Ypres sector. The offensive, begun nearly three months earlier, was a failure from the start. Torrential rainfall had made progress almost impossible, and, by the end of October, the British had become completely bogged down in the mud.⁸² When the CEF arrived in the Ypres sector in October 1917, Arthur Currie, the newly appointed Corps commander,

⁸¹ For the development of the CEF into a more professional army see, Rawling, *Surviving*, and Schreiber, *Shock Army*.

⁸² See for example, Corcoran, *Mud Blood and Poppycock*, 354, 355, Leon Wolff, *In Flanders Fields: The 1917 Campaign* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1979), 245 and Beckett, *Great War*, 169,170.

refused Haig's order to attack immediately. Vimy had taught Currie that an offensive could only succeed if it was properly planned and soldiers were thoroughly trained and rested.⁸³ However, when Currie saw the terrain over which his troops would have to advance, he decided that there was no point in resting his soldiers behind the lines if they would have to struggle for hours just to make it to the front line. Instead, he decided that attacking troops should arrive at the front a few days before the attack in order to recuperate from their difficult trek.⁸⁴

Currie's plan for the attack was simple. The ridge near Passchendaele was to be taken in a succession of small steps, ensuring that the Canadians could be supplied with continuous artillery support. After each step the infantry would consolidate their gains, while the artillery would move forward in preparation for the next stage. In the early morning 26 October 1917, the Third and Fourth Divisions attacked for the first time. But it was not until noon of 6 November that the Canadians finally managed to take Passchendaele. After just four days rest, they were ordered to attack the ridge

⁸³ Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 165. See also, Stephen Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 129-146 and Dean Oliver, "The Canadians at Passchendaele," in *Passchendaele in Perspective: The Third battle of Ypres*, ed. Peter Liddle (London: Leo Cooper, 1997), 255, 256.

⁸⁴ Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 167.

behind the village. By nightfall of 10 November 1917 the battle for Passchendaele was finally over.⁸⁵

According to Dean Oliver, Passchendaele (Third Ypres) falls awkwardly between the battles at Vimy and Amiens.⁸⁶ Soldiers who fought at Passchendaele rarely viewed it as a victory. Indeed, they seem to have been more impressed with the achievements of April 1915 than they were in November 1917 when they achieved “a military feat of the first order.”⁸⁷ Because of the atrocious battlefield conditions and the endless suffering of the soldiers in the mud, Brian Bond suggests that Passchendaele never could be described as a famous victory. After the war, a number of Canadians recalled how disappointing it was to hear they were heading for the Ypres sector again. For Sergeant Kentner the news was by no means cheerful.

Had it been any other part of the whole Western Front, it would not have been so bad. But to again experience the frightful discomfort of the torn bog of shell holes, the agony of much continual shelling and perhaps the repetition of quite as frightful an experience, was sufficient to make the boldest of us feel downhearted.⁸⁸

⁸⁵ Harris, *Canadian Brass*, 129-146, Oliver, “Canadians at Passchendaele,” in *Passchendaele*, ed. Liddle, 255-258 and Col. G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1964), 295-302.

⁸⁶ Oliver, “Canadians at Passchendaele,” in *Passchendaele*, ed. Liddle, 255.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 256.

⁸⁸ Kentner, *Some Recollections*, 62.

In his memoir, Signaler William his Breckenridge, a book-keeper from Salt Coates, Scotland, remembered feeling upset about the latest orders. According to Breckenridge, the Ypres salient “had always been a death trap for the Canadians.”⁸⁹ Despite the fact that Passchendaele had enhanced the CEF’s reputation as ‘shock troops’ of empire, few Canadian soldiers remembered it in the same heroic vein as Second Ypres or Vimy.⁹⁰ War was no longer just dangerous; it had also become extremely hard work.

Soon after arriving in the Ypres sector, the Canadians realized that this sector was even worse than they had expected. Soldiers were not only vulnerable to enemy snipers and artillery, but also had to be careful not to disappear in the mud. In a November 1918 letter to his wife, Private Maheux acknowledged that the Passchendaele front was so bad that he did not know how to describe it.⁹¹ That same month, Lieutenant Andrew Wilson, a policeman from Brussels, Ontario, noted in his diary;

Marched from ST. JEAN up duck walk about six miles into the PASSCHENDAELE country. We are in Bde. Reserve. 7th and 8th in front tonight ready for kick off in morning. 10th in Support and 5th Reserve. Found our position about 8 o’clock. Very dark and the

⁸⁹ Breckenridge, *From Vimy*, 71.

⁹⁰ See Brian Bond, “Passchendaele, Verdicts, Past and Present,” in *Passchendaele*, ed. Liddle, 487.

⁹¹ Frank Maheux, letter to his wife, November 1918, quoted in Morton, “Canadian Soldier,” 85.

mud was deep. No shelter of any kind. I had short trench to get into but half platoon had to dig in. B. Coy near us. A & D in Res. Heavy shelling all night by both sides. I lost two men through night. No sleep. Too cold and raining steadily.⁹²

In 1953, McGill student, Gunner Terence McDermott, still remembered the mud as the major enemy. "Mud became a new element which suffused us mentally and physically; penetrated our eyes and noses and mouths; mingled with our food; rendered every moment slower, more burdensome, more dangerous."⁹³

Even after driving the Germans off the ridge, there was little to cheer about. On the day the Canadians took the ridge, 11 November 1917, another McGill student, Gunner Gordon Morisette, summed up his Passchendaele experience in a letter to his girlfriend Marjorie.

This is an awful place up here. The Canadians have been in some bad places but this beats them all. The mud and weather conditions themselves are enough to a mortal crazy [*sic*] to say nothing of other things. I cannot say much but we will all be glad to get out of here, that is the least I can say. Any other part of the line would almost seem like heaven.⁹⁴

⁹² Lieutenant Andrew Wilson, Diary, 9 November 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=772&warid=3&docid=2&collectionid=104> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁹³ McDermott, *The 7th*, 91. See also Kentner, *Recollections*, 61.

⁹⁴ Gordon Morisette, letter to Marjorie, 10 November 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1854&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=140> [accessed 1 April 2008].

While at Vimy and Second Ypres soldiers would have done anything to be part of the battle, Lieutenant William Hutchinson openly expressed his happiness about having missed Passchendaele. Writing from hospital in England, the New Brunswick engineer told his mother he had thanked his “lucky stars” to have missed the battle. “You know I was lucky to get gassed.”⁹⁵ Shortly after leaving the army and reflecting upon his time in it, Bill Breckenridge concluded in 1919 that there was no victory at Passchendaele, despite the fact that the Canadians had reached all their objectives. The price was simply “too dear”.⁹⁶

Although the battle of Passchendaele enhanced the CEF’s military reputation, it does not fall in the same class as Vimy Ridge. Writing from memory after the war, ex-soldiers were perhaps more apt to include the ‘glorious victory’ at Vimy, rather than the senseless slaughter in the mud. At Passchendaele Canadian soldiers had paid an enormous price to gain a few miles, and the vivid images of the horrible sea of mud would stay with the survivors forever. Even fifty years after the war, Ernest Black found it hard to write about Passchendaele without bitterness. “I know that I can add nothing to what has been said so many times but, as one who will never forget the hell it was, I feel that Passchendaele confirms the statement, made by someone whose

⁹⁵ Hutchinson’s letter is typical for a soldier who has already been through battle and has done his duty. See discussion in chapter 1 and Willard Hutchinson, letter to his mother, 28 November 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1475&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=128> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁹⁶ Breckenridge, *From Vimy*, 103.

name I have forgotten, that war is much too important a matter to be entrusted to generals.”⁹⁷

Ten years after the battle, Lieutenant Tom Rutherford argued that the Canadian Corps did not make all the necessary preparations at Passchendaele. According to the Owen Sound native, Canadian losses were at least five times as high as the German losses, while the 50 acres of ground taken by his unit meant absolutely nothing. As soon as the battle began every officer and NCO was on his own, without means of exerting control.⁹⁸

Our guns, stuck as they were in the mud, were in no position to fire a rolling barrage. If more mortars and smoke bombs had been used, our casualties would have been less than half what they were. Our men were loaded down with equipment which restricted their speed of movement which was most essential. Fifty-yes, even half that number-of good guerrilla-trained fighting men, properly led, could have won our battle and taken as many prisoners with very little loss.⁹⁹

⁹⁷ Black, *I Want*, 62-68.

⁹⁸ For the difficulty of commanding a battle after it has begun see Keegan, *Face of Battle*, 242. For a detailed example of what can happen to a detailed plan, only minutes into a battle see Spencer Fitzgibbon, *Not Mentioned in Despatches, The History and Mythology of the Battle of Goose Green* (Cambridge: Lutterworth Press, 1995).

⁹⁹ Jason Adair, “The Battle of Passchendaele: The Experiences of Lieutenant Tom Rutherford, 4th battalion, Canadian Mounted Rifles,” *Canadian Military History* 13, no. 4 (2004): 79.

What is most surprising about Rutherford's account is that he seemed almost embarrassed to write about Passchendaele. His last paragraph reads: 'These are strange things to say now, but from what I have said here of the happenings on our own particular front I believe them to be only too true, in the light of my subsequent experience.'¹⁰⁰ In contrast to Black, it seems to have been difficult for Rutherford to write in such bitter terms about Passchendaele, an indication that in the 1920s and 30s the "myth of war experience" was perhaps deeply entrenched in the minds of the participants, as well as the spectators, of the war.

Compared to Passchendaele, soldiers' accounts of the Hundred Days are much more positive in nature. Even though the CEF suffered its heaviest losses of the war during that period, memoirs published shortly after 1918 often give the impression that the CEF had won the war single-handedly.¹⁰¹ After leaving Passchendaele, the Canadians had received a welcome rest, and it was not until the spring of 1918 that they would be involved in another major battle. On 21 March 1918 the Germans had started one last, all-out offensive. Two days later Field Marshall Haig stripped the Canadian Corps of the 1st and 2nd Divisions, despite protests from Currie. When

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ According to Desmond Morton a fifth of all Canadian casualties were a result of the Hundred Days. Numbers that are often forgotten when discussing Canada's growing reputation as a result of the war. See Desmond Morton, "La Guerre D'Indépendance du Canada", *La Première Guerre Mondiale et Le Canada: Contributions Sociomilitaires Québécoises*, ed. Roch Legault and Jean Lamarre (Montréal: Éditions du Méridien, 1999), 32.

asked to release his other two divisions, Currie refused and warned Edward Kemp, Canada's Overseas Minister, who took his concerns to the War Office. Perhaps Currie's refusal to give up all his divisions was the result of a growing confidence in the fighting qualities of the CEF and his determination to keep the Canadians together in one Canadian Corps. In any case, as a result of Currie's protests, all the Canadian divisions were returned to his command by July 1918.¹⁰²

After the German offensive was halted in April 1918, Currie received orders from Haig to prepare his troops for a major offensive later that year. As a consequence of Haig's plans, the Canadians were taken off the line in May. According to Morton and Granatstein, Currie had great faith in the fighting abilities of the CEF and was convinced that Canadians were best served by Canadians. During the summer of 1918, he argued for the establishment of special Canadian squadrons in the RFC to assist his corps in the upcoming battles.¹⁰³ One of the benefits of this new and unique "all-arms" corps cohesion was that, in the period from May until almost the end of July, the CEF received complete respite from the fighting.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰² Granatstein and Morton, *Marching*, 197.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

¹⁰⁴ For planning and preparations of the battle of Amiens see Schreiber, *Shock Army*, 35-47. Schreiber has pointed out that the Canadian Brigades consisted of four battalions instead of the BEF's three. Like an army, the Canadian Corps also controlled its own artillery. See also Brereton Greenhouse, "It was Mainly A Canadian Battle: The Decision at Amiens, 8-11 August 1918," *Canadian Defense Quarterly* 18 (1988): 73-80 and Daniel Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1987)

Unfortunately, this long period of rest came to an end by August 1918. From the battle of Amiens, 8 August 1918, until 11 November, the Canadian Corps would be almost constantly engaged in fierce battles with the enemy. Unlike previous battles, progress was swift. The CEF was constantly on the move. Private Robert John Connors, a locomotive engineer from Montreal, explained to his aunt how fast the Canadians were moving and how pleased he was with the progress.

We are having quite a time of it just now as the lads up forward are moving very fast and holy smokes we have to keep on the hop night and day to keep up with them but a fellow don't mind putting in all his time when things are going like they are now. The news must make great reading for the people at home. It is only to be hoped that the whole thing will be finished some of these days and then it will only be a short time till we will be able to get home and see some of our loved ones at home.¹⁰⁵

During the battle of Amiens the Canadians moved eight miles forward on the first day alone, before their advance finally came to a halt.¹⁰⁶ The CEF's next target, the Drocourt-Queant line, proved to be a more difficult obstacle, and it was not until 3 September, after the Germans had decided to withdraw behind the Canal du Nord, that the Canadians managed to take their objectives. After a few weeks respite from the

¹⁰⁵ Private Robert John Connor, letter to his aunt, 4 November 1918. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=2683&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=183> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹⁰⁶ Schreiber, *Shock Army*, 47-56

fighting, the CEF divisions attacked again on the 27 October and, because of thorough preparations, managed to cross the Canal du Nord relatively quickly. After Cambrai was liberated on 9 October, the CEF advanced to Valenciennes before they crossed the border into Belgium on the way to Mons. On 11 November at Mons, the Canadians received news that the war was finally over.¹⁰⁷

Although the CEF gained a lot of ground during the Hundred Days, it also sustained heavy losses, and it is possible that Canadian soldiers, as Morton and Granatstein suggest, called Currie a glory seeker behind his back, even though there is little evidence for this in the sources.¹⁰⁸ CEF soldiers generally seem to have been aware of the fact that their hard earned reputation as “shock troops of empire” would likely cause them to spend more time on the attack. As early as May 1915, weeks after Second Ypres, Captain Donald Mackenzie Moore indicated to a friend that the CEF’s new battle reputation was likely to put them in the next big fight. “The Canadian Division is now considered as good as the best, and I am afraid it is a bed [sic]

¹⁰⁷ For description of these battles see for example, Granatstein and Morton, *Marching*, chapter IX and Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, chapters, XII, XIV, XV.

¹⁰⁸ Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 228. After the war Currie was accused in the press of ordering the attack on Mons to enhance his own personal reputation. The case was later dismissed See Barbara Wilson “The road to the Cobourg Court Room: New Material From The Archives of the Canadian War Museum on the Sir Arthur Currie- Sir Sam Hughes Dispute, 1918-19,” *Canadian Military History* 10, no. 3 (2001): 67-73.

reputation to have as they are sure to put us in the next big fight.”¹⁰⁹ Also writing in 1915, Corporal Roy Mcfie explained to his brother, Arthur, who was still farming in Canada, that he was proud to be a CEF soldier, even though the Canadian soldier had become the Allies’ work horse.

If I was at home and heard about the good name the Canadians had I would want to be there too[.] Old Sir John French says this Division is one of his best, so he always uses them in a bad place[.] But nobody wants to come here and think it is fun, there are hundreds of men ruined for life that never got a wound, their nerves play out.¹¹⁰

That many Canadian soldiers viewed themselves as seasoned professionals by the time of the Hundred Days campaign is also evident from the diary of Captain Alfred Andrews. After Vimy and Second Ypres, Andrews expressed little excitement about having been in a successful battle. With the excitement gone, the only thing that mattered was getting the job done without letting anyone down.

At 4.15 AM Aug 8 the Batt. went over the top in the battle of Amiens. As Q.M. I was left out and stayed at the transport but Q.M.'s job in a show is a tougher one than in trench warfare. You never know where your unit is but you must get the rations up. I was

¹⁰⁹ Captain Donald Mackenzie Moore, letter to Don, 11 May 1915 <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1752&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=137> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹¹⁰ Corporal Roy Mcfie, letter to his brother Arthur, 22 August 1915, in *Letters*, ed. J. Mcfie, 39.

pretty tired and my nerves were about worn out over the worry of the job.¹¹¹

Lieutenant Maurice Pope's letter to his father, written in September 1918, displayed the same pride in the CEF's professionalism. Pope told his father how proud he was to be a member of the CEF. "It is a privilege to belong to this magnificent corps, which invariably does its job in such a finished and business like manner."¹¹² Gunner L.H. Eyres, a teller at the Canadian Bank of Commerce, wrote about the wonderful barrage of the artillery that made everything "run like clockwork", a sign that the thorough Canadian preparations were paying off.¹¹³

Missing from all these first-hand battle descriptions are the strong Canadian undertones, so present in the accounts of Vimy and Second Ypres. Conceivably, the lack of reference to the Hundred Days as another important milestone for Canada can be explained by pointing to the CEF soldiers' professionalism and tremendous self

¹¹¹ Captain Alfred Herbert John Andrews, diary 8 August 1918
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=8090&warid=3&docid=2&collectionid=328> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹¹² Lieutenant Maurice Pope, letter to his father, 6 September 1918, in *Letters*, ed. J. Pope, 132.

¹¹³ Gunner L.H. Eyres, letter, 27 September 1918, in Foster, ed., *Letters*, 299. Before the war Eyres was employed as a bank clerk.

confidence.¹¹⁴ In his diary, Private Swanston portrayed the battle of Amiens as the biggest advance of the war, yet only made reference to Canada once.

“The Canadians went over the “Top” yesterday morning, there was a heavy fog but the weather was quite warm. About 500 “tanks” went with them, followed by the cavalry, it was the biggest advance of the war. All kinds of war material was captured and many of the captured guns were turned around and fired on the retreating enemy.¹¹⁵

Like Swanston, Captain V. Curran showed little surprise about the outcome of the battle for Amiens. In his opinion, the Canadians had merely lived up to their standard both in preparations, as well as execution.

So far I have managed to keep my head down, and am feeling very fit. It is over fifteen months since I came back a second time, and I am getting in need of a rest. As you will have observed from the papers, the Corps have [*sic*] just taken another very successful crack at Fritz, gathering in about 8,000 prisoners and numerous guns both large and small. It was a wonderful show in every way, and it did

¹¹⁴ Because the battles during the last three months of the war took place in rapid succession the argument could be made that soldiers had little time to write about their achievements. Although soldiers most likely had less time to write between battles, a substantial number of Canadian soldiers made mention of their victories in letters, diaries and letters. The tone of the sources is remarkably subdued compared to accounts of Vimy and Second Ypres.

¹¹⁵ Private Victor Swanston, diary 9 August 1918, in *Who Said War is Hell*, ed. Burgess, 51.

our hearts good to see the cavalry go through. All branches did wonderful work, and the flying men completely controlled the air. Our casualties were not heavy, considering, and most of the wounds were good clean machine-gun bullets. The work done by the whole Corps was well up to the standard already set, which will be sufficiently explanatory to give you an idea of the show.¹¹⁶

Curran's letter seems to suggest that, ever since the victory at Vimy, CEF successes needed no further explanation. Perhaps, in his mind, the adjective "Canadian" had become synonymous with victory.

That the Vimy victory had heightened the confidence of CEF soldiers well before the Hundred Days is evident from two letters written in the fall and summer of 1917. Writing two months after Vimy, Sergeant Raymond Ellsworth Ives, from Northumberland County, Ontario, explained what the battle had done for the Canadians. "In many ways we are very content and happy – We are confident of victory and each added success helps greatly. We are in the best of it and it gives us a great deal of pleasure to know that we are better than the German gunners."¹¹⁷ After Vimy, Lieutenant John Newton, a civil engineer by trade, was equally confident that the Canadians could handle any job that was sent their way. In a letter to his wife he wrote: "It certainly has been strenuous, but as usual the Canadian Corps has turned

¹¹⁶ Captain V. Curran, letter 18 August 1918, in Foster, ed., *Letters*, 291.

¹¹⁷ Sergeant Raymond Ellsworth Ives, letter to his aunt, 17 June 1917. <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=6042&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=222> [accessed 1 April 2008].

chaos into order and have successfully performed the tasks allotted to them, which tasks you will have seen mentioned in the newspaper.”¹¹⁸

Even if for a considerable number of veteran CEF soldiers the Hundred Days campaign was not nearly as thrilling as Second Ypres or Vimy, the battle of Amiens clearly excited Private Bertram Cox. In a letter written less than a week after Amiens, Cox, who enlisted in March 1916 and only made it to France in September 1917, conveyed to his brothers that he was dying to see some of the headlines in the New York papers; “I’ll bet that there’s no less than three inch type being used. I’d like to be able to tell you all about the details, but will do my best to explain the main points.”¹¹⁹ Although not exactly a rookie, Captain H.E. Tylor was almost equally excited. Writing one day after the battle of Amiens, he proclaimed 8 August 1918 as “the greatest day of the war.”¹²⁰

Memoirs published after the war not only recalled Amiens as the greatest day of the war, but also as the beginning of the end. In *From Batman to Brigadier*, published in the 1960s, Lieutenant Arthur Leo Barry wrote that in the last hundred days of the war the CEF “formed the spearhead of a drive from the North Sea to Switzerland to

¹¹⁸ Lieutenant John Newton, letter to his wife, 7 November 1917.
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=7605&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=310> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹¹⁹ Private Bertram Howard Cox, letter to Carl, Herbert and Murrill, 13 August 1918.
<http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1012&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=115> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹²⁰ Captain H.E. Tylor, letter 9 August 1918, in Foster, ed., *Letters*, 290.

finish the war on November the 11th. . . The drive was the longest made by any of the Allied Armies on the Western Front up to that time, equaled only by the great German drive of the previous March which smashed the British 5th Army and nearly got to Paris.”¹²¹ Writing less than a year after the war, Signaler Breckenridge summed up what an important contribution the CEF had made during the last three months of the war.

The achievements of the Canadian Corps rank second to none in the allied armies. In the last hundred days of the war the Canadian Corps was more prominent in the fighting than any other body of its size. During the time between the 8th day of August, the day our great offensive commenced, and the Armistice Day, November 11th, the Canadian Corps fought the Boche continuously, defeating approximately over 50 German Divisions, or nearly 25% of the total German Forces on the Western front. The captured totalled about 35,000 prisoners; more than 750 pieces of field and heavy artillery, and thousands of machine guns. The Corps advanced to the depth of about 100 miles, fighting every inch, liberating more than 100 towns and villages, representing a population of a bout 350,000 French and Belgian civilians, who were freed from the bondage of the Boche.¹²²

Despite relying rather heavily on war histories and press accounts to supply their readers with specific details of the Hundred Days, the message of these memoirs is clear. The CEF had begun the war as an amateur army, but Canadian soldiers had

¹²¹ A.L. Barry, *Batman to Brigadier* (Newcastle, NB, 1965), 16, 17

¹²² Breckenridge, *From Vimy*, 247. See also Inglis, *Reminiscences*, 92; Richard H. Adamson, *All for Nothing* (Kansas City, MS: R.H. Adamson, 1987), 213-214; Spear, *Carry On*, 65; Savage, *And So We Joined*, 111 and Frost, *Fighting Men*, 137.

quickly learned their trade, and, as a result, the performance of the Canadian Corps had been second to none.

When discussing the impact of Second Ypres, Vimy, Passchendaele, and the Hundred Days on the construction of a CEF “corps identity,” many soldier sources reveal the importance Canadian troops placed on these battles. Participation in major engagements not only validated their service and provided them with a sense of accomplishment, but also enhanced the image of the CEF, making sure that its hardships and sacrifices would never be forgotten. However, while soldiers were proud of the professionalism of the CEF, they also realized that, no matter how thorough the training and preparations, major battles meant major casualties. With the benefit of hindsight, Sergeant Charles Savage, who had enlisted in July 1915, realized that the last three months of the war more often resembled the bloody failure of the Somme than the success of Vimy. In 1936, almost twenty years after the war, he came to the realization that the soldiers had been mere pawns in a game.

It seemed to us that the Staff had completely forgotten the strategy of Amiens and was reverting to the old methods of the Somme. Men were thrown almost in masse formation against positions defended by hundred of machine guns. The results were bloody in the extreme. Now we know that the Allies were making a desperate, and as it proved a successful attempt at ending the war before winter set in and that almost nothing counted but time. A perfect explanation, but cold comforts to the pawns in the game.¹²³

¹²³ Savage, *And So We Joined*, 112.

Despite Savage's bitter criticism, most letters, diaries, and memoirs written by CEF soldiers are clear indications that the idea of war as a glorious and noble undertaking survived the Great War. This renders Jonathan Vance's conclusion that high diction and romantic imagery were used to create a positive legacy in Canada even more credible. Rather than focus on the futility of war, journalists, writers and artists focused on what had been achieved, creating a "myth of the war experience" for Canada. However, while war books and monuments are an indication that Vance's assumption is a plausible way to explain the strength of this myth, there is another way to explain why this concept was so widely accepted. The fact that many CEF soldiers were convinced that their contributions on the battlefields of Europe had, indeed, helped to enlarge Canada's reputation on the world stage not only strengthened the myth: it also helped create it. The formation of a "corps identity," based on the CEF's success on the Western Front, was not a deliberate attempt by soldiers to create a romantic and glorified version of the war. Ian Miller's assumption that Torontonians never had a need to create a "myth of the war experience" because they simply remembered their experience, "memorializing glory and grief," seems equally true for the CEF.¹²⁴ While a substantial number of Canadian soldiers were quite willing to describe the horrors of the trenches, they preferred to portray themselves as victors, rather than as victims, of an industrial war.

¹²⁴ Miller, *Our Glory*, conclusion.

When the CEF left Canada it was an army only in name. While the 'wild colonials' had initially been viewed with concern, four years of war had earned them respect and admiration. From the moment they set foot in the trenches, Canadian soldiers seem to have been imbued with an enormous confidence in their own abilities. For many young soldiers enlistment had been a rite of passage, and the CEF's rowdy reputation, in combination with its success in battle, created a unit loyalty that formed the basis for the CEF soldier's strong sense of Canadian identity. Although exciting, Second Ypres only proved what many of the troops already knew. Where the CEF had begun the war as a dominion force, it was the efforts of the soldiers on the battlefield that had turned the Canadian Corps into Canada's first national army.

By the time the First Division was sent to the front in 1915, soldiers had begun to realize that Canadians at home were watching their every move. Couched in romantic imagery and high diction, Second Ypres formed the stepping stone for Canada's strong battlefield reputation later in the war. Battle accounts written during or shortly after Vimy Ridge built on this reputation. They suggest that soldiers not only remembered the battle as one of the greatest events of their lives, but also as an important event for Canada. Furthermore, these first-hand accounts often made reference to the fact that Vimy was a true Canadian victory, as all four Canadian divisions had been involved in the battle. The fact that by war's end still almost forty percent of all CEF soldiers were of British birth seems to have had little influence on

the legacy of Vimy. On the contrary, most British-born soldiers seem to have been quite at home in the CEF, indicating the strength of the Corp's collective identity.

Perceptually, the other major Canadian battles of the First World War pale in comparison to Vimy and Second Ypres. Many Canadian soldiers seem to agree that, although they were proud of their achievements, the price of victory at Passchendaele was so high that there was little to celebrate. When the Canadians were called upon to hold the line during Second Ypres, it was their real entry in the war, while at Vimy they succeeded where the French and British had failed. When the Canadians began their attack near Amiens they had been tried and tested. Perhaps this is why they expressed little surprise at the speed of their progress. It was as if they had become accustomed to their success.

According to the "myth of the war experience" it was the Canadian citizen-soldier who had made an important contribution to the war effort. Canadians had dropped their own business to come to the aid of the empire and in the process had achieved nation status. Because Canadian soldiers were citizen-soldiers, literature published after the war often portrayed the CEF as a more democratic army. The Canadian soldier may have lacked discipline, but only as a result of his resourcefulness and penchant for initiative. Based on Canada's harsh climate, CEF soldiers were also expected to be much better equipped for the hardships of trenches. While historians have recently dismissed this stereotype as mythical, the extent to which Canadian soldiers believed themselves to fit the "frontier" mould has never been analyzed.

Chapter 4, Frontier Energy in the Trenches ¹

By November 1918, after four long years of war, the CEF had distinguished itself as one of the finest fighting formations on the Western Front.² Historical narratives published during the war often explained the CEF's combat effectiveness by pointing to the 'outdoor' or 'frontier skills' of the Canadian soldier.³ Based on the assumption that Canada was a 'frontier dominion', this stereotype suggested that soldiers, who had lived an outdoor life and were familiar with hunting, trapping, and fire arms, stood a better chance of surviving the hardships of the trenches. At the same time, the CEF's social composition was thought to reflect Canada's pioneer past and less rigid social structure. As a result of this 'outdoor' and more egalitarian upbringing, Canadian soldiers were considered to be more resourceful, independent of thought, and capable of taking the initiative when circumstances so required. Although the popular image of the CEF as an army of outdoorsmen owes more to myth than reality, the role Canadian soldiers played in creating and sustaining the stereotype is less well understood.

¹ "Frontier energy in the trenches" is how Arthur Lower portrayed Canada's Great War effort in 1946. Lower, *Colony*, 455.

² See Schreiber, *Shock Army*, conclusion; Tim Cook, "'A Proper Slaughter': The March 1917 Gas Raid at Vimy Ridge," *Canadian Military History* 8, no. 2 (1999): 21; Rawling, *Surviving*, 215-223 and Andrew B. Godefroy, "A Lesson in Success: The Calonne Trench Raid, 17 January 1917," *Canadian Military History* 8, no.2 (1999): 25.

³ See for example, Aitken, *Canada in Flanders*; Tucker, *Canada's Glory*; MacKenzie, *Through the Hindenburg Line* and Howard-Smith, *Thrilling Stories*.

Soldiers' sources provide evidence that a "frontiersman" layer was added to the CEF's "corps identity" during the war, at least in part by the troops themselves. To understand this fully, we need to look at how Canadians soldiers wrote about themselves, as well as at what they had to say about the soldierly qualities of troops around them. Evidence suggests that these comparisons not only defined the stereotype, but also helped popularize the CEF's "corps identity" amongst Canadian soldiers serving overseas.

Probably the first time Canadians were able to read about the CEF's 'frontier' stereotype was in September 1915. In a publication titled, *With the First Canadian Contingent*, Mary Plumer described an incident reflective of the CEF's outdoor spirit.

Significant, too of the difference 'twixt Old-World ways and New was an amusing incident which occurred to a Montreal regiment the morning of their arrival. To men, many of whom had roamed trackless forests and been as free as the wild creatures therein, the sacredness of an English tree was news. Therefore great was the horror and indignation of the owner when a number of chaps, equipped with axes, sallied joyously forth to a near-by grove and proceeded to chop down firewood, as had always been their custom in first making camp.⁴

While the image of the Canadian soldier as a somewhat boorish 'bush man' is amusing, it is also predominantly mythical. In *Death So Noble*, Jonathan Vance notes

⁴ Plumer, ed., *With the First Contingent*, 34.

that the CEF has always been portrayed as an army of outdoorsmen, not one of city dwellers, even though large numbers of Canadian volunteers came from urban areas.⁵ Likewise, Desmond Morton and Jack Granatstein agree that the image of the CEF as an army of outdoorsmen is problematic. According to them, more than one third of all CEF recruits came from urban manufacturing, construction and labouring jobs. Trappers, farmers, and miners accounted for less than twenty-five percent of all volunteers.⁶ If we keep in mind that at least seventy percent of the First Contingent consisted of British-born soldiers and that by war's end this number was still almost forty percent, this Canadian 'frontier' stereotype becomes even harder to defend.⁷ So, if the CEF was more urban than popular histories would have us believe, why did Canadians buy into it?

It is obvious that the "frontier" stereotype was an emphatically masculine identity, and as such it is not surprising that this masculine aspect became an important part of the CEF's "corps identity." As early as the South African war Canadians had come to see their soldiers as taller, sturdier and more resourceful, clearly a result of Canada's northern heritage. By once again connecting Canada's frontier past with Christian ideals of morality and manliness the stereotype became extremely appealing to

⁵ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 138.

⁶ Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 52.

⁷ Sharpe, "Enlistment," 9, 10.

soldiers of the CEF.⁸ The belief that colonials were better soldiers was not solely confined to Canada.⁹ In his work on the development of the war's national memory throughout the empire, Mark Sheftall suggests that Canadian and Australian troops had good reason to accept the mythical interpretations of their war service. "By emphasizing the superior military qualities of their soldiers, Australians and Canadians could escape the unflattering stereotypes pinned on them by the 'adherents of the Metropole's superiority.'"¹⁰ According to Sheftall, both dominions' soldiers came from rugged and inhospitable climates where, unlike Britain, leadership was given to those who had the ability to lead, not to those who could socially claim this power.¹¹ During the course of the war, Australians and Canadians became increasingly proud of their dominion's achievements. In this context, the rugged and egalitarian character of the Colonial soldier was often exaggerated.

In general, popular histories of the war perceived trench warfare as an individualistic affair, in which the initiative and drive of the ordinary soldier would carry the day.¹² In "Sir Max Aitken and the Canadian War Records Office," Tim Cook

⁸ Carman Miller, *Canada's Little War: Fighting for the British Empire in Southern Africa* (Toronto: James Lorimer & Company).

⁹ See C.E.W Bean, *Gallipoli Correspondent: The Front Line Diary of C.E.W. Bean*, selected and annotated by Kevin Fewster (Sydney: G. Allen & Unwin, 1983), 153.

¹⁰ Sheftall, "Glories," 18.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, conclusion.

¹² See for example Robin Prior, "The Heroic Image of the Warrior in the First World War," *War & Society* 23 (2005): 43, 44 and Omer Bartov, *Murder in Our Midst: The*

writes: “The Canadians were lauded as natural soldiers who through their Northern heritage and innate abilities as hunters and backwoodsmen had qualities that, when combined with their adventurous colonial mindsets and their pioneer disdain for discipline, produced brilliant battlefield performances.”¹³ However, once they had arrived at the front, Canadians found themselves in a war in which discipline and technology were more important than marksmanship and independence of thought.

Even if the majority of CEF soldiers had grown up in Canada’s vast outdoors, the notion that these soldiers had an advantage over those from urban areas has been rejected by a number of historians. Both Joanna Bourke and Ian Beckett have recently argued that it was the average British Tommy from an industrial town who was best equipped for this new industrialized war.¹⁴ With regards to the CEF, Canadian historian Bill Rawling concludes that the Great War changed the CEF from an amateur force into an army of specialized professionals. “The Canadian Corps thus moved away from the concept of the citizen-soldier who could ride and shoot to an army of technicians which, even in the infantry battalions, specialized in particular aspects of fighting battles.”¹⁵

Holocaust, Industrial Killing and Representation (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 15-24.

¹³ Tim Cook, “Documenting War,” 267.

¹⁴ Bourke, *Intimate History of Killing*, chapter 2 and 3 and Beckett, *Great War*, chapter 9.

¹⁵ Rawling, *Surviving*, 217.

Despite evidence to the contrary, the idea that dominion soldiers were better equipped to withstand the hardships of the trenches has remained popular. In Australia, the image of the tall, strong, independent, and resourceful soldier has not only influenced the way in which Australians remember the Great War, but also the way in which they view the birth of their own nation. According to Dale Blair, the Australian “digger” stereotype has become the embodiment of the Australian nation.

The digger stereotype that emerged during the war and cemented itself in the nation’s post-war iconography remains with us today. The image of course, is singularly masculine. According to the nation’s myth-makers the ‘digger’ was an uncomplicated common man whose behaviour was regulated by a simple set of values. Paramount among these was his desire for a ‘fair go’ and his willingness to stick by his mates. This notion of mateship was to become a powerful ideal for those propagating a distinct Australian character. So much so that Prime Minister John Howard could seriously consider the term ‘mateship’ as reasonable and worthy for inclusion in a proposed preamble to the Australian Constitution.¹⁶

Blair’s reference to ‘mateship’ and a ‘fair go’ is an indication that many Australians viewed the AIF as a more democratic and egalitarian army. Despite David Cannadine’s suggestion that elites in the dominions were perhaps more British than the British themselves and strongly resisted change to the existing social system, Blair is convinced that many Australian nationalists welcomed the war as the ‘great

¹⁶ Blair, *Dinkum Diggers*, 1, 2.

leveler.’¹⁷ Since the latter half of the nineteenth century, Australian nationalists had harboured the idea that Australia was a less class-conscious society. According to Blair, this idea received a boost when war broke out in 1914.¹⁸ Yet, while the war may have been welcomed as the great leveler, the AIF was not nearly as egalitarian as “Digger” historians, such as C.E.W. Bean, Australia’s official war historian, would have us believe. In a case study of the First Battalion AIF, Blair suggests that, when it came to obtaining a commission, class was substantially more important than frontline or frontier experience.¹⁹

Despite Blair’s comments to the contrary, the assumption that dominion armies were more egalitarian in nature remained popular in Canada during the war.

¹⁷ See David Cannadine, *Ornamentalism: How the British Saw Their Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 40 and Blair, *Dinkum Diggers*, 18. Despite its popularity, the ‘digger myth’ has been subject to much criticism since the 1980s. For a brief summary of the work of revisionist historians that challenge the ‘digger myth’ and the outrage they provoked see Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 215-221. According to Thomson it was Bean, not the soldiers, who created the ill disciplined, but resourceful version of the Anzac digger that became so prevalent after the war. Even though “the digger myth” changed over time “the legend has always worked to construct a ‘typical Anzac’ or a ‘genuine digger’ and, in turn, to render aberrant experiences and identities as alien, atypical and un-Australian.”

¹⁸ Blair, *Dinkum Diggers*, 18.

¹⁹ According to Blair, more than fifty of the First Battalion officers came from clerical or professional backgrounds and there were very few soldiers who had a “bush” background. Less than eight percent of the enlisted men came from rural backgrounds and only amongst the sergeants and the junior officers was this number slightly higher. While these figures imply that “the independence of thought, often associated with rural occupations, was viewed as a valuable attribute for the selection of section leaders”, they only account for a very small number of the battalion’s soldiers. See Dale Blair, *Dinkum Diggers*, chapter 1, especially p.24.

According to Tim Cook, popular literature rarely emphasized the similarities between the British and Canadian troops. "Instead, the notion of a democratic army was highlighted over and over again: amateurs and civilians who had voluntarily joined to fight for the empire and drive the militaristic German professionals from the field of battle."²⁰ Whether working-class Canadians, the majority of all CEF soldiers, viewed the war in the same light is difficult to determine. Labour historians have generally focussed more on the role soldiers played in post-war strikes and riots, than on their participation in the war.

In "The Great War, The State, and Working-Class Canada," Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki suggest that the Trades and Labour Congress (TLC) of Canada supported the war in hopes of enhancing unions' legitimacy with the government.²¹ Although volunteers often used enlistment as a chance to better their economic situation, few soldiers seem to have viewed the war as a chance to strengthen working-class awareness.²² In many ways, the war years signified a step backwards for the labour movement, and it was only after the war that this idea of entitlement started to play a role in the soldiers' demand for a fair go.²³

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki, "The Great War, the State, and Working-Class Canada," in *The Workers' Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925*, ed. Craig Heron (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), 30.

²² See Chapter 1.

²³ Bryan Palmer, *Working-Class Experience: The Rise and Reconstitution of Canadian Labour, 1800-1980* (Toronto: Butterworth, 1983), 170.

According to Chad Reimer, returned soldiers joined the Winnipeg General strike because they felt betrayed by the ruling classes. Reimer centres his argument on Eric Leed's assertion that soldiers, who had exchanged their individual self-interest for the benefit of the nation, would demand restitution for their sacrifices. As long as civilians and soldiers suffered equally from the war, most CEF troops would be content to forgo restitution.²⁴ However, when they returned to Canada many working-class soldiers were incensed to find that factory owners and profiteers had grown rich out of the war, while they were out of jobs, out of housing, and often struggling to survive. Thus, it is not surprising that working-class entitlement became an important motive for some returned soldiers to participate in post-war strikes and protests. Yet, despite participation in these later protests, during the war the soldiers' main objective was always to defeat the Germans. The fact that the CEF was considered a less class-conscious and more egalitarian army seems to have made it easier for these working-class soldiers to accept the 'frontier' soldier stereotype and to identify with the CEF's "corps identity" as a whole.

According to Maria Tippett, it is not surprising that many Canadians soldiers interpreted their war effort in the light of Canada's "frontier" past. In "Expressing Identity," she suggests that even "[s]outhern Canadians have long thought of

²⁴ Chad Reimer, "War, Nationhood and Working-Class Entitlement: The Counter Hegemonic Challenge of the 1919 Winnipeg General Strike," *Prairie Forum* 18, no. 2 (1993): 223. Suffering in this case does not have to be physical suffering, but could also be loss of profits or loss of wages.

themselves as a northern people living in close proximity to the wilderness; yet most of them live in cities that are located within three hundred kilometers of the Canadian-American border.”²⁵ Tippet explains this phenomenon by pointing to the mythical importance Canadian artists gave to Canada’s vast wilderness, early in the twentieth century. That this ‘close proximity to the wilderness’ played a role in the way in which some CEF soldiers constructed a collective identity is evident from Major Peter Anderson’s 1920 memoir. According Anderson, soldiers who had not experienced the Canadian north personally could still be imbued with the spirit of a pioneer nation. In Anderson’s words, it was Canada’s pioneer’s spirit that was responsible for the Canadian soldiers’ self reliance and independence of thought.

While there is no choice between the Imperial, Canadian and other Colonial soldiers as to moral courage, when it comes to initiative and resourcefulness the Canadian leads them all. Being pioneers or sons of pioneers in a new country where everyone must learn to shift for himself. [*sic*] Self reliance is the natural consequence, hence their superiority in this respect.²⁶

²⁵ Maria Tippet, “Expressing Identity,” *The Beaver* 80, no. 1 (February/ March 2000): 18.

²⁶ Pete Anderson, *I That’s Me: Escape from German Prison Camp and Other Adventures* (Edmonton: Bradburn Printers), 173.

The notion that Canada was, indeed, a nation of pioneers is also evident from the memoir of Captain, later Lieutenant-Colonel, D.E. Macintyre. Writing in the 1960s, Macintyre, an insurance salesman from Montreal, showed how Canada's alleged "pioneer spirit" was instrumental in the creation of the CEF's "corps identity." Even though Macintyre was aware that the CEF had become an army of specialists, his memoir, *Canada at Vimy*, emphasized the importance of specific 'frontier skills' Canadian soldiers had brought to the trenches. According to Macintyre, Canadian soldiers' penchant for initiative and independence of mind was a direct result of their experience with hunting, fishing and farming, and had gone a long way in turning the CEF into one of the most effective fighting machines on the Western Front.

While one could argue that Macintyre's work was coloured by memoirs and other war-related publications, he does offer as a useful insight into the whole 'frontier' issue. In his memoir, he construes "outdoorsmen" in a broader way than the lumberjack, trapper, and farmer type envisaged by Aitken. He also goes beyond Vance's use of the term. In the eyes of Macintyre, soldiers with an urban background had made important contributions to the war. "Mechanics made excellent machine gunners and artillery men, while others, by reason of better educations became the officers, the N.C.O.'s and specialists needed in the army."²⁷ Yet, on the same page, Macintyre emphasized the many special skills Canadians had learned in Canada's vast outdoors.

²⁷ D.E. Macintyre, *Canada At Vimy* (Toronto: P. Martin Associates), 29.

Many thousands of our men came from the farms and forests of our country and joined other thousands released from railway, mining, bridge-building and other major construction projects in the wilds of Canada, and their skills were invaluable. Their vocations had trained them to improvise and look out for themselves, and as the war was a job of constructions (tunnelling, ditch digging, road making, rail laying) with intervals of life and death struggles to impose their will on the enemy, they were in their element.²⁸

Although actual outdoor experience was an important factor in the creation of a CEF stereotype, Macintyre also alluded to the fact that even soldiers who had not actually worked or lived in Canada's outdoors were, at some point in time, influenced by it. While perhaps not wholly convincing, Macintyre's definition expands the stereotype, allowing more soldiers to fit the mould.²⁹

For example, when asked to lead a newly commissioned scout section, Macintyre knew he was the right man for the job. "I was no backwoodsman, but I had some years of experience with survey parties in Canada's north-country, could use a compass and loved to draw maps."³⁰ On a similar note, Scotland-born Sergeant Frank MacDonald was convinced that his experience in Canada's North had helped him to escape a

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ In his 1916 memoir Curry recalled how an editorial in the *Times* portrayed the Canadians as pioneers and back-woodsmen. "This provoked much comment, but the writer for one was not greatly distressed, for he had been born within sound of the shrill of a sawmill . . ." Although Curry was a pharmaceutical chemist by trade, it was his place of birth in rural Haliburton, Ontario, that allowed him to identify with the CEF's popular image. See Curry, *St. Lawrence*, 160.

³⁰ Macintyre, *Canada at Vimy*, 10.

German prisoner of war camp. In 1918 his adventures found their way to the Canadian public in the form of a memoir. "The experience I had had in the Canadian bush and in the north country before the war stood me in good stead now and we made excellent headway, shaping our course most of the time by the stars."³¹ Once again, it was a sense of connection with Canada's wilderness that let many CEF soldiers, whatever their place of birth, share in the CEF's 'frontier' image.

While MacDonald used the navigational skills he had learned in the Canadian bush, Major Anderson recalled how his experience as a hunter had aided his 1915 escape from a German prison camp. In fact, escaping past the sentries had been a piece of cake compared to big game hunting. "As to the distance [to the neutral Netherlands] this was only a matter of time. As to the sentries, moose and deer hunting is much harder than that as the sentry cannot smell and hear like a moose or other wild animals. Some said it was easier for me to escape"³² Experience with hunting also came in handy when Canadian soldiers ventured out into No Man's Land. Writing in 1918, Lieutenant Herbert McBride recalled how the Germans had put a flag up in their trenches and challenged the Canadians to come and get it. Even though crossing into the German lines was an extremely dangerous undertaking, one of McBride's machine-gunners ventured into No Man's Land, only to return with the flag in hand. "Lucky had been a big game hunter in Canada, however, and had even stalked the

³¹ MacDonald, *Kaiser's Guest*, 231.

³² Anderson, *I That's Me*, 160.

wily moose which is about the last word in 'still hunting', so he managed to negotiate the distance without detection and finally reached the flag."³³

The value some Canadian soldiers put on the CEF's 'outdoor skills', is also evident in the way in which they regarded native soldiers serving with them. Even though his narrative is laced with the stereotypical racial ideas of the time, Private William Millar of the 52nd Battalion, CEF, remembered how impressed he was with the native Canadians in his contingent. In the eyes of Millar, Private Belanger, a runner in his battalion who had received the Military Medal for work during the Ypres battle, "had all the characteristics of his race; quiet, very seldom speaking to anyone and he was never known to back out of any run he had to make with a message."³⁴ Overall, Millar thought the native soldiers to be "born fighters, every one of them – as trim in their dress as any old-time soldier, and ever ready for a fight."³⁵ Much like Millar, Lieutenant McBride was impressed with the quality of the native soldiers in his battalion. "We had several indians, [*sic*] there being two pairs of brothers, all from the same reservation, and all of them splendid soldiers."³⁶

³³ McBride, *Emma Gees*, 104. McBride had been a sniper before he was commissioned.

³⁴ William Chisholm Millar, *From Thunder Bay through Ypres with the Fighting 52nd* (Canada, 1918), 66.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ McBride, *The Emma Gees*, 205

Since most of the incidents described above are derived from memoirs, one could argue that these works were edited before they were published and that soldiers only became aware of the CEF's 'frontier' image after they had returned to Canada. However, material written during the war suggests that the 'frontier' stereotype was just as alive in the trenches as it was in Canada. Writing in April 1917, Lieutenant Clifford Wells tried to explain the nature and mindset of Canadian soldiers. After having had trouble riding a restless horse, Wells asked his batman to take it back to the transport lines. When his batman jumped on the horse, Wells immediately realized he was a perfect horseman. "Since then I have learned that he is the champion rider of Alberta and Saskatchewan and used to be in much demand to ride wild horses at 'stampedes i.e. horse fairs or riding competitions' in the west."³⁷ In the same letter, Wells pointed to the Northern character and outdoor professions of the soldiers serving under him. "You may be interested to know that most of the men in my platoon, as in the rest of the battalion, are farmers, ranchers, cowboys, trappers etc., from the far west and northwest, splendidly stalwart men, most of them . . ."³⁸

As early as September 1916, Private Ronald MacKinnon explained how the dominion's pioneer legacy had influenced British citizens' perceptions of Canada.

³⁷ Lieutenant Clifford Wells, letter to his mother, 5 April 1917, in *Montreal*, ed. Wallace, 301.

³⁸ Ibid.

It is surprising the number of people here who are ignorant of the nature of Canada. When we first came here the natives expected to see a lot of wild men. The first Sunday in church the minister said that he understood Canadians as he had lived in the colonies and that we were a “rough and ready” lot and not used to the big cities of this country (This city has a population of about 1000). This morning in his sermon he spoke out about our homesteads away out on the “rolling prairie” as if we were all farmers.³⁹

Although the suggestion that Canadians were not used to cities must have amused Toronto-born MacKinnon, he pointed out that CEF soldiers could always be counted on to embellish the stereotype: another indication that it was alive amongst CEF troops during the war. “And we” wrote MacKinnon “tell the ‘Tommies’ stories about wolves and bears and climbing up trees to sleep at night, so they must think we are a rough lot.”⁴⁰

Although MacKinnon admits to embellishing the stereotype, the degree to which a number of Canadian soldiers were willing to believe in the ‘Canadianess’ of their soldierly qualities is also apparent from the way in which baseball was used to explain their expertise in bombing enemy trenches. Speaking at the Empire Club in Toronto in January 1918, Major Wilfrid Mavor explained to his audience how soldiers were employed in sections where they could be of best use. “. . . A baseball player is put in

³⁹ Private Ronald MacKinnon, letter to his father, 10 September 1916 <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=7075&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=294> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁴⁰ Ibid.

the bombing section; he may be able to throw the bombs pretty well.”⁴¹ Writing in 1930, Will Bird assured his readers that throwing Mills bombs was easy for the Canadians, since most of them had played baseball before the war.⁴² Although there might be some truth in the fact that experienced Canadian baseball players possessed better arms and were able to throw bombs further, the same could probably be said of British soldiers who had played cricket.⁴³

The Canadian soldier stereotype was not based solely on the special Canadian skills CEF soldiers had acquired while hunting, trapping, and playing baseball. Historical works published during the war often emphasized that life in the outdoors, in combination with Canada’s less rigid social structure, had made Canadian soldiers self-reliant and independent of thought. Although it is not exactly clear what soldiers meant when they termed Canada a more egalitarian society, sources provide evidence that this concept had become an important element of the stereotype by the end of the war. Carl Berger suggests that the notion of Canada as a better educated and ‘freer’

⁴¹ Major Wilfrid Mavor, Speech, Empire Club Toronto, 31 January 1918, quoted in diary of Private Deward Barnes, in *It Made You*, ed. Cane, 3.

⁴² Bird, *And We Go On*, 36.

⁴³ According to Lieutenant Clifford Wells, the Mills bombs were too heavy to throw like a baseball and should be thrown more like a straight arm cricket delivery. Writing in 1916 from bombing school in England, Wells suggested that another “Canadian invention” would possibly be helpful to hurl the Mills bombs into the German trenches. “I think a lacrosse stick would be excellent for throwing them, but I suppose there is not enough room in the trenches to use one.” Lieutenant Clifford Wells, letter to his father, 8 February 1916, in *Montreal*, ed. Wallace, 72. See also Cook, *Sharp End*, 212.

society was initially popularized by the Canada First movement, well before the war.⁴⁴

By the time war broke out in August 1914, Canadian imperialists had come to view Canada as the leading dominion of empire, and, according to Berger, it was not surprising that this concept was used to explain and interpret the formation and successes of the CEF.⁴⁵ Although it is impossible to tell how many Canadians viewed Canada as the leading dominion of empire, according to Carman Miller, the South African war more than ten years earlier, had given Canadians the self-confidence to demand greater autonomy and self-reliance. Veterans from the war demanded that in the next war Canadian officers would command Canadian troops.⁴⁶

According to Jonathan Vance, this idea of Canada as the leading dominion of empire is plainly visible in popular histories of the war, which most-often depicted Canada as a young and vibrant nation.⁴⁷ In “Britishness, Canadianess, Class and Race: Winnipeg and the British World”, Kurt Korneski explains how this notion of “Canada First” became an important element of Canadian identity. Even though Canadians were fundamentally linked to the British Empire, their attitudes towards empire were often ambivalent. When elites spoke of Britishness they did not refer to British people or British society, but rather to Britain’s liberal institutions and, although these elites

⁴⁴ Berger, *Sense of Power*, 260-264.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Miller, *Canada’s Little War*, 88.

⁴⁷ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 147-151.

defined Britishness in liberal terms, they had no intention of building an effete Canadian replica. Rather, in the words of John W. Dafoe, Canada was to be the “most virile community of Anglo-Saxons in the world.”⁴⁸

If Canada was the most virile Anglo-Saxon dominion in the world, how was this idea transferred to the battlefields? In a booklet published for the American market, ex-CEF officer George Patullo explained in 1918 that, even though the British, Canadian, and American soldiers were all “of the same staunch breed”, the Canadian and American were the more skilled and resourceful soldiers. Based perhaps on the astounding Canadian success at Vimy, the former journalist claimed that: “The Canadian excels in initiative, new ideas and rapidity of action. Those are the products of his environment and social system, and they have played a tremendous part in his success in war.”⁴⁹ Like Patullo, Corporal Angus MacPhie was convinced that Canadian and American soldiers shared the same intelligence and resourcefulness. Writing his father in March 1918, MacPhie explained: “We expect a lot of the American troops. They should be on about a par with the Canadians and they are fresh.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Kurt Korneski, “Britishness, Canadianess, Class and Race: Winnipeg and the British World,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 41, no. 2 (2007): 167,168.

⁴⁹ George Patullo, “Fightin’ Sons of Guns,” *The Saturday Evening Post*, 10 November 1917.

⁵⁰ Corporal Angus Ernest MacPhie, letter to his father, 11 March 1918, in *Letters*, ed. H. MacPhie, 29. For similar sentiments see, McBride, *The Emma Gees*, 249 and Milsom, *Sunset*, 46.

That a substantial number of CEF soldiers considered themselves to be intelligent and resourceful fighters is apparent from letters, diaries, and memoirs written by those Canadians who served in the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). According to Lieutenant Stanley Rutledge, Canadians were in high demand, as “flying calls for initiative and other qualities which the chaps from overseas seem to possess to a high degree.”⁵¹ Writing shortly after the war, former RFC pilot T.D. Hallam recalled that flying was a stressful business, but that Canadians seemed to have the right skills for the job. “Canadians seemed to be best fitted for flying-boat work, and probably as high a proportion as three-fourths of the good boat pilots came from the Dominion.”⁵²

According to historian Brereton Greenhous, at least a quarter and possibly one third, of all RFC air crews serving on the Western Front were Canadian, a disproportionately high number when we compare the size of the CEF with that of the BEF.⁵³ With these numbers in mind, it is perhaps easier to understand why Canadian pilots were convinced that life in Canada had prepared them for service in the RFC. Yet, while Canadian pilots may have claimed that flying called for initiative and

⁵¹ Lieutenant Stanley Rutledge, letter home, 1 July 1917, in *Pen Pictures*, 137.

⁵² Hallam, *Spider Web*, 42.

⁵³ Greenhouse, Brereton, ed., *A Rattle of Pebbles: The First World War Diaries of Two Canadian Airmen* (Ottawa, Dept. of National Defence, 1987), xii. When Roderick MacLennan arrived in his first squadron in France he was surprised to find that more than half of the twenty-four officers in the squadron were Canadian. R.W. MacLennan, *The Ideals and Training of a Flying Officer: From the Letters and Journals of Flight Lieutenant R.W. MacLennan, R.F.C., Killed in France, 23rd December, 1917* (Canada, 1918), 48.

resourcefulness, Greenhous quickly points out that of all Canadian pilots more than half came from urban backgrounds, while a high percentage of these were white collar workers or students.⁵⁴ For pilots with an urban background, exposure to Canada's outdoor life had been very limited, and "it seems unlikely that their upbringing was significantly more rugged than that of their British peers."⁵⁵

Yet, even if the assumption that CEF soldiers were 'born' pilots had no real merit, Canadians could always count on outsiders to sustain this myth. According to Dr. Graeme Anderson, a British naval surgeon, pilots required a certain temperament: "The ideal aviator must have good judgment, be courageous, and not be upset by fear, although conscious of the perils of his work. He must be cool in emergencies, able to make careful and quick decisions and act accordingly."⁵⁶ Apart from being mentally challenging, flying was also physically demanding and, according to Anderson, Canadians had a physiological advantage over British pilots. Canadian men were accustomed to "a life in the open" and, as a result, they quickly grew accustomed to the cold air at flying altitude. "The man who coddles himself, who likes to live luxuriously, too warmly clothed, who shirks a cold dip in the mornings, is not the man

⁵⁴ Greenhous, *Rattle*, xiii.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Dr. H. Graeme Anderson, *The Medical and Surgical Aspects of Aviation* (London: H. Frowde, Oxford University Press, 1919) 17, quoted in Greenhous, *Rattle*, xii

who will stand the strain of exposure, or fly well on long-distance flights”⁵⁷

Anderson’s ideas were perhaps influenced by the fact that the majority of pilots were well educated, middle-or-upper-class soldiers, as the British working class could hardly be called coddled.

Because the CEF was more urban than rural, it is unlikely that Canadian troops were more rugged, or used to the outdoors, than their British counterparts. Even so, self-reliance and independence of thought, important elements of the CEF soldier stereotype, were often regarded a direct result of Canada’s frontier heritage. Writing in March 1917, Private McFarlane, from Dutton, Ontario, explained that the CEF’s success was a result of the Canadian soldier’s ability to care for himself without the help of officers.

During the Boer war the Canadian soldier always advancing – never retreating – instinctively taking advantage of every inch of cover, was a revelation to the British Tommy. So in this war the Canadian exhibits a spirit of self-reliance which stands him in good stead in

⁵⁷ Ibid., xiii. Of course not all post-war writings provide evidence that CEF soldiers’ resourcefulness and independence of mind was admired by non-Canadians. For example in *Other Days*, the 1976 memoir of Pilot-Officer, Verschoyle Cronyn, suggests that his British flight instructor cursed him for taking off after an aborted landing even though the move undoubtedly saved him and his instructor from serious injury. When Cronyn explained he had only been using his head to avoid serious injury the instructor “turned away muttering, ‘these damn Canadians’” emphasizing the notion that in his eyes all Canadians were undisciplined soldiers. Cronyn, *Other Days*, 23.

the trenches. He has been raised to stand on his own feet, not born a house-plant, sheltered from wind and weather.⁵⁸

The aspect of trench warfare which best showed CEF soldiers' potential for self-reliance was undoubtedly the trench raid. According to Tony Ashworth, trench raiding was designed by the British to stomp out the 'live and let live' system that had come into existence on the Western Front, but it was the Canadians who planned the first official raid in November 1915.⁵⁹ Lieutenant Frederick Curry was one of the first soldiers to make mention of trench raiding as a Canadian invention. In a 1916 memoir, Curry implied that trench life had become extremely monotonous. In order "to relieve the monotony of this sort of thing the Canadian Corps organized a series of night raids on the German trenches." Later in the war "it became quite the thing to take a few men out with you and bomb his trench."⁶⁰ While Ashworth has suggested that British soldiers were often reluctant to disturb the 'live and let live' system and had to be ordered out of the trenches, both Tim Cook and Desmond Morton point out that the

⁵⁸ Private MacFarlane, letter home, 1 March 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=4976&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=281> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Letter was first published in the *Dutton Advance*, spring 1917.

⁵⁹ John Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Key Porter Books, 1998), 82 and Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918 : The Live and Let Live System* (London: Macmillan, 1980), 73.

⁶⁰ Curry, *Saint Lawrence*, 129. For ideas on the monotony on trench warfare see also Macintyre, *Canada*, 28.

Canadians rarely had to be persuaded to undertake a raid.⁶¹ In *The Real Front*, Arthur Hunt Chute even suggested that Canadian soldiers were so proud of their ability to control No Man's Land they took to calling it "The Dominion of Canada."⁶²

Chute was also convinced that there was a close connection between the invention of the trench raid and the CEF soldier's capability to think for himself. Initially, very few soldiers ventured into No Man's Land, and it was not until the arrival of the Canadians that this policy changed; "Old heads were shaken, and serious faces looked askance, when these wild Canadians mentioned raiding. But thanks to these pioneers, we have a new departure in trench warfare and now raids are the regular order of the day."⁶³ The fact that many Canadians were such eager participants in trench raiding is not only an indication that there was plenty of morale and fighting spirit amongst CEF soldiers, but also that the troops self-identified with the stereotype. According to the diary of Captain Herbert Andrews, some Canadian soldiers were so eager to get at the Germans that they went on raids without asking permission from their officers.

"Fitzroy and Templeman tried a one man raid. They got into a German front line and cleaned out a post but had to get out quick and were badly cut getting thro [*sic*] the

⁶¹ Cook, "Proper Slaughter," 9 and Morton, *When Your Number*, 126. In his work on trench warfare, Tony Ashworth has argued that enthusiasm for trench raiding was much higher amongst the elite regiments of the BEF. Elite battalions liked to manage their own trench raids, but detested the raids implemented by high command to keep up the fighting spirit. Ashworth, *Trench Warfare*, 187.

⁶² Chute, *The Real Front*, 246.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

wire. It was an unofficial raid that couldn't be reported. Fitzroy knew no fear and was always doing some foolhardy stunt.”⁶⁴

For a number of CEF soldiers the trench raid appears to have been a sport in which they had a chance to showcase the Canadian soldierly qualities. In 1918 Sergeant Ralf Sheldon Williams remembered trench raiding as the most popular form of outdoor recreation during the war. “It [trench raiding] evoked the attributes of athlete, hunter, trapper, scout and all around good ‘sport’, on which the Canadian prides himself.”⁶⁵

On a similar note, Lieutenant Stanley Rutledge remembered the trench raid as an important feature of the war. “Some say the Canadians initiated this line of tactics. I am not sure they did, but at all events they are adepts at the game.”⁶⁶

Of course, not all CEF soldiers wrote enthusiastically about trench raids, especially since it was an extremely taxing and dangerous business in which many soldiers lost their lives. Looking back during the 1930s, Corporal John Harold Becker could not help but wonder what it had all been for? “. . . [H]owever it [trench raiding] was actually one of those many crazy ideas that cost us men and wore ourselves out. No one will ever convince me that the raid did us any good whatever.”⁶⁷ Writing in 1986,

⁶⁴ Captain Alfred Herbert John Andrews, diary, 14 March 1918, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=8090&warid=3&docid=2&collectionid=328> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁶⁵ Sheldon Williams, *In France*, 27.

⁶⁶ Rutledge, *Pen Pictures*, 24.

⁶⁷ Becker, *Memoir*, 69.

Richard H. Adamson remembered feeling relieved once he found out he was not included in the next scheduled raid. "I do have the job of watching the raiders to see how they are doing crawling towards the enemy lines. As I watch I see a [*sic*] enemy raiding party leaving his line and it looked to me that it was only a few minutes before both raiding parties would hit head on and they did."⁶⁸ Like Adamson, Gunner Bagnall was equally convinced that one trench raid was enough for any soldier. About the Seventh battalion raid of 1916 he wrote in 1933: "... The Seventh battalion (British Columbia) made the first successful raid with very limited objectives. But it was raid enough for those who took part in it. History is more fiction and wishful thinking than fact. It depends too much on the writer."⁶⁹ While the narratives of Bagnall, Anderson and Becker form a strong contrast to those written by Andrews, Rutledge and Chute, as well as the assumption that some Canadians liked raiding, we have to keep in mind that these negative recollections were published long after the war. Perhaps it was not until the 1930s that ex-soldiers finally reconsidered and questioned whether it had all been worth it.⁷⁰

In general, memoirs published long after the war portrayed CEF soldiers as extremely skilled, independent, and resourceful individuals. Writing in 1946, Sergeant

⁶⁸ Adamson, *All for Nothing*, 31.

⁶⁹ Bagnall, *Not Mentioned*, 58.

⁷⁰ Since Becker and Bagnall wrote their memoirs in the 1930s, they may also have been influenced by the post-1929 "failed peace" sentiments to which both Jonathan

Chester Routley, from Petrolia, Ontario, recalled the similarities between farming and soldiering, as both professions required a high degree of self-reliance. To be a successful farmer, Routley argued, one had to be a blacksmith, a carpenter, a harness-maker, a tractor driver and a biologist. "The town was thirteen miles away and if I had to run down for everything I would be on the road all the time."⁷¹ When General Dan Ormond, a junior officer during the Great War, was interviewed in the early 1970s, he compared the CEF soldiers of the Prairie Provinces to those from British cities, such as Liverpool and London, rather favourably. Despite the fact that almost seventy percent of all CEF soldiers came from an urban background, Ormond suggested that the "Canadian soldier was 'much more adept' and went on to say that the Canadian had the outdoor training, from having lived out of doors most of his life to be able to improvise."⁷²

Although it is obvious that the image of Canadian troops as naturally gifted soldiers was strongly entrenched in the mind of Routley and Ormond, Australian Great war historian, Alistair Thomson, has observed that when elderly soldiers no longer have a personal recollection of certain events they will look to popular memory to

Vance and Modris Eksteins allude. See Vance, *Death So Noble*, 190, 191, 222, 223, and Eksteins, *Rites*, 292, 293, 296, 297.

⁷¹ Chester E. Routley, *The Eighteenth Battalion: The Fighting Eighteenth* (n.p., 1946), 23. Routley hailed from, Lambton Township, Ontario.

⁷² General Dan Ormond, interview, 1972, in Duncan, *Maple Leaf and Mud*, 82. Ormond was born in Pembroke, Ontario, and a barrister by trade.

provide them with the information that has gone missing.⁷³ For example, when asked in the mid-1980s what he remembered about patrolling No Man's Land, Private Stephen Pike remembered a great many details, but none that could be placed in a specifically Canadian context. However, once he had been asked by the interviewer whether the Germans patrolled No Man's Land, the mill-man from New Brunswick did recall the reputation Canadians had gained for trench raiding: "'There were German patrols out too, some?'" (Writer) 'Oh yes. Yeah 'They were always uneasy because they didn't know when the Canadians would raid them, eh? 'I'd say that's the story.' We looked at photos in a book'"⁷⁴

While Pike's recollections were clearly influenced by the leading questions of the interviewer, his answers also reveal how his personal memory of the war has been influenced by time and popular memory. When he is not sure of what exactly took place, Pike reverts back to the popular memory of the war as it was constructed both in the trenches, as well as in Canada during and shortly after the war. This results in the return of the rugged, skilled, and free-spirited Canadian Great War soldier. However, while Pike's recollections are based more on myth than reality, the perception that Canadian soldiers possessed drive and independence was not just a civilian and post-war invention. Material written during the war clearly shows how this perception

⁷³ Thomson, *Anzac Memories*, 216-218.

⁷⁴ Pike, *Reminiscences*, 15.

originated with the soldiers who helped establish and shape the stereotype during the war.

The Canadian 'frontier' stereotype was not only based on the skills, drive, and independence Canadian soldiers had brought to the trenches, but also on the perception that the CEF was a much more egalitarian army. Interestingly enough, some Canadian soldiers adapted the notion of the CEF as a more democratic army to explain both the CEF's successes, as well as the disdain for discipline and imperial authorities. If, in the eyes of Canadian soldiers, their self-reliance and independence of thought were a direct result of Canada's more democratic and egalitarian social structure, the same can be said of the rules governing the officer-man relationship. Isabella Losinger, in her study of the enforcement of discipline in the CEF, has concluded that Canadian officers "retained enough of the practice and ideology of an officer class to impress upon the average soldier their seniority." Nevertheless, the idea that the CEF was a more democratic and egalitarian force was firmly ensconced in soldier's memoirs, letters and diaries.⁷⁵

In a memoir published early in the war, Major Frederick McKelvey Bell was of the opinion that the Canadians were "free born" soldiers and it had taken a long time before "the desire for individual initiative" and "innate independence," so wanted by

⁷⁵ Losinger, "Officer-Man," 267. See also Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches*, 172 and Fuller, *Troop Morale*, chapter 5.

their officers during battle, was no longer a problem when outside the front lines.⁷⁶

According to Lieutenant McBride, Canada's different social structure had better prepared the Canadian soldier for war. In his eyes, the Canadian soldier was "better educated, as a rule, has lived a freer and more varied life and, as a result, possesses that initiative and individual ingenuity. . . ." ⁷⁷ In *Trinity War Book: A Recital of Service and Sacrifice in the Great War*, an unidentified CEF soldier explained why the Canadians had been so successful during the war.

One of the greatest factors in the success of the Canadians was their ability to readily adapt themselves to varying circumstances. Though there were times when camp life necessarily became very wearisome, the individuality of the men could not be suppressed, nor the better things of life forgotten.⁷⁸

Although many CEF soldiers were either British-born, or of British descent, a substantial number of them expressed surprise at the way in which their 'informal

⁷⁶ Bell, *First Canadians*, 281.

⁷⁷ McBride, *Emma Gees*, 98. To what extent McBride's assumptions were representative for the CEF as a whole is difficult to gauge. See Berger, *Sense of Power*, 189-192, 260, 261 and Berger, *Writing of Canadian History*, chapter 2, "The Rise of Liberty" and Donald Creighton's 1956 essay "Towards the Discovery of Canada" in *Towards the Discovery of Canada, Selected Essays* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1972), 57-59.

⁷⁸ Oliver Hezzlewood, ed., *Trinity War Book: A Recital of Service and Sacrifice in the Great War* (Toronto: Trinity Methodist Church, 1921), 161. Author was an ex-CEF soldier but remains otherwise anonymous.

ways' offended the British. Writing in 1916, Lieutenant Curry remembered seeing private soldiers approach their officers for a loan. While British soldiers were surprised at this seeming boldness, Curry saw it as an excellent example of the democracy amongst the colonials.⁷⁹ In April 1916, Lance-Corporal Herbert Andrews noted in his diary how he had shocked a British M.P. by calling an officer by his first name. "I saw Gordon Lough and hailed him by name much to the surprise of an M.P. who couldn't understand a Corporal of the Lance calling a Captain by his first name."⁸⁰

The informal way in which officers and enlisted men interacted became an important characteristic of the Canadian citizen soldiers' stereotype. In *Sunset Night and Dawn*, Irish-born Lieutenant Harry Milsom was impressed with the egalitarian aspect of the CEF before they had even left Canada:

Impressive it was, as one kept guard at night, to look down on this mass of canvas, shining like silver in the moonlight. Equally impressive in the morning to enter a tent and see eight or ten men lying there and wonder from whence they came. There one would see the lawyer lying by the side of the farmer; the doctor by the mechanic; the Sunday-School teacher by the ex-bartender, all of the same rank, same uniform, the same ultimate purpose, just men.⁸¹

⁷⁹ Curry, *From the Saint Lawrence*, 112.

⁸⁰ Lance-Corporal Alfred Herbert John Andrews, diary 1 April 1916, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=8088&warid=3&docid=2&collectionid=328> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Andrews was commissioned in December 1916.

⁸¹ Milsom, *Sunset*, 6.

While Milsom could have made a similar argument with regards to the new Kitchener Armies, it was their perception that the CEF was more democratic and egalitarian that set the Canadian citizen soldiers apart from the British volunteers around them. In a December 1915 letter, Corporal Roy Macfie explained the differences to his father in Ontario. “[T]hey are used to everybody keeping in their own class and the upper class couldn’t have anything to do with a “private,” that would be a disgrace! but [*sic*] the colonials showed them different [.] They would walk up to the highest man in London and say, “Good Day old trapper.”⁸²

Once again, the longevity of the notion that the CEF was a more democratic army, first expressed during the war, is also apparent in material published long after it. More than fifty years after he left the army, Corporal Hugh Monaghan remembered the easy camaraderie between officers and enlisted-men.

Before departing (from 17th battalion) I sought out the adjutant to thank him and to convey my compliments to the Colonel. Under the rigid English Army system I doubt if I would have been shown such tolerance and understanding. In the Canadian Army discipline was necessary and always enforced, but there was an easy camaraderie between officers and men that the old line British troops never understood or wished to copy.⁸³

⁸² Corporal Roy Macfie, letter to his father, 27 December 1915, in *Letters*, ed. J. Macfie, 53.

⁸³ Monaghan, *Big Bombers*, 44.

Whilst working for the Pay Office in London, Monaghan and a few of his friends managed to take over the lease on a flat and referred to the living arrangements as typical of 'Canadian democracy':

Of course the news of our posh quarters got around as hotel rooms in the city were sometimes impossible to obtain we made room for our out of town friends from Majors down. It was democracy at its best. Many of our English acquaintances, accustomed to their officer caste system, must have been puzzled at the casual way the Canadians fraternized. We carried special permanent passes had our off-duty uniforms tailored out of officer's cloth and more than once were accosted by a military policeman shaking his head.⁸⁴

In the eyes of history professor and Great War veteran, Wilfred Brenton Kerr, Canadian society had bred a different kind of attitude towards soldiering. Writing during the Second World War, the Seaforth, Ontario, native went into great detail to describe how, by the end of the war, the CEF had become Canada's national army. Initially, Kerr argued, a large percentage of the CEF was made up of men from the British Isles. "By mid-1918, however, the casualties of the previous year had produced their full effect. Sons of Canada, or at least men brought up in Canada, formed the majority of the rank and file and occupied most of the non-commissioned officerships,

⁸⁴ Ibid., 22. Later on in the war Monaghan would go on to become a pilot-officer in the RFC.

and the dominant influence was now Canadian.”⁸⁵ By 1918 Canadian-born NCO’s had brought a more egalitarian attitude to the job and, according to Kerr, this changed the appearance of the CEF.

The first change was in the relationships between the N.C.O.’s and the rank and file. Our former N.C.O.’s direct or indirect products of the regular army, or at least persons familiar with a well-graded society, were often given to parading their authority and trying to put the gunner in his place. Quite a few Scotsmen, Irishmen and even Yorkshire and Lancashire men, knew better than this, but they were in the minority of the N.C.O.’s. The type was too often the Cockney whose idea of authority was that of the master over the servant. But the Canadian N.C.O. instinctively adopted a different attitude. He looked on his signallers or gun crew, or drivers, as friends, requiring to be managed, and without realizing it, made use of tact and persuasion. “Will you go on battery phone tonight? . . . I guess it’s your turn for O.P. . . . Would you like to go out on this line?”⁸⁶

Kerr was not so naïve as to think that there were no ‘loafers’, or ‘born tireds’, in the CEF, but he was convinced that, overall, the “Canadian N.C.O. of 1918 was of a distinctly good type, and that in selecting the sergeant to represent the student in arms, the decorators of University College Junior Common Room did well.”⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Wilfred Brenton Kerr, *Arms and the Maple Leaf: Memories of Canada’s Corps* (Seaforth, ON: Huron Expositor Press, 1943), 36, 37. Kerr was a university student when he enlisted in October 1916.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

Despite Kerr's suggestion that Canadian-born, or raised, NCO's were the driving force behind the CEF's successes, foreign-born soldiers were not excluded from a share in the Canadian soldier stereotype. Even if foreign-born soldiers serving in the CEF did not consider themselves Canadian, there was, according to Lieutenant Sandham Graves, no "escape from the 'Canada' badges."⁸⁸ When he first arrived in England in 1917, Private James Getson was astounded to find that British civilians were extremely interested in the Canadians. "When a man wearing a uniform and Maple Leaf Badges enters a restaurant or street car or in fact any public place, he without any warning receives many a warm hand shake, and is recognized as 'Oh Canada.' [T]hen the questions start coming and believe me you need to be a professional gab slinger in order to answer them all . . ."⁸⁹

Maple Leaf cap and uniform badges were not the only means by which foreign-born soldiers could buy into the CEF stereotype. Membership in the Corps was based more on merit than on place of birth, and any foreign-born soldier could expect to be accepted, as long as his behaviour did not disgrace the reputation of the Canadian Army. According to a letter written by Private MacFarlane, service in the CEF had

⁸⁸ Graves, *Lost*, 25.

⁸⁹ Private James Getson, Letter home, 2 February 1917, quoted in Morisson, ed., *Hell Upon Earth*, 197. Getson was a farmer from Kildare Capes, PE. See also Roy Stevenson, letter to Jim, 10 October 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=3370&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=224> [accessed 1 April 2008]; George Gorman Proctor, 'Canada' in the Trenches (Detroit: Williams and Houghton Publishers, 1917), 84 and Nasmith, *On the Fringe*, 49.

even “Canadianized” some of his British-born comrades. In the eyes of MacFarlane, the CEF was the best and most aggressive fighting force on the scene, and “[t]he British born man in the Canadian army catches the mood of the Canadians.”⁹⁰

Although not a Canadian by birth, Danish-born Peter Anderson was immensely proud to be referred to as a Canadian. After escaping a German prisoner camp, he was complimented by George V at Buckingham Palace. “Then his Majesty made some very complimentary remarks about the Canadians; as to saving the situation at Ypres and also in general way. I assured the King that he could depend on the Canadians til [sic] the last shot was fired.”⁹¹ Even though Anderson was taken prisoner in April 1915 and had spent most of the war in a prisoner of war camp, he was immensely proud of his CEF identity and the Canadian successes that had been won during his absence from the front.

That, after the war, this identity was well worth defending is obvious from a memoir titled, *Unknown Soldiers, By One of Them*. In it, the author went out of his way to protect the reputation of the CEF. After having been in reserve at the Somme, the author was glad to leave the trenches, clean up and move to a rest camp. “This did much for the morale of all those who saw them. But I saw a lad (not a Canuck) sitting in the mud of a road-side bank cutting his puttees and trousers to make believe he had

⁹⁰ Private MacFarlane, letter to Robert Affleck, 1 March 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=4976&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=281> [accessed 1 April 2008].

⁹¹ Anderson, *I That's Me*, 166.

been through hell.”⁹² Nearly three years later the same soldier found that all his paper money, marked with a red dot, had been stolen from under his hospital bed. However, later that night he “saw and officer (not a Canadian) playing Crown and Anchor with notes bearing a red pencil mark.”⁹³ The notation, “not a Canadian”, is indicative of the fact that, even in 1959, the author felt protective about the reputation of the CEF.

Despite this fiercely guarded reputation, there are a number of published soldier sources that portray Canadian troops as poor soldier material. For example, in September 1918, Corporal John Harold Becker explained to his parents that not all CEF soldiers were excited to get at the ‘Hun’.

I am not afraid to go out against the Hun again if need be but I am not so foolish as to write such stuff as I have seen right in home papers emanating from Hospital beds in England, occupied supposedly by men wounded in France, to the effect that they are waiting anxiously for the time that they are able to get back and have another crack at old Fritz. The man who writes that is one of three things---a fool, a liar or one who got it away back in peaceful France some place before he had found out what the whang of a ricochet machine gun bullet or the whine of a 5.9 coming your way means. To put it straight I am not anxious to go back to it, in fact don't want to.⁹⁴

⁹² *Unknown Soldiers*, 165.

⁹³ *Ibid.* 153.

⁹⁴ Corporal John Harold Becker, letter to his parents, 19 September 1918, in *Silhouettes*, 237.

While Becker indicated that he was not afraid to go back to the trenches, he clearly felt that the bloodthirsty reputation of the Canadian soldier was an exaggeration. At the same time, his letter may be a result of the pressure that came with the CEF's shock-troop reputation. By the time Becker wrote his letter, the CEF had been engaged in battle for more than six weeks, suffering its heaviest casualties of the war.

Generally, it is only works published after the war that portray CEF soldiers as poor soldier material. Yet, even then, most soldiers only refer to their own skills, never to that of the Canadian Corps as a whole. Private Fred Strickland, a British-born soldier who had joined the CEF in Vancouver in 1917, admitted in his 1953 memoir that he had not been a very good soldier. "First evidence of my being poor material for a soldier was when at the head of a column, I was absorbed by a cloud formation. I did not hear the command – 'about face' - but went on serenely for 50 yards or so."⁹⁵ In a 1977 letter written to a twelve year old schoolgirl, Private Edmund Elliott thought his war record would be a great disappointment to her, as he had not won any medals for bravery. On the contrary, had there been medals for being afraid, Eddie thought he "would have won many."⁹⁶

Perhaps the reason why there are so few references to Canadian troops being poor soldier material is that the majority of CEF soldiers identified with the heroic

⁹⁵ Strickland, *War Sketches*, 31.

⁹⁶ Edmund Elliott, letter to Elaine 1977, *Veteran's Review*, 72. Edmund's place of birth and pre-war profession are unknown.

Canadian soldier stereotype. For example, while both Lieutenant James Pedley and Corporal Will Bird opposed the senseless slaughter of the trenches in their memoirs, they generally wrote in scathing terms about malingerers and anti-heroes. Both were extremely proud of their service.⁹⁷ Yet, while to the outside world the CEF displayed homogeneity, internally there were bitter rivalries, especially between soldiers of the First Contingent and those who arrived afterwards. Lieutenant Clifford Wells found the original officers of the PPCLI to be rather “snobbish in their attitude towards those who came overseas later.”⁹⁸ Already in April 1915, Bert Duvar told his mother that whenever the First and Second contingent men met a fight would break out. “There is no love lost between the first bunch of the second contingent and ourselves. Where there is a meeting there is a fight. The 23rd and 30th Battalions claim they are really the first contingent; but anyone who didn’t qualify in the Salisbury mud and rain is not a true first man and we allow no argument.”⁹⁹ When Victor Tupper read the headline, “Canadians lose trenches”, he felt obliged to explain to his readers what had happened. “April 18th: I see a heading in the papers to-day: ‘Canadians lose trenches.’ Let me tell you that this was not the First Division, but the Second.”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ See Pedley, *Only This* and Bird, *And We Go On*.

⁹⁸ Lieutenant Clifford Wells, letter to his mother, 5 July 1917, in *Montreal*, ed. Wallace, 168.

⁹⁹ Bert Duvar, letter to his mother, April 1915, quoted in Morrison ed., *Hell*, 30. Also published in *Pioneer*, 22 May 1915.

¹⁰⁰ Victor Tupper, letter, 18 April 1916, in *Victor Gordon Tupper*, ed. R.H.T., 37.

With unit cohesion perhaps being the most dominating factor of any soldier's identity, descriptions of the rivalry between the distinct elements of the CEF are not surprising. Most allusions to these rivalries, however, are confined to letters and diary excerpts written at the time and are an indication of the competitive nature of Canadian soldiers. In memoirs published after the war there is very little mention of these rivalries, and the CEF is most-often depicted as homogeneous force, even though it was not always self-evident that this homogeneity would remain after the war. Ex-soldiers, unable to find stable and well paying jobs, were disgusted with the much higher pension payments for officers. This jeopardized the unity and future of the Canadian veteran movement. However, the conflicts were quickly resolved, and, by the mid-1920s, unity had returned to the veteran movement. According to Vance, the key to this solidarity was comradeship. "The strength of their relationship lay in a shared response to the conditions they experienced at the front and acceptance of the fact that only in a spirit of cooperation and tolerance could those conditions be endured."¹⁰¹

Shared experience, based on the supposedly special Canadian traits CEF soldiers had brought to the front, played an important role in the creation of a CEF

¹⁰¹ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 127, 128. While a number of English historians suggest that this comradeship was the most important motive for "Tommies" to keep fighting, Stephane Audoin Rouzeau and George Mosse argue that there is little evidence to suggest that this comradeship existed in the French and German armies. See, Ferguson, *Pity*, 354; Keegan, *Face of Battle*, 218-223; Audoin Rouzeau, *Men At War*, 46-52 and George L. Mosse, "Two World Wars and the Myth of the War Experience," *Journal of Contemporary History*. 21, no. 4 (1986): 495.

stereotype. However, a considerable number of Canadian soldiers also defined themselves via comparisons with outsiders. References in letters, diaries, and memoirs suggest that Canadian soldiers often discussed and compared their soldierly qualities with those of enemy and other allied troops around them. Generally, they feared few comparisons and considered themselves at least on par with, if not better than, German, British and Australian troops. In fact, it seems that these comparisons only enhanced the stereotype and gave soldiers another reason to cherish the CEF's "corps identity."

Naturally, Canadian soldiers most often compared themselves to soldiers who were closest to them. In trench warfare the enemy is ever present. Thus, Canadians frequently commented on the moral and soldierly qualities of their German opponents. British Tommies also played an important role in the way in which Canadians created their own identity. The CEF generally served in close proximity to British divisions, and, as a result, there was a considerable amount of contact between the two armies. Apart from enemy and British troops, Canadian soldiers also wrote quite extensively about the alleged similarities between the AIF and CEF, an indication that the image of the dominion soldier as a naturally gifted warrior had become entrenched in their consciousness.¹⁰²

¹⁰² Comparisons to soldiers of other nations are not as frequent. Even though the Canadians seem to have been fond of the New Zealanders, there were not enough of the latter on the Western Front to allow frequent interaction. The same seems to have been the case with the Americans. See, Goodwin, *Memories*, 276; Black, *I want One Volunteer*, 85; McBride, *The Emma Gees*, 23; Victor Lapp, letter to his mother, 23

In material written during the war, Canadian soldiers can often be found bragging about the fearful reputation they had acquired amongst German front line troops. In a January 1917 letter, Corporal MacPhie told his father that the Germans were never too thrilled about facing the Canadians. “We sure have the wind up on Fritz on this front. He always has the wind up on whatever front the Canadians are, and he has good reason for it.”¹⁰³ Almost a year and a half later, MacPhie discussed the same topic again. On 25 April 1918 he wrote: “We have been having very good luck and we are all praying it will continue. Fritz has a very great respect for the Canadian army, no doubt that has something to do with it and we don’t give him any chance to forget that respect which is due to us.”¹⁰⁴ According to a letter written by Private Sidney Hampson, Canadian soldiers intimidated the enemy on purpose. After the Germans put up a sign in front of their trenches, the Canadians shot it up and put up one of their own. “Then we printed a big sign the next day saying we don’t take any Germans

August 1918 in *Let Us Remember*, ed Climo, 284; Duncan, *Maple Leaf and Mud*, 59 and Frank Cousins, letter to his mother, 27 November 1917, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=900&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=113> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Although the Canadians and the French often served in close proximity to each other, Canadian soldiers rarely wrote about French soldiers, and never seem to have fully understood the character of the French ‘Poilus.’ See, Duncan, *Maple Leaf and Mud*, 58. At the same time some Canadian soldiers recalled the French soldiers as brave and resilient. See, O’Brien, diary excerpt, 18 August 1918, in O’Brien, *Send*, ed. W. H. O’Brien, 121 and Agar Adamson, letter to his wife, 19 February 1915, in *letters*, ed. Christie, 21.

¹⁰³ Corporal Angus Ernest MacPhie, letter to his father, 1 January 1917, in *Letters*, ed. H. MacPhie, 25.

¹⁰⁴ Corporal Angus Ernest MacPhie, letter to his father, 25 April 1918, in *Letters*, ed. H. MacPhie, 36.

prisoners. He has never fired a shot at it yet. He don't [*sic*] like the Canadians because we give him a dam site more than he sends them imperial troops, they are to [*sic*] easy with them."¹⁰⁵

Like MacPhie and Hampson, Private MacDonald maintained that the Germans had great respect for the Canadians. After he was taken prisoner, a number of Germans asked him whether the Canadians were always used as shock troops. Undoubtedly aware of the CEF's exaggerated battlefield reputation, MacDonald and his companions told the Germans that there were half a million Guards and two million Canadian soldiers on the Western Front. "Though some were a little dubious most of them went off muttering and we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had set them thinking about the situation a little more serious than formerly anyway."¹⁰⁶ While MacDonald's story is clearly an exaggeration of the actual situation on the Western Front, it is also a good indication of the inflated self-image of the Canadians. By exaggerating the numbers of Canadians serving on the Western Front to two million and the number of Guards to only half a million, there can be no doubt who MacDonald thought to be the better soldier.

Since it is difficult to determine from Canadian sources alone whether German soldiers were, indeed, exceptionally fearful of the CEF, it is quite possible that this

¹⁰⁵ Private Sidney Thomas Hampson, letter to Ada and Jim, 12 May 1916, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=8903&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=354> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹⁰⁶ MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 187.

reputation existed only in the minds of the Canadian soldiers. Nevertheless, writing in 1919, Sapper Bill Breckenridge used exactly this argument to explain why the Germans never went on the offensive when the Canadians were in the front line. "It looked that way, and during the year 1918 the Germans never attempted an attack on a Canadian front; or ever counter-attacked against any newly gained positions. Yet- the men from other nations were undoubtedly just as brave as the Canadians."¹⁰⁷ Even though Breckenridge admits that other non-Canadian troops were equally brave, it is clear that, in the mind of the CEF soldier, Canadians were the shock troops of empire. That they were always put in the most dangerous parts of the line only strengthened this perception.¹⁰⁸

Canadians not only wrote about their reputation amongst the enemy, but they also loved to compare their fighting abilities to those of other allied troops. In general, these comparisons were quite positive. Only British regulars seemed to have really impressed the Canadians. Lieutenant Curry, for example, was rather embarrassed when he found that the original BEF had retreated at a pace of twenty-five to thirty miles a day: "And we were only averaging fifteen miles a march."¹⁰⁹ Many Canadians

¹⁰⁷ Breckenridge, *From Vimy*, 150. This quote is of course, factually wrong. The Germans attacked the Canadians many times during the last twelve months of the war. However, apart from the March offensive, most of these attacks had limited success, and this may explain Breckenridge's insistence on the lack of German counter attacks.

¹⁰⁸ See previous chapter.

¹⁰⁹ Curry, *St. Lawrence*, 127.

were also impressed with the coolness with which the British troops attacked enemy trenches. Moving slowly in straight lines, the British took a lot of casualties but they never wavered. On 11 October 1918 Private Deward Barnes noted in his diary: "The West Yorks went over us at 9.00 a.m. The Imperials are so much different than us. Their non-commissioned officers kept them in dead straight lines, there must have been six waves of them as far as you could see both ways." Different, however, did not mean better, as Barnes added in brackets: "[The Canadians may go over in bunches any old way, but they always get there.]"¹¹⁰ While Barnes' closing sentence may have been a post-war addition, Lieutenant Billy Gray had made a similar observation in a 1916 letter. Although Gray was impressed by the Guards' disciplined attack, he wrote: "Albeit I question if ever the Guards went forward more valiantly than did those Canadian civilian soldiers of ours. The Guards line may perhaps have been straighter, but it could waver no less."¹¹¹

On a more personal level, perhaps because such a large number of CEF soldiers were of British descent, most Canadian and British Soldiers seem to have gotten along rather well. Following his capture by the Germans in 1915, Private Frank MacDonald found that the Canadians and 'Tommies' became fast friends in German prison camps. According to MacDonald, the Tommies were "fine fellows."¹¹² According to Arthur

¹¹⁰ Private Deward Barnes, diary, 11 October 1918, in *It Made You*, ed. Cane, 263.

¹¹¹ Lieutenant Billy Gray, letter to his mother 8 August 1916, in *Sunny*, 122.

¹¹² MacDonald, *The Kaiser's Guest*, 127.

Gibbons, another prisoner of war, the British were the finest men anyone could hope to have next to him in the trenches. “Why, Tommy would give you his last portion of rations or water if he thought you needed it, or half of his last cigarette. He will go out into No-man’s-land and risk his life – yes, and give up his life – to save a comrade or even an enemy.”¹¹³ That this respect was mutual is evident from a number of sources. In a letter home, Private H. Ronald Stewart, a student from PEI, recalled how the Canadian record had made the British troops respect them. According to Stewart, the Canadians had become “awfully popular with the English troops.”¹¹⁴ Private Harold Peat remembered how the British troops had cheered the Canadians after their stand during Second Ypres. In 1917 he wrote: “Yell after yell went upward, and stirring words woke the echoes. The boys of the old country paid their greatest tribute to us of the New as they cried: ‘Canadians – Canadians – that’s all!’”¹¹⁵

Although Canadian troops generally appreciated the character of British Tommies on a personal level, the comparisons were not as positive when it came to evaluating the qualities of the BEF as a whole. While many Canadians seem to have been impressed with the performance of the British regulars, Territorial and Kitchener units often came in for harsh criticism, especially in letters and diaries written at the time. Writing in 1916, Lieutenant Maurice Pope told his father how a visiting British Staff

¹¹³ Gibbons, *A Guest of the Kaiser*, 47.

¹¹⁴ Private H. Ronald Stewart, letter, 1915, quoted in Morrison ed. *Hell*, 67.

¹¹⁵ Peat, *Private Peat*, 168.

officer was lost in admiration at the amount of work the Canadians had done.

According to Pope, the Canadians were much better trained than the British territorial engineers they were teamed with. The engineers were hopeless and “another case of ‘Thank God we have a navy.’”¹¹⁶ According to Lieutenant Walter Flett, a Royal Navy Air Service trainee, the British were awful. In a letter to his sister he pointed out that the British refused to learn lessons from the war and insisted on doing things the old way.

The Englishmen are awful. The good ones must be all dead. They keep us grinding at stuff that will never do us any good in flying. I can't see their point at all, no system at all. They still drink their tea at 4 pm no matter what happens & I don't know when this old war will ever end. They can't get away from old standards, like the old miller that went to market with the stone on one side of the mule to balance the bag of meal on the other.¹¹⁷

To be fair to the British, many of their professional soldiers had been killed or wounded. The BEF had been at the front eight months before the Canadians arrived, and the losses amongst their regular divisions had been severe. While training in England in 1915, Lieutenant Gray realized the Canadians were much better trained

¹¹⁶ Pope, letter to his father 22 March 1916, in *Letters*, ed. J. Pope, 37.

¹¹⁷ Lieutenant Walter Earnest Peter Flett, letter to his sister, 8 June, 1916, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=3517&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=223> [accessed 1 April 2008].

than the new British battalions around him. "We are miles above the English Battalions hereabouts in training and can give them all cards and spades physically. Of course the cream of the English manhood is already there and they are just the remains. So it's not a fair comparison."¹¹⁸ Fair comparison or not, John Harold Becker was convinced that the Canadians were much better soldier material. Even in April 1918, when the Canadian Corps was having difficulty replacing casualties from the Passchendaele offensive, Becker noticed a great difference between the Canadian and British soldier. "The Tommy does not seem to understand our bluff friendliness, they are much more reserved. I do not think I could last long among them. Mind you, they are downright good fellows but they need a couple of years in Canada to put some backbone in them."¹¹⁹

Even if some Canadian soldiers relished the fact that they were at least equal to, if not better than the average British Tommy, they did not always agree with all the praise they received, especially if the efforts of the British soldiers were overlooked. J. Kendal Lacey thought that, even though the Canadians had much to their credit, they were not the only ones doing all the hard work. Kendal Lacey had watched the British

¹¹⁸ Lieutenant Billy Gray, letter to his mother, 31 December 1915, in *Sunny*, 36. See also Private Robert Hale, letter to Alice, 13 March 1915, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1418&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=123> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Hale was a London-born moulder.

¹¹⁹ Corporal John Harold Becker, letter to Pauline, 15 April 1918, in *Silhouettes*, 167. According to Ernest MacPhie the English were absolutely useless, Ernest MacPhie, letter to his father, 10 March 1918, in *Letters*, ed. H. MacPhie, 29.

march up to trenches under heavy artillery fire and was impressed by their steadfast progress.¹²⁰ Writing about the battle of Mount Sorrel, Private Donald Fraser wondered in his diary how many Canadians were aware to what extent the Canadians owed their successes to the surplus British artillery. In his diary, Fraser expressed his annoyance with the way in which the Canadian successes were needlessly exaggerated in the press, minimizing the efforts of the British. In 1916 he wrote:

Judging by the results, therefore the British Tommies had good cause to grouch because we did not hold the ground turned over to us and it ill befits those patriots to talk so loosely and loudly about the Canadians never losing a trench. The Canadian soldier is well content to rest on his just laurels, without untruths being brought in, for the sake of placing him on a higher plane than other soldiers.¹²¹

That, despite his criticism, Fraser was quite proud to be a CEF soldier is evident from the sentence with which he closed his entry. "These methods should be left to others who have more need bolster up their war record."¹²²

¹²⁰ J. Kendall Lacey, letter, 1916, *Hell*, ed. Morrison, 66.

¹²¹ Private Donald Fraser, diary 14-20 June 1916, in *Journal*, ed. Roy 159,161. In the entry for 14-20 June 1916 Fraser makes mention of the Battle for Vimy Ridge and America's entry in the war. It is obvious that the diary was edited after the war. The attack on Vimy Ridge and the United States' entry into the war did not take place until 1917. However, this does not contradict the fact that the Canadians received enormous attention from the British press. See also chapter 2.

¹²² Private Donald Fraser, diary 14-20 June 1916, in *Journal*, ed. Roy, 161.

That there was no need to bolster the CEF's war record is also evident from the comparisons between the CEF and AIF. With Canadian and Australian soldiers allegedly cut from the same 'frontier' cloth, one would expect these comparisons to be positive and complimentary. However, in reality, they seem to have been rather ambivalent. In memoirs published after the war, Canadian soldiers not only emphasized mutual respect between the AIF and CEF, but also the extraordinary size of the Anzacs. At the same time, material written during the war sometimes accused Australian soldiers of being a rather cheeky, slovenly lot. Despite the alleged similarities between both dominion forces, one cannot escape the air of competition these sources contain.

In the eyes of Captain Robert Haultain, the CEF and AIF were very much alike. Writing in the 1970s, the Winnipeg-born engineer simplified the relationship between the Canadians and the Australians, painting both dominions' soldiers as a similar breed. The Canadians played baseball and the Australians played cricket, but, other than that, they got on fine. When horses were scarce, the Canadians made sure that their Anzac friends got the better ones. In his opinion, the Australians were "grand" fighters who would not back down from any fight. By the end of the war, he noted; "[o]ur friendship reached the point where our Canadian Corps Commander asked that we have the Anzacs beside us whenever there was a tough fight ahead."¹²³ Also

¹²³ Robert Haultain, "The Anzacs" in *Veteran's Review*, 38. For similar attitude to the Australians see also, Goodwin, *Memories*, 11 and Joseph Hayes, *The Eighty-Fifth in France and Flanders* (Halifax, Royal Print & Litho Limited, 1920), 118. While

writing after the war, Private Fred Strickland emphasized the more democratic aspects of the dominion forces. Writing in the 1950s, Strickland explained how he had come across three Australian officers in 1919. After he had stopped to salute them, he received quite the surprise. “They stopped and smiled and said, ‘you needn’t bother to salute us Canada!’ The Aussie Army was most democratic.”¹²⁴

A number of Canadian soldiers also commented on the extraordinary size of the Australian soldiers they encountered, reinforcing the notion that dominion soldiers were fitter and stronger. Writing seventy-five years after the war, in a memoir titled *Umty-Iddy-Umty*, Signaler William Ogilvie recalled the Australians as being extremely tall. “I had never met any Australians before and they seemed amazingly tall to me. The hot climate from which they sprung must have increased their growth tremendously for there didn’t seem to be a single Aussie less than six feet tall.”¹²⁵ During an interview in the 1980s, Private Pike recalled the Anzacs as big, tall soldiers. “You never seen [*sic*] a small Australian. I guess they didn’t ship’ em over. They didn’t ship’em overseas, little fellas [*sic*].”¹²⁶

Granatstein and Morton make mention of a similar request from the Australians there is no evidence that Currie ever placed this request. Morton and Granatstein, *Marching*, 200.

¹²⁴ Strickland, *War Sketches*, 83.

¹²⁵ William Ogilvie, *Umty-iddy-umty: The Story of a Canadian Signaller in the First World War* (Erin, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1982) 45.

¹²⁶ Pike, interview, 1980s, *Reminiscences*, 49.

What is interesting about these sources, published long after the war, is that both Ogilvie and Pike refer to Anzacs as big, tall and lanky, even though Dale Blair has suggested that AIF soldiers were not the imposing, bronzed warriors Bean had claimed they were.¹²⁷ While it is possible that these recollections were influenced by popular memory, it was not only after the war that we find reference to the extraordinary size of the Australian soldiers. In an August 1916 letter, a young farmer from Brantford, Ontario, Private William Gullen, referred to the Australians as “big fellows.”¹²⁸ Writing near the end of the war, John Harold Becker confirmed the Anzac stereotype when he too referred to the Australians as, big, tall and lanky.¹²⁹ While it is obvious that not all Australian soldiers were tall, sun-bronzed warriors, and that alleged similarities between the CEF and AIF owe more to myth than reality, these comments indicate that the image of the stronger, fitter dominion soldier was present in the mindset of Canadian troops even during the war.

Despite the emphasis on the similarities between the CEF and AIF in material published after the war, letters and diaries written without the intent of publication generally offer a perspective of competition. In a 1916 letter to his father, Corporal

¹²⁷ Bean, *Dinkum Diggers*, conclusion.

¹²⁸ Private William Roy Gullen, letter to Mary, 27 August 1916, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=4251&warid=3&docid=1&collectionid=242> [accessed 1 April 2008].

¹²⁹ See also Corporal John Harold Becker, letter to his uncle, 26 October 1918, in *Silhouettes*, 220.

Angus MacPhie explained that the Canadians were considered to be the best front line troops, much better than the Australians. “You may see a lot in the papers about the Australians but any Canadian who comes from France has no use for the Australians.”¹³⁰ Just like MacPhie, Deward Barnes was convinced that the Canadian undoubtedly made the better soldier. On 6 November 1917 Barnes wrote in his diary: “The Canadians went over-the-top and took Passchendaele ridge and town. The Imperial and Australian forces had tried before us and failed.”¹³¹ In one of R.A.L.’s letters home we can find a similar sentiment. He was afraid that the Canadians would have to do all the hard work while the Australians would once again get the glory.

Also, I think we Canadians as usual – will be right there – probably for the Anzacs to get the glory. To get the true light on them, you have to ask an Imperial’s opinion. He gives it in no uncertain words – ‘no bon’. Every town in England swarms with them on leave, where our fellows cannot get it on a bet. Out here taking your objective is easy; holding after Fritz loosens up his artillery, is what counts. History will show. We took and held; Australia took alright, but did not hold. . . .¹³²

¹³⁰ Corporal Ernest MacPhie, letter to his father, 26 November 1916, in *Letters*, ed. H. MacPhie, 5.

¹³¹ Private Deward Barnes, diary 6 November 1917, in *It Made You*, ed. Cane, 129. The AIF had indeed been replaced by the Canadians who eventually took the small hamlet in November. To call the AIF’s efforts a failure would be unfair. The offensive had begun in July 1917 and was a failure from the start. See chapter 3.

¹³² R.A.L. letter, August 1918, in *Letters*, ed. Chapin Ray, 121.

The Australians, just like the Canadians, evinced strong disdain for non-essential discipline, but when George Hedley Kempling was sent into a trench camp in 1916 to clean it up he was disgusted. In his diary he noted: "It has been our job in almost every trench camp taken from the Imperials to clean it up. This camp was left by the Australians who left it in a worse state than ever the imperials did."¹³³

Soldier sources discussing the soldierly qualities of enemy and other allied armies provide evidence that the CEF soldier stereotype was not just based on the special skills and independence of mind CEF troops brought to the trenches. Many Canadian soldiers compared their soldierly qualities with German, British and Australian troops to see where they would fit in. Although these comparisons were at times complex, Canadian soldiers by and large used them to help define the stereotype in a positive manner. While British regulars and Anzacs were considered on par with the CEF, most other troops often came in for harsh criticism, supporting the belief that Canadian soldiers were more natural and intelligent fighters.

¹³³ Private George Hedley Kempling, diary, 10 September 1916, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/letters.php?letterid=1526&warid=3&docid=2&collectionid=129> [accessed 1 April 2008]. Of course not all Canadians writing during the war were convinced that they were better than the Australians. In a September 1916 letter, Lieutenant Armine Norris, gave the Australians the highest praise, although he also thought them to be quite cocky. "The finest looking soldiers I have seen are the Indians and next to them the Anzacs. The Anzacs are big fine fellows and their swagger is irresistible and don't they just fancy themselves? Don't get the idea that the Canadians are not fine troops too." See Armine Norris, letter to his cousin 10 September 1916, in *Mainly for Mother*, 96.

Popular histories published during, or shortly after the war, portrayed the CEF as an army of outdoorsmen. Canadian soldiers were thought to be self-reliant, independent, and intelligent fighters, whose abilities as hunters and backwoodsmen were put to good use in the trenches. With regards to this idea, Jonathan Vance has made the point that Canadians celebrated their participation in the war by substituting appealing aspects of the conflict for more unpleasant ones. In the discourse of the myth the Canadian soldier became a “creature of the wilderness” who was engaged in a human war, rather than an industrial endeavour.¹³⁴ This myth was accepted by Canadian society in order to humanize and give meaning to the horrors of war.

Even though a number of historians have indicated that the CEF was not nearly as rural and as Canadian in its origins as some early historians of the war would like us to believe, this image was so well developed that, even after the Second World War, some ex-CEF soldiers maintained that Canada’s ‘frontier’ past had been instrumental in making the Corps into one of the most feared fighting units on the Western front. Based on the notion that Canadians are a northern people who live in close proximity to the wilderness, this soldier stereotype assumed that even soldiers who had been born in cities and had never lived in Canada’s vast outdoors could still be imbued with the dominion’s pioneer spirit.

Despite the fact that the CEF was distinctly more urban and less Canadian than popular histories of the war assume, it was not only Canadian civilians who were

¹³⁴ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 260.

willing to buy into this image of their soldiers as creatures of the wilderness. Letters, memoirs, and diaries provide evidence that, during the war, another layer, a refinement of the popular soldier stereotype, was added to the CEF's "corps identity." Despite having experienced first-hand the destructive aspects of industrial warfare, many Canadian soldiers maintained that skills learned in the Canadian outdoors were extremely beneficial at the front. Soldiers who had used fire-arms for hunting argued that the CEF was an army of marksman, while those who had worked in or traveled through Canada's vast wilderness suggested that their compass and map reading skills came in extremely handy when navigating through No Man's Land. Even baseball was used by some soldiers to suggest Canadians were excellent bombers, capable of destroying German trenches with their well aimed Mills bombs.

Although important, the Canadian soldier stereotype was not based solely on these special outdoor skills. Apart from providing useful skills, life in the outdoors, in combination with Canada's less rigid social structure, had supposedly provided Canadian soldiers with an independent mindset. Based on the assumption that, in order to survive in Canada's outdoors, one had to be self-reliant, many Canadian soldiers considered themselves to be much better equipped for the war than their British counterparts. While historians have recently suggested that soldiers from industrial towns were best suited to this modern warfare, CEF troops maintained that living in Canada's rough and inhospitable environment had taught them to stand on their own two feet, and not be wholly reliant on their officers for guidance during battle. By

appealing to and repeating this stereotypical image in their letters and memoirs, Canadian soldiers added another layer to their collective identity, in this instance as “shock troops of empire”.

Canadian soldiers often wrote about the differences between the CEF and other armies. Frequently, they drew on the idea that Canada was a more open society to explain the more informal officer-man relationship within the CEF. Although discipline was more than likely equally strict in the CEF and the BEF, Canadian soldiers often commented on the more easy going relationship between officers and enlisted men and sometimes referred to this as evidence of “typical Canadian democracy.” This concept of “typical Canadian democracy” was also used to explain the nature of the CEF’s leadership. Even though there is no evidence to suggest that the percentage of officers commissioned from the ranks was much higher in the CEF, the idea that in dominion forces command was given to those best suited for the job, rather than to those who held a higher social status, led many Canadian soldiers to believe that the CEF was a much more egalitarian army.

Of course, not all CEF soldiers accepted the CEF’s ‘frontier’ stereotype that had become so popular in Canada during the war. Indeed, after the war, some soldiers admitted that they had never been very good soldiers, while others took issue with the bloodthirsty image of the Canadian ‘frontier’ warrior. Nevertheless, the stereotypical image of the Canadian soldier as a free-spirited and independent-minded warrior provided the CEF with a unique identity that was not only distinctly Canadian, but

also their own. Even when the Great War turned out to be one in which urban trades and industrial skills were in high demand, most Canadian soldiers maintained the belief that their successes on the Western Front were a result of their special Canadian skills and mindset. By repeatedly articulating these ideas in their letters, diaries, and memoirs, Canadian soldiers helped shape a CEF 'frontier' soldier stereotype as an important component of the CEF's "corps identity" during, as well as after, the war.

Conclusion, Corps Identity

Letter, diaries, and memoirs, written by soldiers both during and after the war, reveal that a distinct Canadian “corps identity” developed within the wartime CEF. This “corps identity” was constructed, layer by layer, during the four years Canadian soldiers spent overseas and was largely in line with the “myth of the war experience” described by Jonathan Vance. According to Vance, this myth was purposely created by artists, authors, and politicians to give historical place and moral meaning to the carnage and horrors of the trenches. However, the myth was not a purely civilian or post-war invention. Instead, soldier sources provide evidence that CEF troops also played an important role in creating and sustaining it. Not only did it provide CEF soldiers with a separate identity, it also gave them a reason to believe in themselves in the midst of an unbelievable war.

One of the reasons Canadian historians have been intrigued by soldier sources, is that they provide us with a better understanding of the dynamics within the CEF. CEF soldiers were not just drones, but active agents of their own self-image. Although this self-image was often based more on perception than reality, it often drove Canadian soldiers to behave in a certain way. In the eyes of Vance, Canada’s national memory was not necessarily based on what had happened, but on the perception of what had happened.

Canada's memory of the war conferred upon those four years a legacy, not of despair, aimlessness, and futility, but of promise, certainty, and goodness. It assured Canadians that the war had been a just one, fought to defend Christianity and Western civilization, and that Canada's sons and daughters had done well by their country and would not be forgotten for their sacrifices. To these great gifts the myth added the nation building thesis.¹

In this respect, it is not surprising that the victory at Vimy Ridge was sometimes referred to as the unofficial birthday of the Canadian nation. Writing on the fiftieth anniversary of the battle, Scotland-born Alexander Ross encapsulated this legacy in the preface to a fellow veteran's memoir.²

But at zero hour this all changed. The barren earth erupted humanity. From dugouts, shell holes and trenches men sprang into action, fell into artillery formations and advanced to the ridge – every division of the Corps moved forward together. It was Canada from the Atlantic to the Pacific on parade. I thought then, and I think today, that in those few minutes I witnessed the birth of a nation.³

¹ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 267.

² Lieutenant-Colonel Ross led the 28th Battalion CEF during the attack on the ridge, and was later promoted to Brigadier-General.
<http://data2.archives.ca/cef/gpc015/611378a.gif> [accessed 1 April 2008].

³ Alexander Ross, preface in Macintyre, *Canada at Vimy*.

While it seems unlikely that a two-day attack on a muddy ridge in France could unleash such feelings of collective and national identity, Ross's statement at least deserves consideration. Indeed, ninety years after the battle, Jack Granatstein reflected on Vimy in a similar vein. Although Granatstein acknowledged that the war had divided the dominion, he still perceived the victory at Vimy as one of the great deeds that helped establish the Canadian nation. On 9 April 2007 he wrote in the *Hamilton Spectator*: "A nation exists because its people accomplished great deeds in the past and believe more can be accomplished in the future. The taking of Vimy was one of the greatest of those deeds."⁴

That this new Canadian nation existed in the minds of all Canadians at the time is very unlikely. Recruiting in Quebec had been below average. Indeed, the war had separated Canada along linguistic and other lines. Quebec politicians were afraid that conscription would cause major unrest in the province. When it did, it only heightened distrust and feelings of betrayal on both sides of the linguistic divide. With regards to so-called "hyphenated-Canadians", the war certainly did not bring minorities the recognition their leaders so desperately wanted. Initially, black and native volunteers were refused. Later, authorities reluctantly allowed them to serve. Finally, they were conscripted. Japanese volunteers were never allowed to serve in the Japanese battalion that was promised to them in the first months of the war. Many working-class soldiers

⁴ Jack Granatstein, "Vimy Victory Began Months of Triumph," *Hamilton Spectator*, 9 April 2007, 15.

also felt betrayed when they returned to Canada. They were shocked to see how business owners had grown rich out of a war that had left them scarred, mutilated, broke and often unemployed.

Thus, it seems doubtful that 9 April 1917 on its own shaped the CEF soldiers' collective Canadian consciousness. More generally, however, the fact that hundreds of thousands of men voluntarily left Canada to serve overseas can help explain why the war furthered a Canadian consciousness within the CEF. Unlike their British colleagues, most CEF soldiers spent the majority of their war service far away from their families and loved ones in Canada. Canadians were rarely granted home leave, and, in the eyes of D.E. Macintyre, this separation from home was what made the CEF different from other armies, with the exception of the Anzacs and Americans. In his 1967 memoir he wrote: "With the Canadians it was different. They were from overseas; a long way from home, and they wanted to stick together. When British general headquarters wanted to move Canadian Divisions about like their own, the idea was always resisted, and after Vimy it was unthinkable."⁵

In "The Great War and National Mythology" Canadian historian Allan R. Young suggests that Macintyre's emphasis on Vimy is not surprising. According to Young, most soldier accounts published after the war only furthered the notion that the war signaled the birth of the Canadian nation.

⁵ See preface in Macintyre, *Canada At Vimy*, 210.

The majority of these [soldier sources] tend unconsciously to perpetuate the national mythology, which crudely put, may be summarized as follows: 1) the sacrifices of Canada during the Great War were noble and justified, for they were in defence of the virtuous mother country and the values of Western civilization at large against an evil enemy intent upon imposing a rule of dictatorship and darkness; 2) Canadians, rugged individuals imbued with a free spirit of the pioneer and frontier life, showed themselves in the Great War to be a special people, capable of the highest military attainments and heroic virtues; and 3) Canadians so demonstrated their worthiness and virtues in the conflict that they earned the admiration of the other Allies and hence the status of a distinct and separate nation.⁶

Although Young makes a valid point, it was not just the influence of post-war national mythology that shaped these soldier sources. Instead, even during the war many Canadian soldiers portrayed themselves as outdoorsmen and natural soldiers who had won great honours for Canada. In this context, the question whether the Canadians were, indeed, as different as this myth would lead us to believe, is only of secondary importance. What mattered most is that CEF soldiers, partially based on their successes on the Western Front, perceived themselves to be different. This perception shaped the way in which they behaved. By portraying themselves as intelligent, independent-minded warriors with a strong disdain for spit and polish discipline, Canadian soldiers strengthened the CEF's 'corps identity.'

⁶ Alan R. Young, "The Great War and National Mythology," *Acadiensis*, XXXIII, no. 2 (1994): 155.

CEF volunteers had not consciously set out in 1914 to do this. Almost seventy percent of Canada's First Contingent was of British birth. For these soldiers service to their country of birth was, most likely, a more important motive than service to Canada. While imperial or national patriotism was a significant factor in the enlistment of some British and Canadian-born CEF volunteers, it is easy to overestimate its importance. Published letters, diaries, and memoirs provide us with a great number of reasons why young men decided to enlist in the CEF. Some joined for financial reasons, while others wanted to be part of the "world's greatest adventure." Although there were probably as many reasons for joining the army as there were men in it, many soldiers expressed the specific fear of being left out as an important motive for enlistment. Meanwhile, some were pressured by recruiting sergeants, or white feathers. Still others were easily persuaded by their friends and peers. As well, the decision to enlist was often taken on the spur of the moment, sometimes even during a volunteer's lunch hour. With this pressure and urgency in mind, it is not surprising that many young volunteers entered what was, arguably, the most formative part of their lives with few preconceived notions as to what life in the army would be like.

Regardless of these different motives, joining the army certainly widened the horizons of many volunteers, and it did not take long for CEF soldiers to acquire some rudimentary form of collective identity. While one could argue that this identity was a result of popular histories published during and shortly after the war, letter and diary excerpts written at the time show how this collective identity was spontaneously

developed by the soldiers themselves. As they marched through Canada, sailed across the Atlantic, and trained in the mud of Salisbury Plain, CEF soldiers were forced to reconsider who they were and where they had come from. The fact that outsiders viewed the CEF as a homogenous unit, generally a result of the CEF's unique maple leaf uniform and cap badges, only heightened the troops' sense of collective identity. Although many of the volunteers were not Canadian-born, the fact that the recruits came from all over the dominion strengthened the perception that the CEF was the embodiment of the Canadian nation.

Apart from uniform badges and travel abroad, the retelling of anecdotes detailing the CEF's pioneer disdain for army discipline was another way in which many Canadian soldiers constructed their collective identity. From early on in the war, these soldiers believed that Canadians behaved differently than their British counterparts. While there is no reason to suggest that discipline was less strict in the CEF, Canadian soldiers often displayed indifference to spit and polish and believed that their officers took a more easy going approach to the enforcement of this type of discipline. By making a very clear distinction between essential trench discipline and non-essential parade-ground discipline, disregard for the latter became a self-perceived point of pride within the CEF. Most soldiers believed the CEF would "be there with the goods" when they were needed. Only when caught by British MPs or imperial officers did Canadian soldiers pay the price for their casual behaviour.

While the idea that the CEF was a poorly disciplined force became an important part of the CEF's "corps identity," it was on the Western Front that the Canadians demonstrated their fullest potential. The First Division's defensive stand near Ypres in April 1915 not only confirmed the notion that the Canadians could be counted on to do their bit, but also added another, more positive, layer to the CEF's collective identity. Press accounts of the battle, which no doubt exaggerated Canadian achievements, became instant hits in Canada. Yet, while some CEF soldiers may have been willing to believe what others wrote about them, they also genuinely believed that citizens at home had a good reason to be proud of their boys in the field. Letters written directly after the battle displayed both relief at holding the line and delight in the CEF's newfound reputation. The fact that almost seventy percent of the "Canadians" at Ypres were of British descent did little to dampen the soldiers' enthusiasm. In many ways, Second Ypres can be viewed as an important stepping stone that set the stage for the CEF's reputation as shock troops. It provided them with confidence in their abilities.

If Second Ypres was a stepping stone, then Vimy was the CEF's keystone moment of the war. At Vimy, the CEF succeeded where the French and British had failed, and a substantial number of Canadian soldiers viewed the battle as the most important victory of the war. Although Vimy was not a solely Canadian operation, Canadian soldiers were quite willing to overlook the contributions made by French and English troops. The fact that the CEF now comprised four divisions qualified the battle as a truly Canadian victory. Writing shortly after the battle, a number of soldiers

emphasized the pan-Canadian nature of the victory, showing a growing awareness of the CEF's distinct Canadian identity. In memoirs published long after the war this victory often became the most decisive element of their service, and it is not surprising that these veterans often equated Vimy with the birth of the Canadian nation.

Vimy not only cemented the CEF's shock-troop reputation, but it also affirmed the notion that the Canadian troops would be called upon to attack where others had failed. Perhaps as a result of this reputation, CEF soldiers generally showed little surprise at the successful outcomes of major battles fought after Vimy. Although few soldiers hailed the battle of Passchendaele as a famous victory, letters written shortly after it displayed pride and confidence in the performance of the CEF. Descriptions of the Hundred Days are much more positive in nature, and it often seems as if Canadian soldiers believed they had won the war single-handedly. Material written directly after the various engagements of the Hundred Days illustrates that many CEF soldiers had come to view the Canadian corps as a highly effective military force that required all its soldiers to play their part in order to get the job done. The idea that the Canadians had become the shock troops of empire became integral to the CEF's "corps identity."

The CEF's combat effectiveness was often explained by pointing to the outstanding soldierly qualities Canadians had brought to the trenches. The belief that most CEF soldiers had, in some shape or form, experienced Canada's vast wilderness created the perception that Canadians were ideally suited for the war in the trenches.⁷

⁷ The opposite seems to have been true. See chapter 4.

The fact that the majority of all CEF volunteers came from urban and industrial backgrounds seems to have had little impact on this perception. The idea of proximity to the wilderness put forward by Maria Tippet is one way to explain why soldiers could identify with this image. Canada was a pioneer nation and the pioneer traits of initiative, leadership and resourcefulness were, supposedly, visible in the CEF at war. At the same time, we have to keep in mind that the stereotypical image of the Canadian soldier as a lumberjack or outdoorsman was popularized in Canada through the publication of a number of books on the war, with Aitken's *Canada in Flanders* perhaps the most influential.

The work of Aitken, who constantly emphasized the CEF's northern heritage, perhaps influenced memoirs published after the war, but the idea had taken hold earlier: in the trenches! Material written during the conflict suggests that experience with hunting and trapping was deemed extremely valuable at the front. Life in Canada's vast outdoors had not only provided some Canadian soldiers with specific skills, but also with resourcefulness and independence. When comparing themselves to others, CEF soldiers often commented on the lack of these qualities amongst British troops. Although most Canadian soldiers regarded the Anzacs as a similar breed, the notion that the AIF was their equal did not always sit well with them. Indeed, a number of soldiers referred to the Australians as a slovenly, cheeky lot. In general, there can be no doubt that Canadian troops considered themselves amongst the best. Meanwhile, even if some enlistees did not consider themselves to be decent soldier

material, their uniform and cap badges identified them as Canadians, and outsiders often showered them with attention based on the Corp's collective battlefield reputation. Even for the reluctant soldier there was little chance to escape the heroic warrior image.

While letters and diaries written during the war are naturally less polished than memoirs written long after it, there is no reason to suggest that the stereotypical image of the CEF soldier was an entirely civilian or post-war invention. Regardless of its horrors, most soldiers believed they were fighting a just war. As such, they felt it was important that it be won. Loyalty to their fellow soldiers and loved ones at home seems to have been the most important motivator behind their determination to see the war through. Of course, not all Canadian soldiers believed that the war was worth fighting. Still, remarkably few wrote about the war as an exercise in futility, as Erich Maria Remarque would in 1929. The Canadians had done well, and their reputation was regularly nurtured. Perhaps that is why the image of the heroic warrior returned to many of the memoirs published long after the war. Even if the return of this warrior is surprising, especially when we consider that pictures of the duckboards at Passchendaele have become the ultimate symbol of the war's futility, it was not new. The traditional warrior image had long been there and was still alive during the war in letters and diaries, as well as in memoirs published during the conflict, not just in propaganda issued from on high.

There can be no doubt that the Great War furthered a Canadian consciousness amongst many members of the CEF. This consciousness is present in both the soldiers' accounts written during the war, as well as in those published long after it. The way the war was portrayed by soldiers fits, almost seamlessly, with the "myth of the war experience" described by Vance and others. This is not only because this myth influenced soldier writings, but also because many Canadian soldiers had both embraced and helped to generate that myth during the war. Gillis's suggestion, that memory is based on identity and vice versa, can help explain why Canadian soldiers wrote in such positive terms about the significance of the war for Canada. By portraying themselves as different, Canadian soldiers created a collective identity that set them aside from others. This identity, based on the perception that Canada was a pioneer nation, strongly coloured these soldiers' memory of the war, even if it was based more on perception than reality. It is exactly this perception of a "corps identity" that we see in the countless letters, diaries and memoirs that have been published in the more than ninety years since the war.

Appendix A:

Occupational and Class Breakdown of Soldier Sources:

Working Class Professions:

Blacksmith 1
Boilermaker 1
Boot maker 1
Brakeman 1
Brewer/ Distiller 2
Bricklayer 1
Butcher 2
Clerk (railway, insurance, court and store) 42
Chauffeur 2
Driver/ Teamster 5
Engraver 1
Factory foreman 2
Farmer 41
Farmhand/ Cowboy 4
Florist 1
Grinder 1
Jeweller 1
Labourer 10
Longshoreman 1
Lumber workers 5
Machinist 6
Milkman 1
Moulder 1
Mover/ Baggage man 3
Plumber 2
Printer 6
Riveter 2
Railway Worker 3
Seaman/ Fishery 2
Trades: (Carpenter/ Electrician/ Plasterer/ Painter) 9
Upholsterer 1
Wireman 1
Woodworker 1
Telegraph operator 1
Total = 174

Middle – Upper Class Professions:

Accountant/ Bookkeeper 7
Agent 2
Artist/ Musician 3
Broker 1
Chemist 2
Civil Servant 3
Clergy 7
Contractor 2
Druggist 1
Engineer 16
Insurance 2
Journalist/ Writer 9
Lawyer/ Barrister 9
Member of Parliament (provincial and federal) 2
Physician/ Dentist 12
Policeman 2
Professional soldier (RMC) 4
Prospector 2
Sales 6
Student (university/ college) 48
Surveyor 2
Teacher/ Instructor 12
Total = 154

Not Listed:

Profession not known 53
Left blank on purpose 1
None (unemployed) 1
High school student 1
Total = 56

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Note on Sources

With regard to published soldiers' sources, every effort has been made to make this bibliography as comprehensive as possible. While a number of these sources are not directly cited in the text, they have been influential in the research. Although many of the soldiers' memoirs, letters and diaries were published after the war, these recollections should still be considered primary material when discussing the enduring self-image and collective identity of CEF soldiers. From an organizational perspective these published sources have been divided into five categories:

- Memoirs
- Diaries and collections of letters
- Interviews, letter and diaries excerpts
- Letters, diaries, and memoirs published online
- Miscellaneous

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