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Performing Masculinity: Calgary Men in the Great War

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts degree in History

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Abstract

This thesis explores the masculinity of soldiers from Calgary during the Great War using a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity. The first chapter establishes a normative masculine standard in Calgary using local newspaper coverage of battalion departure parades. These events were rituals that celebrated militarized masculinity and reinforced the hegemonic ideal that existed across the British Empire in the early 20th century. The second chapter assesses how masculinity was performed in letters during the war. Although men strove to embody the masculine ideal, their letters were not uniform endorsements of martial masculinity. The third chapter analyzes how hegemonic masculinity shaped men's memoirs and illuminates the enduring strength of the wartime masculine ideal. The hegemonic masculinity that existed in 1914 which celebrated physical prowess, military service, bravery, emotional control, and endurance, was not destroyed during the years of the war, but it did not survive unchanged.

Keywords:

Hegemonic Masculinity – Calgary – Great War – Gender Studies – First World War – Letters – Memoirs – Canadian History – Western History – Local History

Summary for Lay Audience

This thesis studies the masculinity of soldiers from Calgary during the Great War. In the early 20th century, across the British Empire, a dominant contingent of society believed that the ideal man was adventurous, brave, emotionally and physically tough, and patriotic. During the Great War, this conception of masculinity was tested. The first chapter establishes that Calgary newspapers celebrated this dominant masculine ideal and praised local men who embodied it. In particular, local newspaper coverage of battalion departure parades reinforced the soldier as an exemplary model of masculinity. The second and third chapters turn to the individual masculine identities of men from Calgary. They assess how men performed masculinity in their letters home and in their memoirs that they wrote after the war. In both cases, men in uniform largely upheld and promoted the same masculine traits and behaviours that were celebrated in newspapers as the hegemonic ideal. However, these personal sources also reveal that men adapted their masculine identities in response to their wartime experiences that challenged traditional conceptions of manly behaviour. Ultimately, this thesis illuminates how the individual masculine identities of Calgary men in the Great War aligned with or differed from societal expectations of masculinity.

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Introduction

On the evening of 4 August 1914, as the citizens of Calgary waited with mixed feelings of hope and dread to see how Germany would respond to Great Britain's ultimatum, the air was hot and choked with smoke from nearby forest fires.¹ If Germany did not withdraw from Belgium by four o'clock Calgary time, a state of war would exist. The crowd in Calgary included thousands of young men, many of whom would soon be overseas in France. As the deadline passed, Calgarians burst into song and cheered the fact that finally, decisive action had been taken. War, some members of the crowd believed, would be "terrible" but at the very least it would "clear up a lot of things." As the blood red summer moon rose in the sky, the citizens of Calgary continued their revelry. An article in the *Calgary Herald* drew parallels between the forest fire smoke and "the smoke of battlefields in which Canadians too shall take their place by the side of their brothers across the sea in the defense of liberty and in opposition to tyrannic domination."² The idea that men from Calgary would fail to rise to the occasion was not considered.

The crowd that lined Eighth Avenue viewed war as an arena for men to demonstrate their masculine prowess. The Great War was a masculine event.³ War cultivated qualities like aggressiveness, comradery, and heroism which society expected of men.⁴ Men at war performed in accordance with accepted definitions of masculinity. They fulfilled their part of

¹ Harold W. McGill, *Medicine and Duty: The World War I Memoir of Dr. Harold McGill's Service as Medical Officer with the 31st Battalion, C.E.F.*, ed. Marjorie Norris, Legacies Shared Series, No. 23 (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 7-8.

² *The Calgary Herald*, "War Announcement Gives Rise to Great Outburst of Patriotic Feeling," August 5, 1914, Newspapers.com, 9. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-war-announcement-gives-ri/126278079/>.

³ George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity*, Studies in the History of Sexuality (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 107.

⁴ Tim Cook, "'More a Medicine than a Beverage': 'Demon Rum' and the Canadian Trench Soldier of the First World War," *Canadian Military History* 9, no. 1 (January 20, 2012), 16. <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cmh/vol9/iss1/2>.

the Victorian gender binary that expected women to be “soft [and] caring,” and encouraged men to be “tough, aggressive, [and] unflinching.”⁵ Traits such as “willpower, hardness, or perseverance” that were particularly valued in wartime were also celebrated in peacetime as normative masculine behaviour.⁶

Despite the contemporary ties between war and masculinity, studies of the Great War in Canada have not used masculinity as a theoretical lens to study the men who went to war. Masculinity has been largely overlooked. In John Tosh’s thought-provoking essay “What Should Historians Do with Masculinity?” he claims that “in the historical record it is as though masculinity is everywhere but nowhere.”⁷ Traditional military, political, and economic histories of the Great War focus on the exploits of men without treating them as gendered subjects. Terry Copp’s analysis of Canada’s military effort in the Great War, for example, acknowledges scholarly work that analyzes war as a “masculine event” but asserts that while there is “some limited value in this kind of explanatory framework... there is no evidence to indicate that such ideas influenced the relatively small numbers of Ontario-born, ordinary-rank volunteers.”⁸ Terry Copp is wrong. War can be studied through a gendered lens, with a focus on how combat impacted masculine identities.⁹ It is possible to examine how normative definitions of masculinity impacted men’s decision to enlist, their emotional survival overseas, and their reintegration into civil society after the war.¹⁰

⁵ Michael C. Adams, *The Great Adventure: Male Desire and the Coming of World War I* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 135.

⁶ Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 115.

⁷ John Tosh, “What Should Historians Do with Masculinity? Reflections on Nineteenth-Century Britain,” *History Workshop Journal* 38, no. 1 (1994): 180.

⁸ Terry Copp, “The Military Effort, 1914-1918.,” in *Canada and the First World War, Second Edition: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, ed. David MacKenzie, 2nd Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 38.

⁹ Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain*, *Genders and Sexualities in History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2009), 2.

¹⁰ Nicoletta F. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, *Cultural History of Modern War* (Manchester: Manchester

This thesis explores the masculine identities of men from Calgary, Alberta, during the Great War using a theoretical framework of hegemonic masculinity. It argues that men's masculinity, as expressed normatively in the press, subjectively in letters and retroactively in memoirs, was impacted by their wartime experience and shaped by hegemonic standards of masculinity entrenched in Western society by the early twentieth century. The war did not prompt a reconstruction of hegemonic masculinity, rather it encouraged a more militant and physical masculinity that had been increasing in popularity for decades. Calgary men were adherents to a masculine model that promoted service to the Empire, adventurous actions, and physical frontier living, while rejecting domesticity and femininity. Individual men crafted masculine identities in their letters home and their memoirs. They emphasized their adherence to the hegemonic conception of masculinity, even as their personal experiences overseas challenged traditional notions of bravery, physical strength, and emotional control.

It is important, however, to define such terms as 'masculinity' and 'hegemony'. This introduction discusses the ties between war and masculinity and explains the significance of what scholars have deemed a "crisis of masculinity" that gripped Canada in the early twentieth century. It situates the theoretical discussion of masculinity in Calgary, through an analysis of the city's social and demographic development, and its local institutions that affirmed and supported hegemonic masculinity on the eve of the Great War.

Masculinity does not have a universally accepted understanding that remains constant throughout time. Normative definitions of masculinity shift according to social, economic, and political developments. According to R.W. Connell, gender is "historically changing and politically fraught."¹¹ John Tosh and Michael Roper argue that "despite the myths of

University Press, 2009). Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men's Bodies, Britain and the Great War* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1996).

¹¹ R. W. Connell, *Masculinities*, 2nd Edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 3.

omnipotent manhood which surround us, masculinity is never fully possessed, but must perpetually be achieved, asserted, and renegotiated.”¹² This is true of all gender identities. As Judith Butler notes: “Gender is an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a stylized repetition of acts.”¹³ Masculinity and femininity can only be defined in specific temporal circumstances according to the actions of individuals. There is no universal, timeless definition of masculinity.

Masculinity is intrinsically a performative concept: “There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very expressions that are said to be its results.”¹⁴ To perform masculine acts and adhere to masculine norms is to be masculine. It is not “common-sense knowledge” but rather a series of “changing practices through which gender is ‘done’ or ‘accomplished’ in everyday life.”¹⁵ Embodying masculinity is the result of a mode of behaviour. A common term to refer to masculinity in the early twentieth century was “manliness.”¹⁶ John Tosh argues that “manliness expresses perfectly the important truth that boys do not become men just by growing up, but by acquiring a variety of manly qualities and manly competencies as part of a conscious process.”¹⁷ The specific qualities and competencies that society defines as ‘manly’ shift over time, but exhibiting them is always a significant aspect of masculinity.

Masculinity is often defined in relation to femininity. Masculine actions, behaviour, and virtues are not feminine, and vice versa. R.W. Connell argues that “masculinity and

¹² Michael Roper and John Tosh, *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1991), 18.

¹³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, 10th Anniversary Edition. (New York: Routledge, 1999), 191.

¹⁴ Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 34.

¹⁵ Connell, *Masculinities*, 6.

¹⁶ J.A. Mangan and James Walvin, “Introduction,” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 1.

¹⁷ Tosh “What Should Historians Do with Masculinity?” 181.

femininity are inherently relational concepts, which have meaning in relation to each other, as a social demarcation and a cultural opposition.”¹⁸ This has not, however, always been the case. As Mark Moss notes, “in the eighteenth century, ‘manly’ meant the opposite of ‘boyish’ or ‘childish’. By the early Victorian period, however, the term was used as the opposite of ‘feminine’ or ‘effeminate’.”¹⁹ During the Great War, masculinity was a term that was defined relationally to women: “To be manly meant not to be womanly – in effect, a definite ‘negation of all that was soft, feminine or sentimental’.”²⁰ The actions and virtues that were defined as feminine are significant to uncovering normative definitions of masculinity. “It is the drawing of boundaries,” Judith Allen writes, “which illuminates that inside the circle.”²¹ What society defined as feminine sheds light on what it deemed masculine.

Because masculinity is relational and performative, it is also inherently a public identity. “The action of gender requires a performance that is repeated,” Butler notes, and this “action is a public action.”²² Men garner masculine recognition through public actions that constitute masculinity according to the society that bears witness to them. Receiving public affirmation for masculine behaviour is necessary to improve masculine status.²³ The Victorian doctrine of separate spheres, so prevalent in the early 20th century, dictated that the public sphere was the ‘natural’ domain of men.²⁴ Because masculinity requires public actions, it can be elucidated by examinations of cultural texts, records of public interactions,

¹⁸ Connell, *Masculinities*, 43.

¹⁹ Mark Howard Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War*, Canadian Social History Series (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014), 28.

²⁰ Moss *Manliness and Militarism*, 28.

²¹ Judith Allen “Men interminably in Crisis? Historians on Masculinity, Sexual Boundaries, and Manhood” Page 195

²² Butler, *Gender Trouble*, 191.

²³ Tosh “What Should Historians Do with Masculinity?” 184.

²⁴ John Tosh, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity and the Middle-Class Home in Victorian England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2008), 47. <https://doi.org/10.12987/9780300143683>.

and through the writing and recollections of individuals. Therefore, as R.W. Connell notes, “masculinity is not just an idea in the head, or a personal identity. It is also extended in the world, merged in organized social relations.”²⁵

Public demonstrations of masculinity are performed for both a male and female “audience.” Tosh argues that “manliness was fundamentally a set of values by which men judged other men.”²⁶ Here, Tosh is referring to the homosocial element of masculinity: the qualities and attributes men admire and strive to uphold to maintain their “relations with each other as men.”²⁷ Characteristics such as physical strength, self-reliance, and financial success are all celebrated masculine traits that are valued because of their benefit in “peer group standing” in addition to the fact that they contribute to patriarchal hegemony.²⁸ The aspects of masculinity that apply to relations between men are particularly important during wartime.

Masculinity is defined by public performances for an audience that changes their expectations over time in response to shifting social, political, and economic circumstances. However, in a specific time and place, there is a “hegemonic masculinity.” The term “hegemony” comes from the Greek etymon *hegemonia* which means “to lead.”²⁹ It was used by Marxist theorist Antonio Gramsci to refer to “a domination which goes beyond the exercise of brute force and legal power because it has become embedded in culture.”³⁰ Hegemonic masculinity was coined in 1983 by sociologist R.W. Connell in her book *Masculinities* but has since been adopted by scholars from many different disciplines.³¹ It

²⁵ Connell, *Masculinities*, 29.

²⁶ John Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family, and Empire*, 1st ed., Women and Men in History (Harlow, England: Pearson Longman, 2005), 5.

²⁷ John Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender,” in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, by Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh, Gender in History (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 54.

²⁸ Tosh “Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender,” 54.

²⁹ Richard Howson, *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity*, Routledge Advances in Sociology 18 (London: Routledge, 2006), 4.

³⁰ Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender History,” 43.

³¹ Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender History,” 42.

refers to the dominant “pattern of practice (i.e. things done, not just a set of role expectations or an identity)” that exists at a given historical moment.³² This form of masculinity “occupies the hegemonic position in a given pattern of gender relations.”³³ It is a useful framework for theorizing gendered power relations amongst men which makes it an insightful aspect of the study of masculinity during the Great War.³⁴

Hegemonic masculinity is maintained and shaped by social and cultural institutions as well as individuals who adhere to the dominant masculine ideal. This relationship is symbiotic. Tosh argues that the structure of hegemony is “maintained not only by force, but by cultural means such as education and the popular media which establish many of the assumptions of hegemonic masculinity in the realm of ‘common sense’.”³⁵ These socio-cultural elements shape the world into which individuals come into being. As they mature, individuals undergo a process of “socialization” by which “each person acquires the knowledge, skills, beliefs, values, attitudes, and dispositions which allow him or her to function as a more or less effective, though not inevitably compliant, member of society.”³⁶ As people are socialized, they interact with socio-cultural institutions and contribute personally towards defining masculine expectations. Hegemonic masculinity is not “imposed upon the gender order exogenously,” rather, it emerges “from and through the socio-cultural milieu itself.”³⁷ The hegemonic masculine ideal is “neither monolithic nor a discrete identity,

³² R. W. Connell and James W. Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” *Gender and Society* 19, no. 6 (2005), 832. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27640853>.

³³ Connell, *Masculinities*, 77.

³⁴ Connell, *Masculinities*, xviii.

³⁵ Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender History,” 42.

³⁶ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 6.

³⁷ Howson, *Challenging Hegemonic Masculinity*, 3.

but rather the result of human relations.”³⁸ It is created, supported, affirmed, and altered through the interactions of people within organizations and social institutions.

Because hegemonic masculine standards are determined by broad cultural acceptance and socio-political institutional support, these standards are dependent on “specific circumstances” and are “open to historical change.”³⁹ Different racial, class, and age groups, have different definitions of hegemonic masculinity. Christopher Forth rejects the idea of a universal hegemonic masculinity. Rather, he argues that “masculinities are defined according to the specific expectations of different sectors of the social world, the relationship among different male groups and, of course, between men and women.”⁴⁰ Hegemonic masculine models can be identified by restricting the temporal and spatial scope of historical study and focusing on specific classes of men.

This thesis focuses on the hegemonic group of men in Calgary during the Great War: The Anglo-Canadian middle class. It analyzes their constructions of hegemonic masculinity during the war in letters home and in their memoirs. The experience of marginalized groups of Calgary men who may not have defined their masculinity according to the hegemonic model is outside of the scope of this thesis. White middle-class men did not speak for all Calgary men. Racialized, homosexual, and working-class men often represent subordinate or marginalized masculinities that exist alongside or in active opposition to the hegemonic masculine ideal.⁴¹ Because this thesis evaluates hegemonic conceptions of masculinity in Calgary, it does not include an analysis of complicit or oppositional masculine models that

³⁸ Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell, “Introduction: Conceptualizing Canada’s Gendered Pasts,” in *Gendered Pasts: Historical Essays in Femininity and Masculinity in Canada*, by Kathryn McPherson, Cecilia Morgan, and Nancy M. Forestell, Canadian Social History Series (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 4. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442627970>.

³⁹ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” 832.

⁴⁰ Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West*, 3.

⁴¹ Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

may have held greater influence in other demographics. That does not make their masculine identities less valid, but it does mean that the subjective identities of racialized, homosexual, or working-class Calgarians are not represented here.

Hegemonic masculinity is an ideal, it does not necessarily correlate with the actual behaviour and actions of the majority of men. John Tosh argues that hegemonic masculinity is defined as the masculine attributes that society accepts as *desirable* for men to exhibit.⁴² Most men do not meet the lofty expectations of hegemonic masculinity in its entirety.⁴³ It is an ideal, a goal, and a standard, that men measure themselves up against. Many men do not meet the standard of masculinity dictated by the hegemonic iteration because desirable traits are difficult to exhibit and not every factor is within an individual's control. During an economic recession, for example, the ability to be a masculine breadwinner is threatened. More men find themselves out of work, and in the unenviable position of transgressing masculine norms. That does not, at least in the short term, challenge the hegemony of the breadwinner model of masculinity. Hegemonic masculine standards are unattainable for many men. There is a "dissonance between representations of masculinity" and "masculinity as lived experience."⁴⁴

Although most men do not embody hegemonic masculine ideals, "it is a measure of hegemony that such men feel that they should struggle to attain these goals."⁴⁵ For example, professional athletes display hegemonic masculine traits that many men aspire to emulate, even though they make up a very small portion of the general population of men.⁴⁶ Although

⁴² Tosh, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender History," 47.

⁴³ Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

⁴⁴ Peter Gossage and Robert Allen Rutherford, *Making Men, Making History: Canadian Masculinities across Time and Place* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2018), 10.

<https://books.scholarsportal.info/uri/ebooks/ebooks3/upress/2018-05-19/1/9780774835657>.

⁴⁵ Tosh, "Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender History," 47.

⁴⁶ Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

hegemonic standards refer to the ideal, rather than the lived reality of men, they still impact men's behaviour. As Graham Dawson argues, ideals determine "the available possibilities for a masculine self in terms of the physical appearance and conduct, the values and aspirations and the tastes and desires that will be recognized as 'masculine' in contemporary social life."⁴⁷ The imagined masculine ideal is hegemonic regardless of whether men can attain it because they strive to achieve it.

However, there are situations where the imagined hegemonic masculine ideal becomes tantalizingly achievable. In 1914, war was broadly viewed as an activity that would improve a nation's manhood by testing its young men and encouraging masculine behaviour. It was an opportunity for masculine attainment.⁴⁸ Those who passed the test and completed the rite of passage were celebrated.⁴⁹ To align with hegemonic conceptions of masculinity, men needed "stoicism, hardiness, and endurance," which was developed by military service.⁵⁰ The soldier was "cherished as an outstanding model of male civic virtue," and war was deemed "a cleansing experience, good for a nation's physical and spiritual health."⁵¹ War was a positive alternative to the debilitating effects of modernity including urbanization, industrialization, and rapid technological advancements that had made men "soft." Mark Moss argues that "war offered the hope of social and personal regeneration through the sorts of experiences no longer available in everyday life."⁵² This opportunity was offered to men.

Because war was so tightly linked to masculinity, and due to masculinity's importance to a nation at war, it was also a destabilizing time for men. War can render men

⁴⁷ Graham Dawson, *Soldier Heroes: British Adventure, Empire, and the Imagining of Masculinities* (London: Routledge, 1994), 23.

⁴⁸ Meyer, *Men of War*, 1.

⁴⁹ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 27.

⁵⁰ Mangan and Walvin, "Introduction," 1.

⁵¹ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 9.

⁵² Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 37.

physically incapable of acting masculine due to injury, but it also thrusts masculine norms into the spotlight.⁵³ Leo Braudy argues that during wartime, “masculinity was the core of national cohesiveness... the essence of defining *us* against *them*.”⁵⁴ In times of war, the scope of acceptable male behaviour shrinks. Men are needed to defend the nation and keep the country’s war machine running smoothly. Because they were so important to the war effort, their behaviour was more rigorously scrutinized. Exhibiting appropriate masculine behaviour made men heroes. Conversely, men who failed to live up to expectations were demonized more than they were in peacetime. Actions that were masculine before the war became unmasculine. Prairie novelist Robert Stead illustrated this point in his novel, *Grain*. Stead’s protagonist Gander Stake stayed on the farm after the outbreak of war until he was shunned by his sweetheart and consumed by guilt that he was shirking his masculine duty. Eventually, Stake left his farm and enlisted in the army.⁵⁵ In wartime, successful businessmen became profiteers, while industrious farmers and factory workers became cowardly slackers in the public discourse. Although war is historically a masculine activity, it demands stricter compliance with a narrower definition of acceptable masculine behaviour.

The Great War occurred at a time when British and Canadian society was undergoing a perceived crisis of masculinity. During such crises, the hegemonic definition of masculinity is tested. It often changes, whether that change is reactionary and regressive, or revolutionary and progressive.⁵⁶ A crisis in masculinity, according to John Tosh, is “a situation in which the traditionally dominant forms of masculinity have become so blurred that men no longer

⁵³ Joanna Bourke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain, and the Great War*, Picturing History (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), 20.

⁵⁴ Leo Braudy, *From Chivalry to Terrorism: War and the Changing Nature of Masculinity* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), 378.

⁵⁵ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 122.

⁵⁶ Connell, *Masculinities*, 84.

know what is required to be a ‘real man’.”⁵⁷ Whether there was a genuine ‘crisis’ has provoked debate amongst gender theorists and social historians. Christopher Forth argues that crisis is a misnomer because it implies that there is some sort of stable form of masculinity that can be either in crisis or not in crisis.⁵⁸ On the other hand, Judith Allen argues that crisis is appropriate because it describes the constant state of masculinity, “inherently unstable... always in process, under negotiation.”⁵⁹ While the concept of a crisis might pose concerns for gender theorists analyzing normative prescriptions of how gender ought to be conceived, it is suitable for historical approaches that explore how gender was conceived at a particular point in time. At the beginning of the twentieth century in Canada, masculinity was in crisis.

The crisis was due to several factors that combined to destabilize men’s place of power in society. Modern industrial living conditions and a vocal women’s rights movement undermined men’s claim to power and increased masculine self-doubt.⁶⁰ Urbanization and industrialization, accompanied by its manifestations of poverty, health concerns, and perceived moral degradation, resulted in a widespread concern that men were becoming weak and lazy. The fact that roughly half of all British volunteers during the Boer War were rejected as physically unfit for service emphasized these concerns.⁶¹ Due in part to this crisis, hegemonic masculinity in Britain began to place a greater emphasis on emotional repression, physical activity, and martial values. The word “manly,” which meant “to not complain” in

⁵⁷ Tosh “What Should Historians do with Masculinity?” 193.

⁵⁸ Christopher E. Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West: Gender, Civilization and the Body* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 3.

⁵⁹ Judith A. Allen, “Men Interminably in Crisis? Historians on Masculinity, Sexual Boundaries, and Manhood,” *Radical History Review (Project Muse)* 82, no. 1 (2002), 199.

⁶⁰ Moss *Manliness and Militarism*, 110.

⁶¹ Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West*, 146.

Victorian High Diction, took on new meaning.⁶² There was a shift during the Victorian era “from the earnest expressive manliness of the Evangelicals to the hearty, stiff-upper-lip variant in the era of Kitchener and Baden-Powell.”⁶³ Muscular Christianity, a hallmark of early Victorian-era masculinity that emphasized “compassion, fairness, and altruism,” was replaced by a masculine code that emphasized “stoic endurance.”⁶⁴ The ideal masculine Englishman was a person “without emotion who confronts unpleasantness stoically.”⁶⁵ The quintessential masculine figure, however, was the warrior.⁶⁶ Hegemonic standards of manliness in Britain were maintained and supported by organizations such as the Boy Scouts, the Boys Brigade, and public schools.⁶⁷ These organizations emphasized an aggressive, physical hegemonic masculine ideal in response to widespread fears that young men were growing soft and effeminate amid the comforts of an affluent society.⁶⁸ Furthermore, popular literature promoted the myth that boys became men by adhering to rigid hegemonic standards of manliness. Thomas Hughes’ *Tom Brown’s School-Days* encouraged boys to pursue martial exploits, intensive physical activity, and to exclude the “soft and sentimental” as feminine.⁶⁹ Writers such as G.A. Henty, who had sold twenty five million copies of his adventure stories

⁶² Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 3rd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 23. <https://hdl-handle-net.proxy1.lib.uwo.ca/2027/heb00705.0001.001>. PDF.

⁶³ Tosh, “What Should Historians do with Masculinity?” 181.

⁶⁴ Michael Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity: The ‘War Generation’ and the Psychology of Fear in Britain, 1914–1950,” *Journal of British Studies* 44, no. 2 (2005), 347. <https://doi.org/10.1086/427130>.

⁶⁵ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 26.

⁶⁶ Mike O’Brien, “Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902–1914,” *Labour / Travail* 42 (Fall 1998), 120. <https://doi.org/10.2307/25148882>.

⁶⁷ Michael Roper, *The Secret Battle: Emotional Survival in the Great War*, Cultural History of Modern War (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2009), 185. Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 141. Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, 197 and 113. John Springhall, “Building Character in the British Boy: The Attempt to Extend Christian Manliness to Working-Class Adolescents, 1880–1914,” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800–1940*, by J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 52.

⁶⁸ Wood, *Militia Myths*, 153.

⁶⁹ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 10–12.

by 1914, emphasized that overseas colonies were a “man’s world” where British men could hone their masculine skills.⁷⁰

The British approach to promoting masculine values was instructive for Canadian society: “Canadians borrowed directly from the example provided by martial youth movements in Britain, combining their concern for the moral and physical health of boys with a nascent spirit of civilian militarism.”⁷¹ Physical activity became more important to demonstrating superior manliness and to combat the “deterioration of Canadian manhood.”⁷² Urbanization and industrialization created cities that, in the eyes of social reformers, were hotbeds of juvenile delinquency and immoral behaviour. This “boy problem” led to social movements and organizations, such as the Boys Brigade, the Boy Scouts, and the cadets, which were intent on producing more militarized manly men.⁷³ This is an example of what R.W. Connell refers to as the link between global, regional, and local modes of hegemonic masculinity. Connell argues that regional hegemonic masculinity provides a cultural framework that may be “materialized in daily practices and actions.”⁷⁴ Connell’s conceptual framework is useful because it provides theoretical links between hegemonic masculinity in Britain during the war, and the Calgary men who are the focus of this study. Regional hegemonic masculinity was supported by institutions and ideas that matured in Britain and were transported overseas by waves of immigration. Calgary, and after 1914 the trenches in

⁷⁰ Anthony Fletcher, “Patriotism, the Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness,” *History* 99, no. 334 (2014), 43. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12044>.

⁷¹ Wood, *Militia Myths*, 154.

⁷² Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 123.

⁷³ Evan J. Habkirk, “From Indian Boys to Canadian Men? The Use of Cadet Drill in the Canadian Indian Residential School System,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 30, no. 2 (September 22, 2017), 230, <https://doi.org/10.3828/bjcs.2017.13>. James A. Wood, *Militia Myths: Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier, 1896-1921*, Studies in Canadian Military History (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010), 112. Patricia Dirks, “Canada’s Boys - An Imperial or National Asset? Response to Baden-Powell’s Boy Scout Movement in Pre-War Canada,” in *Canada and the British World: Culture, Migration, and Identity*, by Phillip A. Buckner and R. D. Francis (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 111. <https://doi.org/10.59962/9780774855044>.

⁷⁴ Connell and Messerschmidt, “Hegemonic Masculinity: Rethinking the Concept,” 850.

France and Belgium, was the site where local daily practices and actions performed by men affirmed hegemonic masculine standards.

In 1914, Calgary was a city that had undergone several decades of rapid demographic, economic, and social change. Many of the inhabitants were new to Canada, and nearly all of them were new to Alberta.⁷⁵ When the Canadian Pacific Railway reached Calgary in 1883, the village consisted of the Royal North West Mounted Police fort, a Hudson's Bay Company store and an I.G. Baker Company store, "some tents," and two "tiny Roman Catholic and Methodist Churches."⁷⁶ Once Calgary was connected to the rest of Canada by regular rail service, it grew rapidly. In 1893, it became the first city to be incorporated in the North-West Territories.⁷⁷ Throughout Calgary's development into a major urban center, it remained a city dominated by British Canadian culture, even as its economic makeup became more industrialized and its population exploded.

In 1902, a visiting reporter from the *London Times* described Calgary as "English in the substantial stone buildings; it is English in its sentiment; it is English in its social life; it is English in its Ranchman's Club and English in many other respects."⁷⁸ Although the city was small, just three miles east to west and one mile north to south, it had an established Anglo-Protestant elite that shaped its institutions and industries.⁷⁹ First-generation British immigrants who made their fortunes in the ranching industry were strongly represented in the ranks of the city's social and economic elites.⁸⁰ Prominent local men such as Pat Burns and

⁷⁵ Brock Millman, *Polarity, Patriotism, and Dissent in Great War Canada, 1914-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 133.

⁷⁶ Bob Shiels, *Calgary: A Not Too Solemn Look at Calgary's First 100 Years* (Calgary: Smith Grant Mann Alberta Limited, 1974), 45.

⁷⁷ John Blue, *Alberta, Past and Present: Historical and Biographical*, vol. 1 (Chicago: Pioneer Historical, 1924), 169. <http://archive.org/details/albertapastprese01blue>.

⁷⁸ Hugh A. Dempsey, *Calgary: Spirit of the West: A History* (Calgary: Glenbow, 1994), 76.

⁷⁹ Shiels, *Calgary*, 107.

⁸⁰ Howard Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice: A History of Nativism in Alberta*, The Canadian Social History Series (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1982), 23.

A.E. Cross were representative of hundreds of other “entrepreneurs, financiers, merchants, and government and church leaders” who promoted “the inevitable correctness of British traditions.”⁸¹ Calgary retained a distinctly British identity, particularly among the middle and upper class, despite the rapid population growth it experienced after the arrival of the railway.

Between 1883 and 1893 Calgary’s population grew from 500 to 4,000 people.⁸² Due to an economic downturn, the population growth was relatively stagnant for the next decade. In the 1901 census, Calgary’s population was only 4,865 people.⁸³ However, in the next fifteen years Calgary’s population increased dramatically, particularly between the years of 1909 and 1913.⁸⁴ From the 1906 census to the 1911 census, the population grew from 13,573 to 43,704.⁸⁵ The rate of increase was so rapid that it was a logistical nightmare to record. In R.B. Bennett’s maiden speech in the House of Commons as Calgary’s Member of Parliament, he boasted that the city’s population was even larger than official records indicated because between 6,000 and 7,000 people who had arrived after enumerators had finished counting were not included in the 1911 census.⁸⁶

⁸¹ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 286 and 237-238.

⁸² P. Whitney Lackenbauer, “The Politics of Contested Space, Military Property Development in Calgary, 1907-1938” (National Library of Canada = Bibliothèque nationale du Canada, 1999), 13. http://www.collectionscanada.ca/obj/s4/f2/dsk1/tape9/PQDD_0017/MQ47955.pdf.

⁸³ Statistics Canada, *Fourth Census of Canada, 1901: Population*, vol. 1, 4 vols. (Ottawa: S.E. Dawson, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1901), 130. https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2016/statcan/CS98-1901-1.pdf.

⁸⁴ Bryan Peter Melnyk, *Calgary Builds: The Emergence of an Urban Landscape, 1905-1914* (Regina: Alberta Culture/Canadian Plains Research Center, 1985), 20.

⁸⁵ Statistics Canada, *Census of Prairie Provinces. Population and Agriculture. Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta. 1916* (Ottawa: J. de Labroquerie Taché, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1918), 87-89. <http://archive.org/details/censusofprairiep00cana>.

⁸⁶ Library of Parliament, “Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons of the Dominion of Canada: First Session-Twelfth Parliament” (CH Parmelee, Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1911-1912), Image 25/Page 21 Canadian Parliamentary Historical Resources, https://parl.canadiana.ca/view/oop.debates_HOC1201_01/25

Over this same period, Calgary's economic makeup shifted from a primarily ranching and agrarian center to a booming hub of industry, construction, and real estate. In 1901, Calgary was still primarily a ranching town reliant on stockyards and the railway.⁸⁷ However, increased agricultural production driven by immigration and new technology, speculation about the arrival of the Canadian Northern and Grand Trunk Pacific Railways, and the Canadian Pacific Railway's decision to locate their western car repair shops in Calgary, contributed to the city's rapid social and economic transformation.⁸⁸ Calgary's geographic area and economic activity expanded dramatically in lockstep with its population. Between 1900 and 1911, the city grew thirteen times larger.⁸⁹ By 1909, it had ninety-seven wholesale warehouses and factories producing biscuits, soap, candy, breakfast food, coffee, spice, and macaroni.⁹⁰ Calgary's growth became a driver of economic activity. In 1911, roughly 10% of the adult male population worked in the real estate industry.⁹¹ In the 1912 fiscal year, work began on twenty-two new warehouses, six garages, twelve stores, eight office buildings, and several iconic hotels and stores such as the Palliser Hotel and the Hudson's Bay Company Store. That year, roughly twenty million dollars' worth of building permits were issued.⁹² Calgary's expansion meant that on the eve of the Great War, it was a bustling hub of industry with an economy that was dominated by manufacturing, construction, and agricultural industries.⁹³

⁸⁷ Dempsey, *Calgary: Spirit of the West*, 76.

⁸⁸ Melnyk, *Calgary Builds*, 20.

⁸⁹ Beverly A. Sandalack and Andrei Nicolai, *The Calgary Project: Urban Form/Urban Life* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2006), 16.

⁹⁰ Shiels, *Calgary*, 61.

⁹¹ Grant MacEwan, *Calgary Cavalcade from Fort to Fortune*, (Saskatoon: Western Producer Book Service, 1975), 162.

⁹² Dempsey, *Calgary: Spirit of the West*, 86-87.

⁹³ David Bright, *The Limits of Labour: Class Formation and the Labour Movement in Calgary, 1883-1929* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1998), 30. Maxwell Foran and Heather MacEwan Foran, *Calgary: Canada's Frontier Metropolis: An Illustrated History* (Windsor: Windsor Publications, 1982), 72 and 120.

Calgary was in transition from a rural frontier past to an urban industrialized future. In most respects, it offered the same amenities and activities as other Canadian cities. By 1910, the municipal railway had 18 street cars and 22 miles of track to move citizens around the city.⁹⁴ Calgary had a reliable source of electricity after 1911, the same year in which it hosted its first aviation meet to the delight of onlookers.⁹⁵ In other ways, the citizens of Calgary embraced its frontier identity. The 1912 Calgary Stampede was a “nostalgic extravaganza” that celebrated Calgary’s role as the city that represented the ‘last best west’.⁹⁶ Fred Kennedy recalled that for 50 cents, a photographer downtown would take your picture in “cowboy attire,” including a .45 calibre revolver, that you could mail to your “folks back home.”⁹⁷ However, British codes of masculinity shaped how Calgarians mythologized their frontier past. Guy Weadick, the lead organizer of the first Stampede, urged Calgarians to celebrate cowboys as “courteous and self-contained... truthful, honest and brave” rather than as rough and rugged frontiersmen.⁹⁸

Throughout all of Calgary’s growth, its local culture and demographics remained dominated by an Anglo-Protestant upper middle-class elite. As Howard Palmer notes, prairie urban areas were “universally dominated by Anglo-Saxon Protestants.”⁹⁹ The vast majority of Calgarians were Anglicans, Presbyterians, or Methodists.¹⁰⁰ Popular British sports like polo and cricket were also popular in Calgary.¹⁰¹ Schools and churches in the region were built in the architectural styles of Victorian England.¹⁰² Local journalist Fred Kennedy

⁹⁴ Shiels, *Calgary*, 141.

⁹⁵ Shiels, *Calgary*, 96 and 144.

⁹⁶ Mary-Ellen Kelm, “Manly Contests: Rodeo Masculinities at the Calgary Stampede,” *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 4 (December 2009), 719. <https://doi.org/10.3138/chr.90.4.711>.

⁹⁷ Fred Kennedy, *Alberta Was My Beat: Memoirs of a Western Newspaperman* (Alberta: The Albertan, 1975), 8.

⁹⁸ Kelm, “Manly Contests,” 719.

⁹⁹ Palmer, *Patterns of Prejudice*, 18.

¹⁰⁰ Statistics Canada, *Census of Prairie Provinces 1916*, 215.

¹⁰¹ Shiels, *Calgary*, 175.

¹⁰² Trudy Soby, *Be It Ever So Humble* (Canada: Century Calgary Publications, 1975), 16.

recalled that his first experience in the city in 1912 was the annual Orangeman parade.¹⁰³ The 1916 Census of Prairie Provinces illustrates the stark divide between Calgary and the rest of the province. In Alberta, 48.9 percent of the population was Canadian-born, while just 17.5 percent was born in the British Isles, and the remaining 33.6 percent was foreign-born. In Calgary, 49 percent of the city was Canadian born while 35 percent was born in the British Isles and the remaining roughly 16 percent was foreign born.¹⁰⁴ While Calgary had similar numbers of Canadian-born residents as the rest of Alberta, it had double the number of British-born immigrants and less than half the number of foreign-born immigrants.

The demographic makeup of Calgary is significant because it had a direct bearing on the model of hegemonic masculinity that was prevalent before the Great War. Newcomers to Calgary faced pressure to assimilate into masculine identities that emphasized self-control, honour, manhood, and duty.¹⁰⁵ At the start of the 20th century, there were three men for every woman in the city. Many of the men were young and unmarried.¹⁰⁶ They were often attempting to escape the “ennui, routine and feminine constraint” of domestic life in England by adventuring to the far reaches of the British Empire.¹⁰⁷ They adhered to British hegemonic masculinity in its most virulent and martial form. An anonymous English writer in 1913 wrote that a man who went to Calgary became “the captain of his own fate, the master of his own soul.”¹⁰⁸ The frontier was where men could test their manhood against nature and excel by utilizing “brawn and physical power.”¹⁰⁹ It was a location for aspiring homesteaders,

¹⁰³ Kennedy, *Alberta Was My Beat*, 6.

¹⁰⁴ Statistics Canada, *Census of Prairie Provinces 1916*, 217-218.

¹⁰⁵ R. Rory Henry, “Making Modern Citizens: The Construction of Masculine Middle-Class Identity on the Canadian Prairies, 1890-1920,” in *Toward Defining the Prairies: Region, Culture and History*, by Robert Alexander Wardhaugh (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2001), 82.

¹⁰⁶ MacEwan, *Calgary Cavalcade*, 102.

¹⁰⁷ Tosh, “What should Historians do with Masculinity?” 188.

¹⁰⁸ Soby, *Be it Ever so Humble*, 11.

¹⁰⁹ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 25.

remittance men, ranch hands, and cowboys.¹¹⁰ Because the immigrants who came to Calgary tended to be British, unmarried, and young, it meant that as the city grew, more men adhered to a martial and aggressive hegemonic masculinity. The men emigrating to Calgary were largely those who subscribed to the idea, popularized by Rudyard Kipling and Robert Service amongst others, that on the frontier they would become men.¹¹¹ They formed the nucleus of a society that endorsed an increasingly violent and militant version of hegemonic masculinity that required physical activity rather than mental acumen, and encouraged courage and duty as opposed to morality and kindness. When Luther McCarty was killed during a highly publicized boxing match in 1913, the *Calgary Herald* pushed back against efforts to ban the sport by arguing that it remained “just as manly and fair a sport as it ever was.”¹¹²

Two anecdotal examples from young men who came to Calgary during its population boom illustrate the prevalence of hegemonic British codes of masculinity. Victor Wheeler, who emigrated to Calgary in 1912, recalled that his schooling in Wolverhampton, England, included a visit from the politician Winston Churchill who urged him and his fellow students to prepare for an “inevitable” war with Germany.¹¹³ Fred Kennedy, who came to the city as a child in 1912, remembered that his childhood was shaped by the novels of G.A. Henty, histories of the Boer War, and a desire to follow in the footsteps of his father and join the cavalry.¹¹⁴ These young men who immigrated to Calgary were not blank slates upon which a distinctly Western regional hegemonic masculine identity could be written. They were often

¹¹⁰ Shiels, *Calgary*, 34 and 58.

¹¹¹ Robert H. MacDonald, *Sons of the Empire: The Frontier and the Boy Scout Movement, 1890-1918*, Heritage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993), 32. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442680098>.

¹¹² MacEwan, *Calgary Cavalcade*, 169.

¹¹³ Victor W. Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man's Land* (Calgary: Comprint Publishing Company, 1980), 183.

¹¹⁴ Kennedy, *Alberta was my Beat*, 3.

men who had spent their childhoods and early adulthood steeped in the British school system and society that promoted an increasingly martial version of hegemonic masculinity.

Calgary's local institutions were venues where regional hegemonic masculine models were supported, negotiated, and inculcated. The city stood at the forefront of the expansion of the British Empire and local middle-class reformers sought to improve upon "the great British culture that had created it."¹¹⁵ As Calgary experienced unprecedented levels of growth, institutions such as the militia, cadet programs, and extra-curricular groups such as the Boy Scouts and the Boys Brigade that supported a martial version of hegemonic masculinity became more popular. These institutions demonstrate that Calgary was receptive to British masculine ideals, and reflect the fact that its citizens understood themselves as active actors in the Empire, not as distinctly Western Canadian individuals.

The first militia group in Calgary, "G" Squadron of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, was created in 1901 in the wake of the Boer War.¹¹⁶ From 1901 to the outbreak of the Great War, the militia's popularity across Canada increased. Annual militia expenditures increased from roughly three million to nearly eleven million dollars. During the same period, the number of militia members trained in urban units doubled from 12,000 to 24,000 men.¹¹⁷ In April 1910, the 103rd Regiment (Calgary Rifles) was organized to complement "G" Squadron, which was renamed the 15th Light Horse.¹¹⁸ By 1913, Calgary was home to a variety of militia units including the No. 13 Section Canadian Army Veterinary Corps, 4th Field Troop Canadian Engineers, No. 9 Detachment Canadian Army Pay Corps, and the No. 8 Canadian Postal Corps.¹¹⁹ The growth of the militia was praised by local newspapers such

¹¹⁵ Henry, "Making Modern Citizens," 79.

¹¹⁶ Lackenbauer, "The Politics of Contested Space," 13.

¹¹⁷ Wood, *Militia Myths*, Page 277-278.

¹¹⁸ Richard Cunniffe, *Scarlet, Riflegreen and Khaki: The Military in Calgary*, The Century Calgary Historical Series, (Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975), 12.

¹¹⁹ Cunniffe, *Scarlet, Riflegreen, and Khaki*, 15.

as the *Calgary Herald*. Increased militia attendance indicated that “the trend of the public mind” had shifted towards increased interest in preparing for the defence of the country.¹²⁰ The paper argued that “the people of Calgary are behind ‘the amateur soldier.’ He is a man without selfish motives; a real man and entitled to consideration.”¹²¹

Calgarian elites supported local militia efforts. As the city grew, a “fledgling military identity” was developed due to the Northwest Rebellion of 1885 and the Boer War mobilization efforts. Beginning in 1903, Colonel James Walker hosted cavalry summer camps at his sprawling estate and the exhibition grounds at Victoria Park hosted military competitions.¹²² A drill hall, built using private funds in 1904, was soon joined by a second, more permanent hall in 1912. Immediately before the Great War, even the youngest Calgarian boys were being taught the values of military service. Calgary cadets won the King’s Challenge Cup and the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire Challenge Cup in 1912, and in 1914 Alberta won the Governor-General’s Challenge shield for the “province enrolling the largest number of cadets.”¹²³

School curricula and cadet programs in Canada fostered hegemonic militarized masculine principles before the Great War. Western Canada College was built in 1904 to satisfy a need for Calgarians of British descent who wanted their sons to receive a good education in “culture and utility.”¹²⁴ It was modelled after the English public school.¹²⁵ Seventeen teachers and 260 students from the school enlisted during the Great War.¹²⁶ The

¹²⁰ “Significant Figures,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 9, 1913, Newspapers.com, 6. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-militia-flourishing-in-ca/121910110/>.

¹²¹ “Disparaging the Militia,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 25, 1913, Newspapers.com, 6. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-pre-war-pro-militia-senti/124816881/>.

¹²² Lackenbauer, “The Politics of Contested Space,” 56

¹²³ Cunniffe, *Scarlet, Riflegreen, and Khaki*, 15.

¹²⁴ Kay Bourassa, *From Slate Pencil to Instant Ink: Calgary’s Public, Separate and Private Schools*, The Century Calgary Historical Series (Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975), 213.

¹²⁵ Blue, *Alberta Past and Present*, 292.

¹²⁶ Bourassa, *From Slate Pencil to Instant Ink*, 213.

inclusion of military drill in schools contributed to and strengthened “the relationship between manliness and militarism.”¹²⁷ Cadet training was viewed as a tool for encouraging manliness in Canadian boys. In the 1898 Report of the Minister of Education of Ontario, military drill was justified because “no other drill so effectually develops manliness of form and bearing, as well as physical force and independence.”¹²⁸ It provided the additional advantage of teaching “promptness, obedience, attention, and even resoluteness, which are invaluable in the formation of a strong character.”¹²⁹ Cadet programs grew increasingly popular before the war. Between 1910 and 1914, the number of cadets nearly doubled from 21,000 to 40,000 boys.¹³⁰

Calgary schools embraced cadet programs to inculcate boys with proper masculine values. Before the Great War, Alberta had the second-highest percentage of its school children enrolled in cadet programs.¹³¹ One pro-cadet article in the *Calgary Herald*, argued that cadet training in schools would “add to the manliness and bearing of the rising generation.”¹³² Cadet training, aside from its obvious military application, was thought to provide wide-ranging benefits for the development of boys. The 1912 Report on Education in Alberta argued that cadet training produced the “same results” as “field and athletic sports” for boys in school.¹³³ It emphasized that cadet training improved physical development,

¹²⁷ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 59.

¹²⁸ Ontario. Dept. of Education, Ontario. Ministry of Education, and ONTARIO. DEPT. OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION, *Report of the Minister of Education, Ontario, 1898* (Toronto: Warwick Bro’s & Rutter, Printers & Co., 1899), xxxv. <http://archive.org/details/reportofminister1898onta>.

¹²⁹ Ontario Dept. of Education, *Report of the Minister of Education, Ontario, 1898*, xxxv.

¹³⁰ Desmond Morton, “The Cadet Movement in the Moment of Canadian Militarism, 1909–1914,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 13, no. 2 (1978), 63. <https://doi.org/10.3138/jcs.13.2.56>.

¹³¹ John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1919*, Canadian Social History Series (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1978), 20.

¹³² “Canadian Defence League Addresses Governor General,” *The Calgary Herald*, February 3, 1912, Newspapers.com, 4. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-canadian-defence-league-a/135515168/>.

¹³³ Alberta Dept. of Education, *Seventh Annual Report of the Department of Education of the Province of Alberta, 1912* (Edmonton: J.W. Jefferey, Government Printer, 1913), 127. <http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/bibliography/9535.7/reader.html#67>.

counteracted morbidity, developed obedience, promoted dexterity and muscularity, and taught courtesy.¹³⁴ J. Morgan, a school inspector in Alberta, believed that military training derived “both physical and moral” benefits.¹³⁵

Another institution in Calgary that instilled hegemonic militarized masculinity was the Boy Scouts.¹³⁶ The first Boy Scout troops were established in Calgary in February 1910 by local religious leaders and a principal who had been a scoutmaster in England before emigrating to Calgary.¹³⁷ Scouting in Calgary was dominated by local elites.¹³⁸ The scouts were closely linked to the militia. During the 1911 trip to King George’s coronation, the Calgary contingent of scouts was led to the CPR station by the band of the 103rd Calgary Rifles playing the song “Onward Christian Soldiers.”¹³⁹

Scouting promoted hegemonic masculinity and combined values like obedience and marksmanship with masculine principles such as self-sufficiency, physical fortitude, and bravery. In Baden-Powell’s 1911 Handbook *The Canadian Boy Scout*, he blamed the fall of the Roman Empire on the unwillingness of Roman boys to serve in the military and their lack of manliness.¹⁴⁰ Although Baden-Powell explicitly argued that there was “no military meaning attached to scouting,” he noted that in times of war, “he who shirks and leaves this

¹³⁴ Alberta Dept. of Education, *Seventh Annual Report*, 126.

¹³⁵ Alberta Dept. of Education, *Seventh Annual Report*, 63.

¹³⁶ Kevin Woodger, “‘No Mere Child’s Play’: The Canadian Cadet Movement and the Boy Scouts of Canada in the Twentieth Century” (Ph.D., Ontario, University of Toronto (Canada), 2020), 12. <https://www.proquest.com/docview/2427369518/abstract/963B0A61FB6A4673PQ/1>.

¹³⁷ Dirks, “Canada’s Boys,” 113.

¹³⁸ The Local Association Council included the Anglican Bishop of Calgary Rt. Rev. W. Cyprian Pinkham, Calgary Member of Parliament and prominent lawyer R.B. Bennett, Calgary’s Mayor R.R. Jamieson, several Presbyterian ministers, local militia members Capt. Cornelius de Kam, Col. W.H.V. Cunliffe, and local Judge Charles A. Stuart. See Tom Baines, *Scouting in Calgary: Boy Scout Groups and Activities, 1910-1974: Accounts*, The Century Calgary Historical Series, (Calgary: Century Calgary Publications, 1975), 7

¹³⁹ Baines, *Scouting in Calgary*, 14.

¹⁴⁰ Robert Baden-Powell, *The Canadian Boy Scout: A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship*, CIHM/ICMH Digital Series 71367 (Toronto: Morang, 1911), 283. <https://www.canadiana.ca/view/oocihm.71367>.

[military] duty to others to do for him is neither playing a plucky nor a fair part.”¹⁴¹ While Baden-Powell downplayed the military ties of scouting, in both philosophy and organizational structure, the Boy Scouts promoted militarized hegemonic masculinity.¹⁴²

The Boys Brigade, though less well known than the Boy Scouts, was also a popular youth organization that promoted hegemonic militarized masculine values. The Boys Brigade was first mentioned in Calgary newspapers in October 1911 with the establishment of a dedicated column for Boys Brigade and cadets news.¹⁴³ The organization was intended to advance “Christ’s Kingdom among boys, and the promotion of habits of obedience, reverence, discipline, self-respect, and all that tends towards a true Christian manliness.”¹⁴⁴ The Boys Brigade was viewed as part of an overall effort to “study the boy problem as never before.”¹⁴⁵ It was directly intended to alleviate the crisis of masculinity. The Boys Brigade had a similar model to the cadets, but it was not linked with the public school system. To promote values like discipline and self-respect, it used militarized drill that interested boys and provided social benefits.¹⁴⁶

At the beginning of the Great War in 1914, a hegemonic masculinity existed in Calgary that paralleled late Victorian English codes of manliness. Manly qualities included

¹⁴¹ Baden-Powell, *The Canadian Boy Scout*, 324.

¹⁴² During the war, 222 Calgary Scout leaders or former scouts enlisted for overseas service. See Donald B. Smith, “Calgary’s Grand Theatre in the Great War,” in *The Frontier of Patriotism: Alberta and the First World War*, ed. Adriana Davies and Jeff Keshen, *Beyond Boundaries: Canadian Defence and Strategic Studies* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016), 405.

¹⁴³ “With the Boys Brigade and Public School Cadets,” *Calgary Herald*, October 28, 1911, Newspapers.com, 7. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-with-the-boys-brigade-and/124802910/>.

¹⁴⁴ “With the Boys Brigade and Public School Cadets,” 7.

¹⁴⁵ “The Boys Brigade Report,” *The Calgary Herald*, November 7, 1912, Newspapers.com, 18. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-the-boys-brigade-report/125241792/>.

¹⁴⁶ Canadian Organizing Secretary of the Boys Brigade F.V. Longstaff explained that “military organization and drill” secured “the interest of the boys” and made the sessions “arouse their pride and interest, induce a desire for manliness, animate the growing sense of duty, and feelings of pleasure.” For more see F.V. Longstaff, “With the Boys Brigade and Public School Cadets,” *The Calgary Herald*, March 22, 1913, Newspapers.com, 7. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-with-the-boys-brigade-and/125139195/>.

“forthrightness, vigorous physical activity, chivalry, courage, ambition, toughness, pluck, sacrifice and self-reliance, decisiveness, [and] determination.”¹⁴⁷ Although the majority of men did not belong to the militia and the majority of boys were not cadets, Boy Scouts, or members of the Boys Brigade, these institutions were endorsed by local elites, promoted in public schools, and venerated in the local press for providing positive examples of masculinity that would help deal with the boy problem. Popular literature promoted soldier heroes and adventurers on the frontier as masculine role models.

Chapter One of this thesis uses newspaper coverage of battalion departures in Calgary to analyze how this hegemonic model of masculinity was impacted by the war. It tracks battalion departures from August 1914 to August 1916 and demonstrates that the male ideal that began the war was not significantly altered even as public understanding of the war changed from a brief conflict to a protracted bloody struggle. Chapter Two uses men’s letters to assess how their individual masculine identities differed or aligned with the hegemonic ideal. Chapter Three uses memoirs to explore the enduring appeal of the hegemonic masculine model that existed when the Great War began, even as public understanding of the war became altered by post-war issues. Ultimately, this thesis explores the hegemonic masculine ideals that Calgary men contended with during the war. It is most concerned with uncovering how men adapted their personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings, to fit with accepted masculine ideals. The individuals in this thesis were thought to be the living embodiment of masculinity. In the words of the fictional George Winterbourne, they were “the first real men I’ve looked upon. I swear you’re better than the women and the half-men, and by God! I swear I’ll die with you rather than live in a world without you.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁷ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 29.

¹⁴⁸ George Winterbourne was the protagonist of Richard Aldington’s *Death of a Hero*, written in 1929. Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero*, Penguin Classics (London: Penguin Books, 2013), 228.

Chapter One: “Another Scene of Delirious Excitement”: Hegemonic Masculinity and Battalion Departure Parades

On 22 June 1914, local elites, militia members, and thousands of citizens gathered in Central Park in Calgary to unveil a memorial to the men who fought and died in the Boer War (1899-1902). Members of the cadets, Boy Scouts, and local militia units were well represented. Nearly 2,000 militia members, in Calgary for their annual summer training camp, paraded past onlookers. Boer War veterans in attendance were held up as ideal examples of masculinity. They were “stalwart, bronzed looking men” who betrayed “no trace” of the “trying experiences that they must have gone through.” Calgary’s Member of Parliament, R.B. Bennett, gave a lengthy speech that emphasized military service as the ultimate male honour. Bennett praised the memorial as a reminder of such values as “heroic self-sacrifice; indomitable courage; lofty patriotism; devotion to duty and of service to the cause of freedom, justice, and liberty.”¹⁴⁹ Additionally, he expounded on war’s unparalleled ability to develop “heroic virtues” such as “cool, determined self-sacrifice” and “dauntless courage.”¹⁵⁰ Six days later, Archduke Franz Ferdinand was shot and killed in Sarajevo. Britain, and by extension the rest of the Empire, declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914.

In the immediate aftermath of Canada’s entry into the war, the prevailing mood in cities across the country was enthusiastic and patriotic. The *Calgary Herald* ran an article on 5 August entitled “How the News was Received in Canada,” which reported enthusiastic crowds in Montreal, Ottawa, Toronto, Edmonton, Winnipeg, and Regina.¹⁵¹ A *Herald* article declared, however, that Calgary was “undoubtedly the most optimistic city in Canada

¹⁴⁹ “South African Memorial Statue Is Unveiled by the District Officer Commanding,” *The Calgary Herald*, June 22, 1914, Newspapers.com, 5. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-south-african-memorial-st/125682855/>

¹⁵⁰ “South African Memorial Statue is Unveiled,” 10.

¹⁵¹ “How the News Was Received in Canada,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 5, 1914, Newspapers.com, 7. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-how-the-news-was-received/126277889/>.

today.”¹⁵² Another indicated that the city “went wild with excitement.”¹⁵³ Crowds thronged newspaper offices which displayed bulletins for those on the street and rushed special editions to print to keep up with breaking news. People spontaneously cheered and sang “Rule Britannia,” and “The Marseillaise.”¹⁵⁴ Enthusiasm for news was so intense that on 7 August, the *Herald* ran a public notice asking people to “be calm” and refrain from crowding the streets into the late hours of the night.¹⁵⁵

This chapter examines public conceptions of hegemonic masculinity in Calgary during the Great War. It focuses on newspaper coverage of local battalion departure parades and the events associated with them. Departure parades were ritualized public displays of men in uniform that reinforced military service as masculine behaviour.¹⁵⁶ They allowed soldiers to say goodbye to their loved ones, helped local recruiting efforts, and provided a venue for local elites to give speeches. Symbolically, they represented the moment when men became soldiers in the eyes of the public.¹⁵⁷ Departure parades reinforced a soldier hero model of masculinity that idealized men who were physically fit, courageous, enthusiastic, emotionally reserved, and in uniform. This masculine ideal was consistent throughout the war, even as the public understanding of the conflict changed.

Between August 1914, and the summer of 1917, when conscription was implemented, local military and civilian leaders became more involved with recruiting efforts for the

¹⁵² “Calgary Optimistic Despite Big War,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 5, 1914, Newspapers.com, 4. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-calgary-optimistic-despit/126277520/>.

¹⁵³ “War Announcement Gives Rise to Great Outburst of Patriotic Feeling,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 5, 1914, Newspapers.com, 9. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-war-announcement-gives-ri/126278079/>.

¹⁵⁴ “War Announcement Gives Rise to Great Outburst of Patriotic Feeling,” 9.

¹⁵⁵ “Let the Public Be Calm,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 7, 1914, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-let-the-public-be-calm/126280502/>.

¹⁵⁶ Robert Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada’s Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 87.

¹⁵⁷ Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons*, 62.

Canadian Expeditionary Force.¹⁵⁸ The authorized size of the C.E.F. grew from 30,000 men, to 150,000 men in July 1915, 250,000 in October 1915, and 500,000 in January 1916.¹⁵⁹ As the government tried to recruit more men, it relied on “local networks, local appeals, local control, and local resources.”¹⁶⁰ In Calgary, the first recruits were dispatched from the city on 14 August 1914, when 300 men left to join the Princess Patricia’s Own Light Infantry at Valcartier.¹⁶¹ Calgary’s contribution to the first contingent left the city on the 21 August when local militia groups, including the 103rd Calgary Rifles, left for Camp Valcartier, Quebec.¹⁶² Subsequent battalions were raised by men from militia groups who did not leave with the first contingent. For instance, the 12th Canadian Mounted Rifles and the 56th Battalion were recruited from men who were formerly members of the 15th Light Horse and the 103rd Calgary Rifles respectively.¹⁶³ These units were raised in the fall of 1914 and spring of 1915, along with men for the two battalions from Calgary that remained intact overseas: the 31st Battalion and the 50th Battalion.¹⁶⁴ In total, nine infantry battalions were recruited in whole or in part from the city of Calgary throughout the war.¹⁶⁵

Local elites were eager to label battalions that were recruited in the area as Calgary battalions to demonstrate the city’s commitment to the Empire and the war effort. The 56th

¹⁵⁸ Robert Rutherford, “Send-Offs During Canada’s Great War: Interpreting Hometown Rituals in Dispatching Home Front Volunteers,” *Histoire Sociale / Social History* 36, no. 72 (2003), 426, <https://hssh.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/hssh/article/view/4411>. And, Paul Maroney, “‘The Great Adventure’: The Context and Ideology of Recruiting in Ontario, 1914-1917,” *Canadian Historical Review* 77, no. 1 (March 1996), 73, <https://doi.org/10.3138/CHR-077-01-03>.

¹⁵⁹ Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed*, vol. 14, The Canadian Centenary Series (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), 219.

¹⁶⁰ Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons*, 49.

¹⁶¹ “First Western War Contingent Leaves for the East Today,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 14, 1914, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-first-western-war-conting/126284594/>.

¹⁶² “Calgary Contingent of Local Militia Leaves for Valcartier Today,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 21, 1914, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-calgary-contingent-of-loc/122313970/>.

¹⁶³ “Use the Militia,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 2, 1915, Newspapers.com, 4. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-recruiting-problems-in-th/122313449/>.

¹⁶⁴ Blue, *Alberta Past and Present*, 403.

¹⁶⁵ Blue, *Alberta Past and Present*, 403-404. The battalions were the 3rd CMR, 12th CMR, 31st Battalion, 50th Battalion, 56th Battalion, 63rd Battalion, 82nd Battalion, 89th Battalion, and the 137th Battalion.

Battalion was labelled “Calgary’s Own” because it was recruited almost entirely in the city.¹⁶⁶ When the battalion departed, the *Calgary Herald* wrote that the 56th would be a “credit to Calgary, to the whole Dominion, and the Empire,” and that the city had given “another pledge of its loyalty to the Crown and its undying allegiance to the cause of Empire.”¹⁶⁷

Calgary newspapers promoted the idea that the city itself, and the men it provided for the war effort, were emblematic of the frontier. Calgary elites celebrated the Empire’s previous military accomplishments and believed that the extension of British dominance would come from the Canadian West where the influence of the frontier produced the ideal soldier.¹⁶⁸ As the first men left Calgary, the *Herald* reported that the “whole body was typical of the last west, men gathered from all parts of the Dominion and of the Empire.”¹⁶⁹ Mythic conceptions of frontier masculinity that drew many men to the city before the war pervaded the descriptions of men in uniform. Calgarian men were good soldiers, due to the influence of the western frontier. As the 50th Battalion departed, the *Herald* wrote “to a man they were “as hard as nails” and they carry with them to distant scenes that healthy, vigorous atmosphere of the western country.”¹⁷⁰ The 137th Battalion was described as a “battalion of sturdy westerners.”¹⁷¹ Calgary and the West were conflated, despite the differences between life in the city and the hardships of homesteading in rural Alberta. The men of the 31st

¹⁶⁶ “Lieut.-Col. Armstrong and Officers and Men of 56th Battalion Are Ready to Face the Enemy,” *The Calgary Herald*, March 11, 1916, Newspapers.com, 9. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-56th-battalion-prepares-t/125408315/>.

¹⁶⁷ “Lieut.-Col. Armstrong and Officers and Men of 56th Battalion Are Ready to Face the Enemy,” 9.

¹⁶⁸ Gerald Friesen, *The Canadian Prairies: A History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 342.

¹⁶⁹ “Thousands Give Hearty Send-Off to Local Boys Leaving for the Front,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 22, 1914, Newspapers.com, 9. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-thousands-give-hearty-sen/135551436/>.

¹⁷⁰ “Great Crowd Cheers 50th Battalion as It Leaves Calgary,” *The Calgary Herald*, October 21, 1915, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-50th-battalion-leaves-cal/125353788/>.

¹⁷¹ “Formal Farewell to 137th Battalion at City Hall, Saturday,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 14, 1916, Newspapers.com, 7. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-formal-farewell-to-137th/135552018/>.

Battalion were “not merely representatives of Calgary” but, “representatives of the whole body of Alberta.”¹⁷² The 12th CMR were expected to perform well overseas because they were “bred in the ranging foothills, brought up in the open,” and would “make ideal cavalry.”¹⁷³ Newspaper reports about battalion departures emphasized the local representativeness of the men because of their British heritage, not in spite of it. Their lived experience on the frontier combined with their British-Canadian heritage qualified them even if they were not born and raised in the Calgary area. The men were praised for their strength and virility, which local newspapers attributed to the frontier lifestyle of the “last west.”

The public ceremonies associated with a battalion’s departure from the city, whether they were parades, a presentation of colours, or civic farewells, were rituals that served to reinforce patriotism, militarism, imperialism, and hegemonic masculinity. Eric Hobsbawm argues that rituals often serve to reinforce “invented traditions” that legitimize “institutions, status or relations of authority” and reinforce “beliefs, value systems, and conventions of behaviour.”¹⁷⁴ Robert Rutherford defines these rituals as “activating moments between pre-existing power relations – captured theoretically as hierarchies, that is, structured, yet constantly changing power systems marked by class, gender, ethnic, or age-based differences through which agents attempt to preserve or impose both their agency and their identity.”¹⁷⁵ Battalion departure ceremonies “elevated the myth of the volunteer, military masculinity, and imperial nationalism through the media of local spaces and local sites.”¹⁷⁶ Terms such as myth or power structures suggest that the rituals in question were imposed in a top-down

¹⁷² J.E. Pember, “Calgary’s Farewell to the 31st Battalion,” *The Calgary Albertan*, February 18, 1915, Newspapers.com, 6. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-31st-battalion-depa/117101004/>.

¹⁷³ “Our ‘Ain Folk,”” *The Calgary Herald*, October 6, 1915, Newspapers.com, 6. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-high-praise-for-12th-cmr/120298778/>.

¹⁷⁴ Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Canto Classics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 9. <https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9781107295636>.

¹⁷⁵ Rutherford, “Send-Offs during Canada’s Great War,” 434.

¹⁷⁶ Rutherford, “Send-Offs during Canada’s Great War,” 426.

manner by local elites to indoctrinate the middle and lower classes with elite values. This view denies the agency of the majority of Calgarians who attended battalion departure parades. Although they were organized by local elites and included speeches by prominent local figures, the events were widely popular and required broad cultural buy-in to achieve success.¹⁷⁷

Local support was particularly important for battalion send-offs to reinforce hegemonic standards of masculinity. The high degree of enthusiasm for these events reflects the ability of the parade to influence many people at once, as well as the widespread support that the soldier hero masculine model already garnered in society. Parades were a popular social activity before the war.¹⁷⁸ In Calgary, parades in support of the British Empire such as Victoria Day parades and parades for the coronation of King George V drew large crowds.¹⁷⁹ They generated public attention and made the participants the subjects of adoration and enthusiasm. As men paraded during battalion departures, they performed duties in accordance with “gendered scripts” that “ritualized the exclusivity of military manhood.”¹⁸⁰ Parades publicly delineated the difference between militarized men participating in the parade and the public, who took every opportunity to show their affection for the men who had aligned with masculine ideals. Because parades provided a venue for public adoration of enlisted men, they affirmed masculine ideals in soldiers and encouraged these ideals in society at large. The rituals included a great deal of “staged spectacle” that required “reciprocal elements” of crowd behaviour such as call-and-response chants and singing.¹⁸¹ Parades reinforced public support for the ideals they represented by encouraging crowd

¹⁷⁷ Rutherforddale, *Hometown Horizons*, 44.

¹⁷⁸ Wood, *Militia Myths*, 31.

¹⁷⁹ Lorry W. Felske, “Calgary’s Parading Culture Before 1912,” in *Icon, Brand, Myth: The Calgary Stampede*, ed. Max Foran (Canada: Athabasca University Press, 2008), 79.

¹⁸⁰ Rutherforddale, *Hometown Horizons*, 87.

¹⁸¹ Rutherforddale, *Hometown Horizons*, 55.

participation. The *Calgary Herald* noted at the first send-off of troops that there were “thousands of men, women and children giving vent in a public manner to feelings that ordinarily are hidden, and becoming wildly enthusiastic in the effort.”¹⁸² Members of the public already supported the war effort, but by participating in the cheering and singing of martial songs, they grew more enthusiastic and supportive.

Send-off parades were celebrations of hegemonic militarized masculinity. Rutherforddale claims that they “showed militarism and masculinity conjoined in displays of military power: a manful assertion of garb, gesture, and gait.”¹⁸³ The newspaper coverage of these events “privileged the myth of the volunteer and the valour of active servicemen as a male ideal.”¹⁸⁴ From the first departure of men in August 1914 to the last full Calgary battalion to leave in August 1916, Calgarians came out in droves to express their support for the men who were leaving for the front. Their sustained enthusiasm in a public setting indicates the enduring power of the soldier hero as a model of masculinity. Newspaper coverage of departures reinforced this masculine ideal because participants attended the event and then read about it afterwards.¹⁸⁵ By describing the widespread adoration and admiration bestowed on the men going overseas, newspapers reaffirmed and entrenched martial performance as a standard of masculinity.

Battalion departures required other ceremonial actions that further reinforced these themes. The 31st Battalion was given an official civic farewell at city hall before its parade.¹⁸⁶ At civic farewell ceremonies, speeches were given by the mayor and local military figures.

¹⁸² “Our Part in the Game,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 22, 1914, Newspapers.com, 6. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-our-part-in-the-game/135552767/>.

¹⁸³ Rutherforddale, *Hometown Horizons*, 55.

¹⁸⁴ Rutherforddale, *Hometown Horizons*, 200.

¹⁸⁵ Rutherforddale, *Hometown Horizons*, 54.

¹⁸⁶ “Thirty-First Battalion Given Official Farewell by the City of Calgary,” *The Calgary Herald*, February 17, 1915, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-thirty-first-battalion-gi/116877774/>.

The men were told that they were embarking on “the noblest mission that men could undertake.”¹⁸⁷ The 82nd Battalion was presented with official regimental flags by the children of Calgary. Approximately 17,000 people were in attendance, including 600 cadets.¹⁸⁸ Speeches were made that reinforced the masculine nature of serving overseas. Major Hogbins described the men as crusaders in a holy war who were committed to the “protection of innocent maidens and helpless children and suffering womanhood.” Dr. G.W. Kerby, the chairman of the school board, implored the men to “act like heroes,” and reminded them that they were “fighting for honour, for justice... for the soul of the human race.”¹⁸⁹ Evocative speeches that praised the heroism of men in uniform were grounded in the understanding that the conflict was a “war for righteousness” in which soldiers fought not just for the King, but for Christ.¹⁹⁰ Speakers portrayed the war in romantic terms that encouraged their audiences to view the men in uniform as living representatives of a “mythopoeic masculinity.”¹⁹¹ These ceremonial events were a significant aspect of promoting the soldier hero as a masculine ideal.

By celebrating men in uniform, departure parades and their associated rituals also served to compel men in the audience to alter their behaviour to align more with the hegemonic norm. Parades were recognized as events that encouraged enlistments. The 103rd Calgary Rifles was the first unit to parade in Calgary during the war. The regiment conducted a route march through the downtown business core of the city that was expected to “hurry up

¹⁸⁷ “Thirty-First Battalion Given Official Farewell,” 1.

¹⁸⁸ “Ten Thousand Calgary Children Present Colors to the Gallant 82nd,” *The Calgary Albertan*, May 11, 1916, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-ten-thousand-calgary/135553161/>.

¹⁸⁹ “Ten Thousand Calgary Children Present Colors to the Gallant 82nd,” 8.

¹⁹⁰ Vance, *Death so Noble*, 35-37.

¹⁹¹ Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons*, 54.

recruiting considerably.”¹⁹² The “stirring martial airs” and admirable conduct of the men in uniform were thought to encourage recruiting efforts.¹⁹³ After the 56th Battalion’s departure parade, the *Calgary Albertan* reported that the event “has helped recruiting very much in this city.”¹⁹⁴

Departure parades encouraged recruitment in two ways. Positive speeches that stressed the manliness of the men in uniform were reminders to everyone else that military service was a masculine duty. The chaplain for the 103rd Calgary Rifles praised men in uniform for possessing the “courage to do what is right and the spirit of sacrifice,” and encouraged the rest of the “young manhood of the west” to carry out their duty.¹⁹⁵ Additionally, at events associated with departure parades, speakers tried to shame men into enlisting. This became more common as casualties mounted and the pool of potential recruits decreased.¹⁹⁶ The night before the 50th Battalion departed, soldiers travelled along Eighth Avenue singing songs and waving flags.¹⁹⁷ The procession stopped outside the Grand Theatre, where a local alderman gave a speech that “harangued the remained” which prompted “deafening cheers” from the crowd.¹⁹⁸ Men who failed to join the military opened themselves up to “charges of cowardice and selfishness” for failing to exhibit “appropriate

¹⁹² “Calgary Rifles Will Make Route March in the City Tonight,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 11, 1914, Newspapers.com, 4. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-calgary-rifles-will-make/126281327/>. “Volunteer Lists Now on the Way to Headquarters,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 10, 1914, Newspapers.com, 4. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-volunteer-lists-now-on-th/135553537/>.

¹⁹³ “Six Hundred Men of 103rd Regiment Seen to Advantage on Parade,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 12, 1914, Newspapers.com, 5. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-103rd-rifles-parade-with/126281874/>.

¹⁹⁴ *The Calgary Albertan*, March 20, 1916, 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-good-recruiting/125459373/>.

¹⁹⁵ “Open Air Church Parade Held in City Yesterday,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 17, 1914, Newspapers.com, 4. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-open-air-church-parade-he/126285275/>.

¹⁹⁶ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 55.

¹⁹⁷ “Soldiers Tour City in Motors Last Night,” *The Calgary Herald*, October 20, 1915, Newspapers.com, 10. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-50th-battalion-soldiers-l/125354014/>.

¹⁹⁸ “Soldiers Tour City in Motors Last Night,” 10.

manliness.”¹⁹⁹ Negative shaming tactics, such as providing men in civilian clothes with white feathers, that called into question a man’s masculinity, were a common method of recruitment.

Military service was explicitly described as a necessary component of masculinity. It was a “litmus test of loyalty, citizenship, and manhood itself.”²⁰⁰ At one of the first parades of soldiers in Calgary, the *Calgary Herald* reported that the men were under no obligation “save that of manhood and love of justice and home.”²⁰¹ The implication was that men who remained in their civilian professions were ignoring their obligations of manhood. At the 137th Battalion’s departure, Senator James Lougheed denounced the men who remained in Calgary: “I know no higher sense nor any higher obligation than that a man be prepared to defend his country, and I say unhesitatingly that any man, physically fit, who refuses to respond to the call of his country is unworthy the name of manhood.”²⁰² For men to demonstrate their patriotism, and therefore their masculinity, they had to enlist.

The men who decided to enlist were widely celebrated and had their masculinity affirmed at battalion send-off parades. The practical purpose of the parade was to transport the battalion from their barracks to the train station and allow their friends and family to say farewell. At the beginning of the war, troops were either quartered at various militia sites downtown or at Victoria Barracks on the exhibition grounds. In June 1915, Sarcee Camp was opened, after which all departing battalions paraded from the camp to the CPR station.²⁰³ As

¹⁹⁹ Amy Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objection in Canada During the First World War*, Studies in Canadian Military History (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009), 8.

²⁰⁰ Nicoletta F. Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons: Men, Women, and the Renegotiation of British Citizenship during the Great War*, 1st ed. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 105.

²⁰¹ “Historic Parade of Legion of Frontiersmen Held at Victoria Park,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 6, 1914, Newspapers.com, 9. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-early-departure-of-men-in/126278745/>.

²⁰² “Formal Farewell to 137th Battalion at City Hall, Saturday,” 7.

²⁰³ Cunniffe, *Scarlet, Riflegreen, and Khaki*, 22.

long as Calgary was sending battalions of men, thousands of full-throated civilians attended these parades. The sustained enthusiasm and adoration of these individuals was a positive reinforcement of hegemonic martial masculinity. At the departure of the 31st Battalion, “crowds of people swarmed about. Every vacant spot was occupied, and the neighboring roofs and windows were black with human beings.”²⁰⁴ The *Calgary Albertan* estimated that 5,000 people came out to watch the battalion depart. At the 89th Battalion’s send-off, the “vast crowd” was described as “one of the largest that has turned out to cheer a departing battalion.”²⁰⁵ Even as the last complete local unit (the 137th Battalion) left for the front, the *Herald* reported that “thousands of citizens” had turned out to bid farewell.²⁰⁶ The crowds were so dense that “the [train] cars were fairly swallowed up... people hung onto them like swarming bees.”²⁰⁷

Newspaper coverage emphasized the presence of women in the crowds. For example, the *Calgary Herald* reported that “hundreds of the fair sex were out, dressed in their daintiest costumes to bid the boys farewell.” They noted the “hundreds” of “sweethearts” that waited at the station until the last train car had disappeared.²⁰⁸ Women’s adoration of men in uniform (and condemnation of those who avoided military service) reinforced the hegemony of the soldier hero model of masculinity.²⁰⁹ Their approval of the men’s decision to enlist reinforced that behaviour as masculine.²¹⁰

²⁰⁴ Pember, “Calgary’s Farewell to Thirty-First Battalion,” 6.

²⁰⁵ “82nd Battalion Under Lieut. Col. W. A. Lowry Leaves the City ‘Mid Cheers of Crowds,” *The Calgary Herald*, May 13, 1916, Newspapers.com, 13. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-82nd-battalion-under-lieu/118753698/>.

²⁰⁶ “Another Calgary Regiment Leaves to Serve Empire,” *The Calgary Herald*, August 14, 1916, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-137th-battalion-leaving-c/120851684/>.

²⁰⁷ “137th Battalion’s Departure Was a Memorable Event,” *The Calgary Albertan*, August 15, 1916, Newspapers.com, 5. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-137th-battalions-d/125529549/>.

²⁰⁸ “Thousands Give Hearty Send-Off to Local Boys Leaving for the Front,” 9.

²⁰⁹ Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons*, 49.

²¹⁰ John Tosh notes the importance of the “perception of women” for determining masculine codes of conduct. Masculine behaviour is often that which garners women’s affection and attention. For more, see Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, 105.

The enthusiasm of crowds at battalion departure parades was referenced in nearly every newspaper article. This enthusiasm was sustained throughout the war. At the departure of the 31st Battalion, the *Herald* reported that “all along the route in every part of the city patriotic citizens lined the streets and cheered.”²¹¹ The 12th CMR was accompanied on their parade by five different military bands that drew “people from every part of the west end and hundreds of motor cars.”²¹² When two drafts of the 50th Battalion left the city, “thousands of people gathered along the line of route from the camp to the city and raised rousing cheers as the men in khaki passed by.”²¹³ As the 137th Battalion marched along 17th Avenue from Sarcee Camp, the *Albertan* reported that “both sidewalks were black with cheering crowds.”²¹⁴ People gathered to watch these ideal examples of manhood. The men of the first contingent to go to Valcartier were said to possess “the martial bearing and look of confidence which a British soldier never loses.”²¹⁵ The parade was an opportunity to witness the men in military formation. It was a public display of martial prowess and it was well received throughout the war.

Battalion departure parades were accompanied by music that reinforced military service as a masculine ideal. Music helped soldiers bond and connected them to the crowds that lined their parade routes.²¹⁶ At the 50th Battalion’s departure, “martial airs” such as “It’s a Long Way to Tipperary” or “Onward Christian Soldiers,” were played by uniformed band

²¹¹ “Thirty-First Battalion Given Official Farewell by the City of Calgary,” 1.

²¹² “Officers of the 12th Overseas Mounted Rifles Who Have Left Calgary For the Front,” *The Calgary Herald*, October 6, 1915, Newspapers.com, 8. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-officers-of-the-12th-over/13555572/>.

²¹³ “Mid Cheers Two Drafts Leave the City,” *The Calgary Herald*, June 10, 1915, Newspapers.com, 13. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-mid-cheers-two-drafts-le/117101992/>.

²¹⁴ “137th Battalion’s Departure was a Memorable Event,” 1.

²¹⁵ “Calgary Rifles Will Make Route March in the City Tonight,” 4.

²¹⁶ Tim Cook, “The Singing War: Canadian Soldiers’ Songs of the Great War,” *American Review of Canadian Studies* 39, no. 3 (September 7, 2009): 224. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02722010903125740>.

members.²¹⁷ At the 89th Battalion's departure, the *Calgary Albertan* wrote that "the bands played the usual repertoire, from 'we'll never let the old flag fall' to 'when the boys come home'."²¹⁸ These songs, played by military bands and sung by marchers and attendees alike, reinforced a shared understanding of masculinity. They were a far cry from the rough and vulgar songs created by men once they had experienced the trenches.²¹⁹ The song "Onward Christian Soldiers" stressed that the men had ecclesiastical support for their new militarized roles. "When the Boys Come Home" emphasized that soldiers who returned would be showered with fame for bearing "the traces of battle's royal graces."²²⁰ Furthermore, "We'll Never Let the Old Flag Fall" was a nationalistic and imperialistic song that called on "Britain's sons" to die for their country if provoked by an aggressive foe.²²¹ These songs referenced soldiering as a masculine duty, and the fact that many of them were defined as both martial and popular songs illustrates the extent to which militarized gendered expectations had become part of mainstream society.

When the men made it to the station, similar to troop departures before the war, the enthusiasm of the crowd reached new heights.²²² At the first send-off, the *Herald* reported that the scene at the depot was a "maddening hour of enthusiasm" that "beggar[ed] description."²²³ When the 12th CMR reached the train station, the *Herald* described the

²¹⁷ "Fiftieth Battalion, Sound as a Bell, Off for the Front," *The Calgary Albertan*, October 22, 1915, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-50th-battalion-depa/125347670/>.

²¹⁸ "89th Battalion Off to Do Its Part at the Front," *The Calgary Albertan*, May 26, 1916, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-89th-battalion-depa/117100323/>.

²¹⁹ Cook, "The Singing War," 225.

²²⁰ Oley Speaks, "When the Boys Come Home" *Historic Sheet Music Collection*. (1917). 1579. <https://digitalcommons.conncoll.edu/sheetmusic/1579/>

²²¹ Albert MacNutt, and M.F. Kelly, "We'll Never Let the Old Flag Fall," *Wartime Canada*, (Toronto: The Anglo Canadian Music Publishers Association, 1915). <https://wartimecanada.ca/sites/default/files/documents/We%27ll%20Never%20Let%20the%20Old%20Flag%20Fall.pdf> see Vance, *Death so Noble*, 94.

²²² Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902*, Canadian War Museum Historical Publication 28 (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1993), 62.

²²³ "Thousands Give Hearty Send-Off to Local Boys Leaving for the Front," 9.

reception as “pandemonium let loose.”²²⁴ The *Albertan* reported that “four thousand people cheered themselves hoarse... the open space in front of the CPR station was black with eager humanity.”²²⁵ The *Calgary Herald’s* description of the 50th Battalion’s reception at the trains is typical and illustrates the jubilation that the event inspired:

There was another scene of delirious excitement. The bands played, a concourse of people larger by far than ever assembled before on such an occasion, shouted and waved au revoir to the khaki clad lads... It was a spectacle gorgeous in its material effect; it was soul inspiring and the enthusiasm knew no bounds.²²⁶

Enthusiastic civilians, live music, and men in uniform came together in a celebration of public martial masculinity.

Newspaper coverage of battalion send-off parades portrayed the men as emblematic of the masculine ideal; eager to fight, willing to brave dangerous conditions, and physically exceptional. Men were expected to be cheerful, optimistic, and enthusiastic about enlisting and the task ahead.²²⁷ Newspapers described the “eager, muscled men” that crowded recruiting offices for a chance at a coveted spot in a battalion headed overseas.²²⁸ The *Calgary Herald* noted that “enthusiasm, patriotism, and confidence in the mission on which they were setting out could be discerned on the countenance of every man.”²²⁹ The *Weekly Albertan* emphasized that “hundreds of soldiers... would have given their boots for the opportunity to change places with the fellows” who were on their way to the front.²³⁰ The men’s enthusiasm was contrasted with women’s displays of emotion and sadness. When the 50th Battalion departed, “the men were in excellent spirits and for the most part the dear ones

²²⁴ “Officers of the 12th Overseas Mounted Rifles Who Have Left Calgary for the Front,” 8.

²²⁵ “Twelfth On Way to Front,” *Weekly Albertan*, October 6, 1915, Newspapers.com, 1.
<https://www.newspapers.com/article/weekly-albertan-12th-cmr-battalion-send/120299033/>.

²²⁶ “Great Crowd Cheers 50th Battalion as it leaves Calgary,” 1.

²²⁷ Rutherford, “Send-Offs During Canada’s Great War,” 435.

²²⁸ Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons*, 54.

²²⁹ “Thousands Give Hearty Send-Off to Local Boys Leaving for the Front,” 9.

²³⁰ “Twelfth On Way to the Front,” 1.

left behind bore up bravely. Here and there a wife sobbed quietly and amid her tears heroically strove to return the smiles of the one who was manfully going forth to do his country's work."²³¹ Enthusiasm was exhibited by soldiers at battalion departures even as the war turned into a bloody protracted struggle. As men from the 50th Battalion departed in 1915, the *Calgary Herald* reported that they "evinced almost schoolboy glee in the fact that they were actually on their way to help to wipe out something on Kaiser Bill's slate."²³² The use of the term "schoolboy" references the men's "vigour" and "firm" bodies rather than immaturity and adolescence which the term is associated with today.²³³ Young enthusiastic men were manly men. When the 82nd Battalion left in the spring of 1916, they were "in the best of spirits" and performed the popular call and response, "Are we downhearted? No!" to the excitement of everyone assembled.²³⁴

Masculine expectations, however, demanded emotional control and the "suppression of sentiment," particularly in public.²³⁵ Newspaper coverage of battalion departure parades rarely referenced men crying or expressing sadness. When the 82nd Battalion departed, "sobs were stifled bravely by the women when the final wrench came and the men behaved like soldiers."²³⁶ Some exceptions did occur such as when the *Calgary Herald* recorded that the men on trains to Valcartier "could not help being affected by the visible emotion of their relations."²³⁷ At the departure of the 12th CMR, the *Weekly Albertan* noted that "soldiers, their eyes wet with tears, literally tore themselves from the last embraces of those dearest to them."²³⁸ These statements were rare and they did not occur in coverage later in the war.

²³¹ "Great Crowd Cheers 50th Battalion as it leaves Calgary," 1.

²³² "Mid Cheers Two Drafts Leave the City," 13.

²³³ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 110.

²³⁴ "82nd Battalion Under Lieut. Col. W.A. Lowry Leaves the City 'Mid Cheers of Crowds,'" 1.

²³⁵ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 20. And Roper, "Between Manliness and Masculinity," 347.

²³⁶ "82nd Battalion Under Lieut. Col. W.A. Lowry Leaves the City 'Mid Cheers of Crowds,'" 1.

²³⁷ "Thousands Give Hearty Send-Off to Local Boys Leaving for the Front," 9.

²³⁸ "Twelfth Now On Way to the Front," 2.

Both examples also emphasized the men's ability to regain control of their emotions, even when they suffered momentary lapses in control. Most of the newspaper coverage depicted men as stalwart figures, enthusiastic about the task at hand, and anxious to do their duty overseas.

Newspaper reports described men as enthusiastic soldiers even as civilian understanding of the war changed. For example, coverage of the departures of men in August 1914 and August 1916 were similar in tone. In 1914, newspapers reported that "everybody was enthused with the prospect of getting away at last and the excitement ran high."²³⁹ Local support was tremendous. The *Calgary Herald* reported that "many of the city's prominent business and public men were noticed on the platform, and the ladies were out in large numbers."²⁴⁰ The dangerous aspect of war was acknowledged and used to reinforce the bravery of the men.²⁴¹ High rates of Belgian casualties in the face of the German onslaught were cited as evidence that "human slaughter as the world has never before known" was going to occur.²⁴² As the war progressed and the reality of high casualties was brought home through lengthy casualty lists, articles describing enthusiastic crowds were juxtaposed with more sobering war coverage. When the 89th Battalion left the city amidst great fanfare, the *Calgary Herald's* front page was split between a positive portrayal of the departure parade and an article on the "awful stench" of thousands of corpses from fighting at Verdun.²⁴³

In the summer of 1916 when the 137th Battalion left the city, newspaper coverage was similar to the coverage of earlier battalion departure parades. After two years of war,

²³⁹ "Thousands Give Hearty Send-Off to Local Boys Leaving for the Front," 9.

²⁴⁰ "First Western War Contingent Leaves for the East Today," 1.

²⁴¹ "First Western War Contingent Leaves for the East Today," 1.

²⁴² "What May Be Expected," *The Calgary Herald*, August 21, 1914, Newspapers.com, 6. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-what-may-be-expected/126285932/>.

²⁴³ "89th Battalion Leaves Calgary 'Mid the Cheers of Many Thousands," *The Calgary Herald*, May 26, 1916, Newspapers.com, 1 and 13. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-89th-battalion-departure/117100135/>.

civilians understood the nature of trench warfare and had grown accustomed to daily casualty lists.²⁴⁴ Public expressions, however, still celebrated the soldier hero archetype. Dangerous conditions at the front solidified the public perception that men who enlisted were making heroic sacrifices that required bravery. The *Calgary Albertan* described the reality that the “actualities of war” had been brought home by the thousands of men who had left the city and never returned.²⁴⁵ Because of these “actualities,” they reported that Calgary was “a sober city” when the 137th Battalion left.²⁴⁶ However, the *Albertan* reported that Calgarians felt a more visceral emotion:

But with the grief was mingled a sterner joy. Joy that this regiment was at last to have the opportunity it had so long awaited of doing its part in the great conflict which is summoning the bravest and best of the whole wide empire of Britain. Joy that a Calgary regiment and Calgary men were to get their chance of doing something for the cause of righteousness, truth, and justice.²⁴⁷

Despite a growing awareness of the danger of warfare, newspapers reported that civilians and soldiers alike were pleased at having an opportunity to fight for a cause they viewed as just and righteous. The 137th Battalion still represented the “bravest and best” men in the Empire, the Dominion, and Calgary. As such, they were celebrated by crowds of people who came out to wish them farewell.

Ian Miller’s study of Toronto during the Great War claims that after the lengthy casualty lists from the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915, the war became “a great crusade” rather than “a great adventure.”²⁴⁸ This observation holds true for Calgary. But it did not change the overall message that battalion departure parades endorsed. Although the

²⁴⁴ Ian Hugh Maclean Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 51.

²⁴⁵ “Good-Bye and Godspeed,” *The Calgary Albertan*, August 15, 1916, Newspapers.com, 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-good-bye-and-godspe/125528734/>.

²⁴⁶ “Good-Bye and Godspeed,” 3.

²⁴⁷ “Good-Bye and Godspeed,” 3.

²⁴⁸ Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief*, 43.

public's enthusiasm for war was higher at the beginning, battalion departure parades were not an outlet for discontent and war weariness. Rather, they were occasions when the soldier hero, as a model of masculinity, endured. Men were publicly praised for enlisting, not because it was safe, but because it was a dangerous task. Throughout the war, newspaper coverage of battalion departure parades from a wide range of local Calgarian papers emphasized large, enthusiastic crowds, that celebrated the men in uniform as the living embodiment of masculinity.

As the dangers of war became impossible to ignore, the prestige of the soldier hero in official accounts increased. The risk of death was a key component of the soldier hero as a hegemonic masculine ideal. Men willing to die in battle on behalf of the state were vaunted symbols of heroic masculinity.²⁴⁹ The *Calgary Albertan* reminded readers that the 31st Battalion was not off on a "holiday excursion," but on the "serious, dreadful business of war."²⁵⁰ When the 56th Battalion left Calgary, Brigadier-General Cruickshank, the commander of the 13th Military District, did not mince words: "Some of you will fall. I hope you will fall in the proper way with your bayonets pointed forward and your faces to the foe."²⁵¹ The *Calgary Herald* noted that members of the 50th Battalion wrote the phrase "to Berlin or bust" on their train compartment. The *Herald* recorded that the action "represented the grim determination in every heart of the husky bunch who were willing to lay down their lives in the titanic struggle against a barbarous nation."²⁵² To willingly die fighting the enemy was an expectation of masculinity. As public understanding of the war shifted from a

²⁴⁹ John Horne, "The Age of Nation-States and World Wars, 1850-1950," in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh, Gender in History 3 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 28.

²⁵⁰ *The Calgary Albertan*, February 18, 1915, Newspapers.com, 3. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-31st-battalion-depa/117100648/>.

²⁵¹ "Presentation to the 56th Battalion Is Made," *Weekly Albertan*, March 15, 1916, Newspapers.com, 6. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/weekly-albertan-presentation-to-the-56th/125458718/>.

²⁵² "Mid Cheers Two Drafts Leave the City," 13.

“Great Adventure” to a “Great Crusade,” the dangers of war affirmed the men’s status as soldier heroes in the eyes of the civilian population.

In addition to risking their lives, soldiers were described as men who embodied the proper physical masculine traits. Scholars of gender note the body’s importance to masculine expectations. R.W. Connell argues that the body is “inescapable in the construction of masculinity.”²⁵³ It is the “bedrock of normative masculinity,” which provides men with the ability to enact “masculine practices and habits.”²⁵⁴ Their “physical appearance and performance” formed the basis for how men’s “inner qualities” were judged by other men.²⁵⁵ The bodies of men were held to a rigid standard. They were the most visible indication of masculinity.

The soldiers who paraded through Calgary’s streets were viewed as physical bearers of masculine ideals. The 17th Company Ambulance Corps were described as a “hardy, rough and ready body of men.”²⁵⁶ The 12th CMR included “stalwart, sturdy fellows... and alert, manly officers.”²⁵⁷ Men of the 56th Battalion were “fit as fiddles and hard as nails.”²⁵⁸ The 137th Battalion consisted of “bronzed young giants” that “carried their heavy packs as though they were thistledowns” and marched in the blazing heat without expending any serious effort.²⁵⁹ Men were celebrated as symbolic representations of physical masculine standards even though many did not live up to these standards. In July 1915, as casualties mounted and the need for new recruits increased, the Canadian military lowered the minimum height and

²⁵³ Connell, *Masculinities*, 56.

²⁵⁴ Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West*, 4.

²⁵⁵ Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 347.

²⁵⁶ “Thousands Give Hearty Send-Off to Local Boys Leaving for the Front,” 9.

²⁵⁷ “Twelfth On Way to the Front,” 2.

²⁵⁸ “56th Battalion Has Left Calgary for the Front,” *The Calgary Albertan*, March 16, 1916, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-56th-battalion-has/125508698/>.

²⁵⁹ “137th Battalion’s Departure was a Memorable Event,” 1.

chest requirements to be accepted into the army.²⁶⁰ As historian Nic Clarke notes, “many members of the Corps had distinctly uninspiring physiques.”²⁶¹ For example, Victor Wheeler who served in the 50th Battalion was accepted for service despite his weak heart and sunken chest. The medical officer who examined him predicted that he would only last three months at the front.²⁶² Nevertheless, newspapers held to the symbolic ideal and portrayed the soldiers as physical examples of masculinity.

Men who did align with masculine expectations were praised. For example, the 31st Battalion was described in the *Calgary Albertan* as: “Splendidly set-up fellows... Erect of body and square of shoulder. Clear of eyes and fresh of face. Smart, intelligent, alert, and “fit” in every sense of the word, they were the subject of admiring comment on the part of the enormous crowd that gathered to see the farewell ceremony.”²⁶³ The *Albertan* identified these men as the subject of “admiring comment” because of their physical appearance: “Every Calgarian is justifiably proud of the stalwart, manly, intelligent and patriotic young fellows, looking so fit and smart in the King’s uniform who marched through the streets yesterday. No finer body of soldiers than the 31st Battalion has been raised in Canada, and that means the British Empire.”²⁶⁴

Military service was crucial for the development of all masculine traits, physical and emotional. Training made “hardy, sun-tanned warriors” out of raw recruits.”²⁶⁵ It shaped recruits into manly men:

The men, sunburned and tanned from route marches, fit as fiddles and hard as nails, after months of physical training and arduous drill, with every weakling weeded out, certainly looked fit. A more stalwart, sturdy lot of

²⁶⁰ Nic Clarke, *Unwanted Warriors: The Rejected Volunteers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force*, Studies in Canadian Military History (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015) 38.

²⁶¹ Clarke, *Unwanted Warriors*, 9.

²⁶² Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 8.

²⁶³ Pember, “Calgary’s Farewell to the 31st Battalion,” 1 and 6.

²⁶⁴ *The Calgary Albertan*, February 18, 1915, 3.

²⁶⁵ “Mid Cheers Two Drafts Leave the City,” 13.

young giants never left any city to go a-soldiering, and Calgary has seen some pretty fine specimens depart during the past 18 months at that.²⁶⁶

The rhetoric that military service created physically masculine men aligned with pre-war advocates for mandatory military training who argued that warfare produced “a trimmer, fitter culture.”²⁶⁷ It indicates the centrality of military service to the masculine ideal. Men in uniform were the ones who “manfully set forth to fight for the supremacy of Empire and for justice and right.”²⁶⁸ They received public recognition as “real” men.²⁶⁹

When the 89th Battalion left in May 1916, it was clear that Calgary had grown accustomed to the send-off rituals. An article in the *Calgary Albertan* alluded to the repetitive nature of the parades:

The familiar scenes, so similar yet so different, were enacted when the trains bearing the 89th steamed away. The same long strings of coaches with the windows filled with brown, excited faces, and platforms jammed with gesticulating khaki-clad forms. The same packed station platforms. The same cheers, the same flag waving, the same tears.²⁷⁰

Although the rituals were similar, the men who conducted them and the crowds of people who lined the street were not:

And yet they were not the same, for the individuals were different. It was another lot of sturdy lads going forth to fight the battles of their country. It was another company of wives, of daughters, of sisters, of sweethearts who smiled through their tears and waved a heroic farewell to the lads from whom they were parting, some perhaps, never to meet again on this side of the grave.²⁷¹

The men who marched through Calgary were those who aligned most closely with the hegemonic model of masculinity that existed at the time. However, they were still

²⁶⁶ “82nd Battalion Now On Its Way to the Front,” *The Calgary Albertan*, May 15, 1916, Newspapers.com, 5. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/the-calgary-albertan-82nd-battalion-now/125407482/>.

²⁶⁷ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 51.

²⁶⁸ “Officers of the 12th Overseas Mounted Rifles Who Have Left Calgary For the Front,” 8.

²⁶⁹ Ilana Bet-El, “Men and Soldiers: British Conscripts, Concepts of Masculinity, and the Great War,” in *Borderlines: Genders and Identities in War and Peace, 1870-1930*, ed. Billie Melman (London: Routledge, 1998), 73.

²⁷⁰ “89th Battalion Off to Do its Part at the Front,” 1.

²⁷¹ “89th Battalion Off to Do its Part at the Front,” 8.

individuals. As Mark Moss argues: “If we forget that individuals, regardless of their origins, are capable actors in their history, who are aware of what they are doing, and if we view all of society as one homogenous mass dominated by institutions, great men, or structures, then central components of past experiences are nullified or, at the least, relegated to the fringes.”²⁷² It is to these individuals that we now turn, to interrogate to what degree they accepted, rejected, or renegotiated the hegemonic masculine ideal that they were purported to represent.

²⁷² Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 11.

Chapter Two: “It is much better to die a man, than live a conquered coward”: Wartime Letters and Hegemonic Masculinity

Letters from the front acted as the primary connection between men at war and their loved ones at home. As a conduit for men’s emotions, these letters provide insight into their masculinity. This chapter discusses how different models of masculinity were constructed and expressed through the private letters of Calgary soldiers. Historian Jessica Meyer’s work on this subject is particularly instructive. She argues that “although few [men] comment directly on masculinity as a specific aspect of identity because combat was so firmly gendered as a male activity, soldier’s narratives of warfare inevitably reflect on how they understood themselves to be men.”²⁷³

Two main identities emerge from soldiers’ letters: the heroic and the domestic.²⁷⁴ Heroic masculinity, also referred to as martial masculinity and militarized masculinity, denotes specific traits, values, and actions that were “elevated to the status of the hegemonic form of manliness in wartime society.”²⁷⁵ During the Great War, martial masculinity was a hegemonic masculine ideal. In wartime letters, martial masculine identities were constructed and performed. According to historian Michael Roper, “men were anxious to communicate to mothers their capacity not only to endure the stresses of battle personally but to exhibit appropriate soldierly qualities.”²⁷⁶

²⁷³ Meyer, *Men of War*, 9.

²⁷⁴ Meyer, *Men of War*, 2.

²⁷⁵ Jiří Hutečka, *Men under Fire: Motivation, Morale, and Masculinity among Czech Soldiers in the Great War, 1914-1918*, *Austrian and Habsburg Studies* 26 (New York: Berghahn, 2020), 251. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781789205428>.

²⁷⁶ Michael Roper, “Maternal Relations: Moral Manliness and Emotional Survival in Letters Home during the First World War,” in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh, *Gender in History* 3 (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 310.

At the same time, men's letters illustrate that their domestic masculine duty to "protect" and "provide" for their families was not subsumed by their martial roles.²⁷⁷ Historian Joanna Bourke argues that men sought domesticity and femininity in their letters home to "regain their sense of honour and a taste of contentment" in response to the disillusioning experience of combat.²⁷⁸ Men used letters pragmatically to comfort their loved ones and themselves, receive news from home, and convey their experience of war. In doing so, they were constrained by domestic and martial masculine considerations. The letters indicate a tension between a natural desire to express oneself and a gendered expectation to be stoic and reserved. In their domestic roles, men's identity was that of husband, father, and son. However, as soldiers, they expressed hegemonic militarized masculinity that emphasized their adherence to duty, willingness to fight, and bravery under fire. Scrutiny of the letters from Calgary men during the Great War reveals that although men did not abandon their domestic masculine roles, militarized masculine traits were highly valued.

The men in this chapter came from a variety of economic backgrounds. Some, like Doctor Harold McGill, came from the professional class. Others, like carpenter Howard Galloway, came from the blue-collar trades. They were all, however, either British or Canadian-born, the vast majority of whom had come to Calgary during the western immigration boom immediately before the war. Their ethnic identity, rather than their class, gave a better indication of their views on masculinity. At this time, given the fledgling state of class consciousness, "ethnic identity transcended and subsumed class," particularly where support for the war was concerned.²⁷⁹ The Calgary men in question, therefore, had a sense of

²⁷⁷ Tosh, *A Man's Place*, 3.

²⁷⁸ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 23.

²⁷⁹ Millman, *Polarity and Patriotism*, 36.

masculinity that aligned closely with British values of emotional regulation, physical aggression, and military duty.

This chapter places Calgary in an imperial context. The soldiers discussed were all men who spent time in Calgary prior to the outbreak of war. The vast majority enlisted in the city. However, the themes of masculinity that these letters elucidate are rooted in a broader “heroic masculinity” that fused “imperialist patriotism, [and] the virtues of manhood.”²⁸⁰ Heroic masculinity was a code of expectations that was entrenched by the war, as the newspaper coverage of battalion departure parades indicates. Men’s personal letters reveal that they subscribed to the “gospel of manliness” that had instilled them with, among other things, a sense of duty to the Empire.²⁸¹

Soldiers from Calgary adhered rigorously to these masculine ideals which were prevalent across the British Empire. Direct references to a unique Calgarian masculine code in the letters are uncommon because many of the men who wrote them were newcomers to the city. The population of Calgary tripled between 1906 and 1911.²⁸² As a result, most men who lived and worked in and around the city constructed their gender identity from events and institutions they experienced before coming to Calgary. The local hegemonic masculine ideal in Calgary embraced British masculine ideals and sought to improve on them.²⁸³ This definition of manliness had militarized applications. As Graham Dawson argues in *Soldier Heroes*, “military virtues” were defined as “natural and inherent qualities of manhood.”²⁸⁴ Many of the men in Calgary were educated during an era which saw the success of books such as Robert Baden-Powell’s *Scouting for Boys* which emphasized life on the frontier of

²⁸⁰ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 1.

²⁸¹ Morton, *When your Number’s Up*, 52.

²⁸² Shiels, *Calgary*, 50.

²⁸³ Henry, “Making Modern Citizens,” 79.

²⁸⁴ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 1.

the British Empire as an incubator for masculine prowess.²⁸⁵ These men exhibited adherence to masculine values such as enthusiasm for adventure, military duty, and stoicism promoted by writers such as W.E. Henley, Henry Newbolt, and Rudyard Kipling.²⁸⁶ The influence of British conceptions of hegemonic masculinity from the early twentieth century is prevalent in Calgary men and their letters home during the Great War. Soldiers from Calgary understood their masculinity in terms that would have been recognizable to most English Canadians who had come of age in the early twentieth century.

During the Great War, letter-writing helped to maintain morale and keep soldiers connected to home. The German Army handled an average of nearly seven million letters per day during the war.²⁸⁷ Similarly, the Austro-Hungarian Army postal service processed ten million letters and parcels daily.²⁸⁸ By 1917, the British Army sent home roughly nine million letters a week.²⁸⁹ Canadians were not slackers when it came to writing letters. In 1918, the year with the highest number of Canadian troops overseas, the Canadian Postal Service handled an average of 1.3 million letters per week for a total of 86 million in the year.²⁹⁰

Soldiers often referred to the staggering amount of correspondence as an attempt to pay the debt “owed to loved ones.”²⁹¹ Fred Turner remarked in a humorous postscript to his

²⁸⁵ John M. Mackenzie, “The Imperial Pioneer and Hunter and the British Masculine Stereotype in Late Victorian and Edwardian Times,” in *Manliness and Morality: Middle-Class Masculinity in Britain and America, 1800-1940*, ed. J. A. Mangan and James Walvin (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987), 177.

²⁸⁶ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 52.

²⁸⁷ Jason Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front: Masculinity, Sexuality, and German Soldiers in the First World War*, First edition. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 5.

²⁸⁸ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 8.

²⁸⁹ Meyer, *Men of War*, 14.

²⁹⁰ Canada Ministry of Overseas Military Forces, *Report of the Ministry, Overseas Military Forces of Canada, 1918*. (London: Printed by authority of the Ministry, Overseas Military Forces of Canada, 1919), 88. <http://archive.org/details/reportofministr00cana>.

²⁹¹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 51.

brother Arthur that “this [was] my 14th letter today, so good night.”²⁹² Letters connected distant family members to their loved ones in uniform by providing a forum for the exchange of information.²⁹³ The act of letter writing itself generated further letters to clarify what had previously been written. A typical example is Arthur Turner’s letter to his wife on 27 February 1916 which confirmed his receipt of four letters written in January and February.²⁹⁴ Letter writing was a task that provided relief from lengthy periods of inactivity and boredom. Joseph Eckersley told his brother and sister-in-law that he was writing because he was “doing nothing for the present moment.”²⁹⁵ When men were kept busy, it was difficult to find free time. Albert Nye apologized to his sister that he could “never seem to find time” to write letters because they were “kept busier than ever.”²⁹⁶ Some men had difficulty keeping up with the rate of correspondence demanded by their families. Harold McGill pleaded with his wife: “Please remember, dear, that it is not always very easy for me to get off a letter. I have written to you every day since the unit came out of the line; that’s pretty fair, isn’t it?”²⁹⁷ Because writing conditions were often poor, men went to great lengths to maintain correspondence. They wrote “huddled in corners or on beds, scrawling in poor light on

²⁹² Fred Turner, “Letter from Fred Turner to Arthur Turner,” Military Correspondence, April 30, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1821-S0001-M1255-3, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

²⁹³ Martin Robb, “‘From Your Ever Anxious and Loving Father’: Faith, Fatherhood, and Masculinity in One Man’s Letters to His Son during the First World War,” *Genealogy* 4, no. 1 (March 24, 2020), 2. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy4010032>.

²⁹⁴ Arthur Turner, “Letter from Arthur Turner to Florrie,” Military Correspondence, February 27, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1821-S0001-M1255-3, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

²⁹⁵ Joseph Edward Eckersley, “Joseph Edward Eckersley Letter to Albert and Connie,” Military Correspondence, November 2, 1916, CA ACU GBA F0708-M8157-3, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

²⁹⁶ Albert Nye, “Albert Nye Letter to sister Rose,” Military Correspondence, March 6, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1406-M0028, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

²⁹⁷ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, August 6, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

notepads balanced on their knees.”²⁹⁸ Joseph Eckersley asked that his loved ones “excuse the writing as this hole is pretty small.”²⁹⁹

Although mail was in high demand at home, it was in even higher demand in the trenches. Soldiers “hungered for mail.”³⁰⁰ Historian Jason Crouthamel, in his study of German soldiers during the Great War, argues that men used letters as an essential means of “emotional support.”³⁰¹ Joseph Eckersley thanked his brother and sister-in-law for their letter “because on this side news is very scarce and a letter is greatly appreciated.”³⁰² Thomas Riley and Harvey Duncan were grateful to receive news from home, no matter how belated.³⁰³ John Cousins wrote to his mother that he received her letter and it was a relief because it had been “nearly three weeks since any of us have received Canadian mail.”³⁰⁴

Sometimes letters were delayed on account of censorship. For “rankers,” every letter sent was censored by an officer while only some letters were censored at Postal Depots.³⁰⁵ Canadian soldiers fell under the same regulations as British soldiers. Letters could not discuss “troop movements, armaments, morale... criticism of operations, other branches, allies, and superiors.”³⁰⁶ Officers were not subjected to official censorship because they had the duty of censoring their own men. This privilege, however, was bestowed with the

²⁹⁸ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 51.

²⁹⁹ Joseph Edward Eckersley, “Joseph Edward Eckersley Letter to Albert and Connie,” Military Correspondence, August 1, 1917, CA ACU GBA F0708-M8157-3, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁰⁰ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 49.

³⁰¹ Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front*, 10.

³⁰² Joseph Edward Eckersley, “Joseph Edward Eckersley Letter to Albert and Connie,” Military Correspondence, October 15, 1916, CA ACU GBA F0708-M8157-3, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁰³ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, December 3, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-M8375-Box 6-File 52, Glenbow Western Research Centre. Fred Bagley and Harvey Daniel Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage: “Calgary’s Own” 137th Overseas Battalion, C.E.F.* (Calgary: Plug Street Books, 1993), 97.

³⁰⁴ John Moore Cousins, “John Moore Cousins Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, April 3, 1918, CA ACU GBA F0590-M6339, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁰⁵ Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008), 181.

³⁰⁶ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 238.

condition that they would censor themselves.³⁰⁷ Meyer identifies censorship as an inhibiting factor for “men’s abilities to express themselves.”³⁰⁸ It was used by soldiers as an explanation and as an excuse for why a letter might be less detailed. James Brown complained to his girlfriend: “In your last letter you wanted me to write and tell you many things and never mind the censor well that would hardly be right and besides it would not go.”³⁰⁹ Harold McGill lamented that “there is not very much that I can write you. The things that might be interesting we are not allowed to speak about.”³¹⁰

While only officially required of officers, self-censorship was common throughout the ranks for a variety of reasons.³¹¹ Men tried to “bear the brunt like real men” by restricting information from their family members.³¹² James Reid joked that he did not “wish to keep the censor busy cutting out the half of what I write and giving him extra work.”³¹³ Thomas Riley justified the lack of information in his letters by alluding to war reporting in Calgary papers and referencing the censor: “You know more about it [the war] away back in Calgary than I do right here, so I won’t try to tell you anything about it, even if the Censor would let me.”³¹⁴

However, the impact of censorship on the contents of letters should not be overstated. Michael Roper has found that in many cases officers were “overwhelmed” and unable to

³⁰⁷ Meyer, *Men of War*, 16.

³⁰⁸ Meyer, *Men of War*, 29.

³⁰⁹ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Marion,” Military Correspondence, November 20, 1917, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³¹⁰ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, March 1, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³¹¹ Vance, *Death so Noble*, 96.

³¹² Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship during Canada’s Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), xvi.

³¹³ James Reid, “James Reid Letter to Siblings,” Military Correspondence, July 18, 1915, TMMF0147, Box 1, Series 1, File 1, The Military Museums Archive.

³¹⁴ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, May 20, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-M8375-File 54, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

effectively censor the hundreds of letters they were responsible for each day.³¹⁵ Official censorship was concerned with precise logistical details, such as the names of places and movement of troops, rather than the general morale of the men or eyewitness accounts of the battle.³¹⁶ Harold McGill's description of the Battle of St. Eloi is a good example of the descriptive nature of letters: "A lot of the German infantry coming over to attack seemed half dazed, probably by the terrible shell fire, and were shot down like sheep in front of our trenches... In many places both our own and the enemy trenches were wiped completely out of existence."³¹⁷ Although censorship, official and otherwise, impacted the contents of letters, many men wrote "highly descriptive" letters that were even published in local papers.³¹⁸ Censorship did not prevent men from endeavouring to "set the record straight about their feelings."³¹⁹ Even if certain logistical details or exact troop movements were not discussed, men were still relatively candid about their experiences overseas.

Letters from the front, however, must still be read with discretion. Jessica Meyer notes that the "question of representativeness" is central to studies that use personal narratives.³²⁰ As Jonathan Vance argues, "very few people can write superb poetry; very many of us can write deplorable verse."³²¹ The most introspective and well-written letters often come from men who were not representative of the general population. The middle class was the "great self-recording class."³²² They felt it was important to record their day-to-

³¹⁵ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 50.

³¹⁶ Meyer, *Men of War*, 16.

³¹⁷ Harold McGill, "Harold McGill Letter to Emma," Military Correspondence, April 15, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³¹⁸ Meyer, *Men of War*, 16.

³¹⁹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 22.

³²⁰ Meyer, *Men of War*, 10.

³²¹ Jonathan Vance's larger point here is superb. He argues in favour of using the "inept novelist, the bad versifier, and the talentless essayist" rather than restricting the scope of analysis to unrepresentative literary works that passed specific aesthetic standards. This, Vance argues, makes the interpretation more representative. Vance, *Death so Noble*, 6.

³²² Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers' Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 32.

day lives. Education was an indicator of the “quality” of letters that a man could produce. Jiří Hutečka found that “men with a higher level of education tend to be more reflective of their predicament,” and tended to produce more correspondence than their lesser-educated counterparts. Sixty-four percent of the writers surveyed in Hutečka’s work had secondary education.³²³ Even studies that use lower-ranking soldiers disproportionately cite men with higher than average education. Michael Roper found that the “rankers” included in his study “were probably better educated, and more literate, than most, their dutifulness in writing home, or later composition of a memoir, being itself a sign of respectability.”³²⁴ Many of the letters confirmed the good health and spirit of the writer but were not particularly insightful. The common soldier’s lack of reflection is not just part of the scholarly consensus. Contemporary men held this opinion. “You know how thoughtless and indifferent the average man is,” James Brown wrote, “he will soon forget all he has seen and let it go at that.”³²⁵ Men who were exceptional, either due to their educational background, economic class, or intelligence tended to write more descriptively and frequently. Often, these men are disproportionately represented in historical works.³²⁶

Despite questions of representativeness, historians have demonstrated that wartime letters can be used to illuminate the inner emotions of men. Hutečka argues that because letters were “written by men,” their accounts “tell us how it feels to be a *man* in war.”³²⁷ Although letters cannot display what “all soldiers did, thought or felt... general patterns, repetitions, themes and points conspicuously left out quickly emerge and tended to repeat

³²³ Hutečka, *Men under Fire*, 18-19.

³²⁴ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 28.

³²⁵ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, August 18, 1918, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³²⁶ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 28.

³²⁷ Hutečka, *Men under Fire*, 21.

themselves.³²⁸ Letters are often superior to other forms of personal writing. Joanna Bourke argues that using letters as opposed to strictly published personal accounts provides “a much broader range of men” to study.³²⁹ Furthermore, differences in education and class do not necessarily make men unrepresentative. Men of lower class and educational standards did not have a “constitutional difference in the capacity for feeling” because they did not record their thoughts as effectively as their middle-class, educated counterparts.³³⁰ This chapter utilizes a wide range of letters from men who had varying degrees of education and came from different economic backgrounds.

The letters from Calgary soldiers provide insight into individual constructions of masculinity. Letters have been used by historians who seek to understand how men personally represented themselves as masculine individuals.³³¹ Graham Dawson argues that masculinities are “lived out in the flesh, but fashioned in the imagination.”³³² Letters were a medium in which men’s lived experiences met their imagined masculine identities. Anthony Rotundo’s work on American masculinity in the nineteenth century uses letters because they “took [him] as close to the feelings, attitudes, and daily experiences of men as [he] could get.”³³³ Historians who use letters emphasize that they are documents which are representations of self rather than true indications of self. In other words, they are not objectively truthful. Jason Crouthamel argues that letters were a representation of how men

³²⁸ Hutečka, *Men under Fire*, 18.

³²⁹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 15.

³³⁰ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 33.

³³¹ Some examples of works focused on the First World War include Michael Roper’s *The Secret Battle*, Jessica Meyer’s *Men of War*, Jason Crouthamel’s *An Intimate History of the Front*, and Jiří Hutečka’s *Men under Fire*.

³³² Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 1.

³³³ E. Anthony Rotundo, *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era* (New York: BasicBooks, 1993), ix.

wanted to be perceived by those who read them.³³⁴ How men behaved and what they thought did not always correlate with their letters home.

Because letters provide insight into subjective constructions of masculinity, they are useful for analyzing which tenets of masculinity were held in high regard. Most men were unable to adhere fully to hegemonic masculine ideals.³³⁵ For example, many men claimed that they were not afraid in combat. Whether they were afraid or not is irrelevant; the implication of conveying bravery, or a lack of fear, is what is important. The performance of masculinity is what is being analyzed. Furthermore, scholars have noted that masculinity “must perpetually be achieved, asserted, and renegotiated.”³³⁶ Men who enlisted in the army fulfilled one tenet of hegemonic masculinity, but it did not mean that they stopped performing as men. The pressure to adhere to gender ideals was constant and unrelenting. Hegemonic standards, however, also shift over time. Letters are significant because they can demonstrate how masculine ideals change. They indicate which masculine ideals were rejected or adapted to fit lived realities. As men experienced the war, their definitions of ideal masculinity subtly changed.

Because letters are performative, the recipient of the letter is crucial to analyzing the masculine identities that men performed. Letters must be read with the understanding that they are documents intended for an audience. As Jessica Meyer indicates, “the narratives contained in those letters are clearly shaped by the expectations of their intended recipients.”³³⁷ Letter writers had an agenda. Jiří Hutečka argues that “even the most authentic diary entry or letter is not just an outpouring of feelings and thoughts, but a construction of

³³⁴ Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front*, 6.

³³⁵ Connell, *Masculinities*, 79.

³³⁶ Roper and Tosh, *Manful Assertions*, 18.

³³⁷ Meyer, *Men of War* 10.

meaning addressed not only to the writer and his or her consciousness, but also to numerous potential readers.”³³⁸ Because letters are not reliable and objective observations of fact, they are valuable for analyzing subjective projections of thoughts and feelings. Within these subjective projections, individual conceptions of masculinity can be discovered. Letters were an individualized projection of self-image that offer insights into which aspects of hegemonic masculinity men accepted, rejected, or renegotiated throughout their military service.

Men in the trenches struggled to convey their experiences to loved ones in familiar terms. Harold McGill apologized because “it is sometimes very hard for me to express myself.”³³⁹ He struggled to portray the gory details of war to his fiancée, even though she was serving in England as a nurse and was much closer to the war than most Canadians. Some family members were easier to communicate with than others. Men avoided giving their mothers “graphic details” but felt more comfortable writing candidly with siblings and fathers.³⁴⁰ William Donnelly joked to his siblings that they “know that the old folks worry a lot, very naturally so, and that plain, bald facts from me would only tend to downhearten them when we would all prefer to cheer them up.” Even confidantes were not privy to all the information. In the same letter, Donnelly acknowledged that his siblings were “anxious to receive more detailed news” and told them he would like to do so but that it was “going to be a difficult one [letter] for me to write.”³⁴¹

Conditions of warfare could be so foreign to a civilian that they were impossible to convey in written form. Letters were “conditioned by the tension between being at the front

³³⁸ Hutečka, *Men under Fire*, 17.

³³⁹ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, March 9, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁴⁰ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 67.

³⁴¹ William Donnelly, “William Herbert Donnelly Letter to Siblings,” Military Correspondence, September 21, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

and writing to those who had no direct experience of it.”³⁴² Machine guns and heavy artillery created battlefields that were revolting. Artillery was devastating because it forced men into positions of inactivity which violated “a basic animal instinct to react.”³⁴³ It was difficult to internalize these conditions that were alien to their pre-war lives. Roper argues that “the more stressful the circumstance, the stronger was the pressure *both* to want to confide in loved ones, *and* to resist confiding.” Men struggled with the tension between a desire to describe their experiences, and gendered expectations to remain emotionally reserved and in control of their faculties.³⁴⁴ James Brown told his mother that “there is no use trying to describe these things as it would be hard enough to do it talking to you.”³⁴⁵ William Donnelly expressed a similar sentiment. He informed his parents that he would not describe the conditions of warfare as they were “impossible to pen” but that they were “awful in comparison to what we ever thought were hard times in Canada.”³⁴⁶

This chapter contends first with men’s construction of martial masculine identities. Jessica Meyer argues that martial masculine identities were most clearly formed in wartime diaries, rather than in letters home.³⁴⁷ Though diaries may provide a clearer picture of martial masculinity, the ideal was still prevalent in letters. Dominant themes of martial masculinity such as stoicism, bravery under fire, and endorsements of militarized men as the ultimate expression of masculinity were prevalent. Men illustrated their commitment to militarized masculine codes in two ways. They expressed admiration for actions that aligned with

³⁴² Roper “Maternal Relations,” in *Masculinities in Politics and War*, 297.

³⁴³ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 102.

³⁴⁴ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 64-66.

³⁴⁵ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, December 30, 1916, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁴⁶ William Donnelly, “William Herbert Donnelly Letter,” Military Correspondence, June 11, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

³⁴⁷ Meyer, *Men of War*, 49.

masculine ideals and they condemned men who failed to adhere to these ideals. Performing militarized masculine behaviour was crucial for men who sought to prove themselves in the “young male club” of the trenches.³⁴⁸ Men used their letters home to express their evolving martial masculine identities to their friends and family.

For men entering the army, the uniform was a major aspect of their transition from civilian to military life. In pre-war Canada, the militia uniform was a “visible link to the British Empire” and demonstrated “martial vigour.”³⁴⁹ Uniforms were designed to “enhance men’s masculine appearance” with hats to make them taller, pants designed to make them look larger, and epaulettes to exaggerate “the width of shoulders.”³⁵⁰ Soldiers identified the uniform as one of the “prime attractions of military service.”³⁵¹ They recognized its importance for recruiting. In a letter in which James Brown reflected on how men had been convinced to fight, he noted that “without the jingling glamour etc. [of uniforms] it would be hard to get recruits in peace times.”³⁵² Receiving the uniform marked the moment when soldiers left their civilian lives behind. During the Great War, it was one of the “symbols of masculinity” that proved adherence to dominant concepts of manliness.³⁵³ A proud Thomas Riley reported from the University of Alberta Campus that he was “now a full-fledged soldier” after he had been sworn in and received his uniform.³⁵⁴ In a letter to his sister, Charles Knights wrote that they “shine up [their] boots and buttons just like real soldiers.”³⁵⁵ Uniforms functioned as an indication that a man was in service, visually confirming to those

³⁴⁸ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 106.

³⁴⁹ Wood *Militia Myths*, 31.

³⁵⁰ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 128.

³⁵¹ O’Brien, “Manhood and the Militia Myth,” 129.

³⁵² James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, December 24, 1916, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁵³ Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons*, 38.

³⁵⁴ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother from U of A,” Military Correspondence, Fall 1916, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 6-File 52, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁵⁵ Charles Knights, “Charles Knights Letter to Ruth,” Military Correspondence, April 7, 1917, TMMF0068-Box 1-Series: Letters, The Military Museums Archive.

around him and himself that he was fulfilling a duty central to the embodiment of martial masculinity.

The concept of duty was an essential aspect of masculinity that was often expressed in letters home. James Wood argues that Canada's belief in the supremacy of the "citizen soldier" rested on concepts of "citizenship and duty" rather than "manliness and militarism."³⁵⁶ Wood's argument, however, fails to consider the ways in which citizenship and duty were "inherently gendered and often explicitly masculine."³⁵⁷ According to the hegemonic masculine model, a man's civic responsibility during war was to enlist and endure dangerous conditions overseas.³⁵⁸ James Brown wrote that "it is much better to die a man than live a conquered coward and when I go back I want to be able to look any man in the face and say I done my duty at all times."³⁵⁹ Brown's affirmation of duty elucidates the homosocial aspect of masculinity. Homosocial aspects of masculinity refer to the actions and traits that "govern men's relations with each other as men."³⁶⁰ Brown explicitly noted that by incurring the risk of death overseas, he was able to retain his status as a "man" and prove that status publicly to any other man who may challenge him. His military service elevated his masculine status in the eyes of other men.

Men cited duty as an intrinsic masculine requirement to explain their decision to enlist to concerned mothers and fathers. William Donnelly wrote to his mother: "I believe that I could not have done my duty in any other manner towards God and man."³⁶¹ Donnelly

³⁵⁶ Wood *Militia Myths*, 9.

³⁵⁷ Mary G Chaktsiris, "'Our Boys With the Maple Leaf on Their Shoulders and Straps': Masculinity, the Toronto Press, and the Outbreak of the South African War, 1899," *War & Society* 32, no. 1 (March 2013), 4. <https://doi.org/10.1179/0729247312Z.00000000014>.

³⁵⁸ Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, 37.

³⁵⁹ James Ernest Brown, "James Ernest Brown Letter to Mother," Military Correspondence, November 23, 1916, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁶⁰ Tosh, "Introduction: Hegemonic Masculinity and Gender History," 54.

³⁶¹ William Donnelly, "William Herbert Donnelly Letter," Military Correspondence, June 11, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

struggled to convince his parents that he could remain safe and still carry out soldierly duties. Two months later, he wrote that “all anyone can do is their best and be as careful at the same time as possible. Worry would only tend to make one forget precautions and hinder doing his duty properly thus endangering not only his own, but his comrades welfare.”³⁶² Duty meant doing one’s job. While Thomas Riley told his parents “I will be careful, and am only going to do my duty,” he also noted that the many men within his company who had been killed and wounded had “done [sic] their duty and done [sic] it well!”³⁶³ Nicoletta Gullace argues that when men referenced their “sense of duty,” they referred to established principles of masculinity defined by “schools, social clubs, and boy’s literature.” A man’s expression of duty was an external reference to the “ineffable manifestation of a socialized self... by which masculine subjectivity was bound to military service.”³⁶⁴ Duty appears in men’s letters as a code by which men ought to live, and a justification for the actions they undertook to exhibit martial masculinity.

Before they arrived in France, many men expressed impatience to get to the front lines. Enthusiasm to fight aligned with conceptions of masculinity which encouraged “ambition and combativeness... competitiveness and aggression.”³⁶⁵ The war provided a fundamental “purpose to living” for some men.³⁶⁶ As he waited in Shorncliffe, England, with the 9th Infantry Reserve Battalion, James Reid told his siblings to “tell the boys at the front to

³⁶² William Donnelly, “William Herbert Donnelly Letter,” Military Correspondence, August 20, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

³⁶³ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Father,” Military Correspondence, April 20, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 54, Glenbow Western Research Centre and Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, May 17, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 54, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁶⁴ Gullace, *Blood of Our Sons*, 38-39.

³⁶⁵ Rotundo, *American Manhood*, 6.

³⁶⁶ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 96.

keep the Germans where they are till we get out to give them a helfor.”³⁶⁷ While crossing the Atlantic with the 31st Battalion, Harold McGill noted that “the boys of our battalion are all keen on the idea of getting into the mixup. There are a few cases of cold feet... the number of waverers is surprisingly small, however.”³⁶⁸ Reid expressed his desire to fight the Germans alongside soldiers already at the front and McGill stressed that very few men had “cold feet.”

As the war dragged on, men remained enthusiastic in their letters home, despite the proliferation of news that increasingly emphasized the widespread death and destruction. Ian Miller argues that Canadians had “ample opportunity to learn the grizzly details of front-line combat.”³⁶⁹ After the Second Battle of Ypres, the population was “well informed” given the widespread accounts of warfare that made it into newspapers.³⁷⁰ Despite the apparent horrors of war, men reiterated their enthusiasm for combat. Such enthusiasm, however, also disguised a “need to camouflage mixed emotions and motivations.”³⁷¹ During the costly Somme Campaign, Thomas Riley’s battalion cheered “till they could hardly talk” in response to the news that they would be going overseas: “I don’t know whether I am glad or sorry that we are going. Nobody is ever sorry when they leave this Camp... but perhaps after we are one step nearer to the mysterious “front”, we will wish we were back at Camp Hughes.”³⁷² Although Riley and his comrades were excited to go overseas, his letter also alludes to the fact that by 1916, recruits were not blinded by “khaki fever” to the dangers of warfare.³⁷³

³⁶⁷ James Reid, “James Reid Letter to Siblings,” Military Correspondence, July 18, 1915, TMMF0147, Box 1, Series 1, File 1, The Military Museums Archive.

³⁶⁸ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, September 9, 1915, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁶⁹ Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief*, 48.

³⁷⁰ Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief*, 49.

³⁷¹ Meyer, *Men of War*, 28.

³⁷² Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, October 22, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 6-File 52, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁷³ Meyer, *Men of War*, 28.

If men at the beginning of the war saw the conflict as a “rejuvenating adventure,” by 1916 they were increasingly aware of the dangers.³⁷⁴ Despite this knowledge, men wrote enthusiastically, “particularly for action,” because training, marching, and fatigues were “extremely dull.”³⁷⁵ In the summer of 1916, William Donnelly wrote: “I do hope we get to the actual front this week as I am tired of this [training] and anxious to help do our share and aid in ending this awful carnage. I am not at all anxious for the experience, but to get there and do all I can to aid.”³⁷⁶ Donnelly was under no illusions about conditions at the front, yet he expressed his desire to “get there” because he wanted to contribute to the war effort. Hadden Ellis heard the news of the Canadian victory at Vimy Ridge from a reinforcement depot in England. Ellis wrote to his mother: “I hope I am there for the finish, as I always wanted to be there... So maybe I do not know something about this war eh.”³⁷⁷ While Ellis reiterated his desire to be in France, he noted ironically that his enthusiasm might be due to a lack of knowledge. Men continued to express enthusiasm to fight at the front, even when knowledge about the horrors of war was widespread.

Some men touted the positive effect of military service on their masculine identities. They discussed how the army made them physically more masculine.³⁷⁸ Fredrick Knights told his sister: “I have gained 18 lbs in weight since I left Calgary, but in muscle not in fat.”³⁷⁹ Men identified the rigours of army training as positive aspects in their physical

³⁷⁴ Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West*, 166.

³⁷⁵ Meyer, *Men of War*, 28.

³⁷⁶ William Donnelly, “William Herbert Donnelly Letter,” Military Correspondence, August 20, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

³⁷⁷ Hadden Ellis, “Hadden William Ellis Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, April 20, 1917, Hadden William Ellis Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/20824/doc/221>.

³⁷⁸ Meyer, *Men of War*, 23.

³⁷⁹ Fredrick Knights, “Fredrick Knights letter to Ruth,” Military Correspondence, November 20, 1914, TMMF0068, Box 1, Series: Letters, The Military Museums Archive.

development as men.³⁸⁰ Eric Harvie, an officer with the 103rd Calgary Rifles before the war, wrote that he had “never felt better in my life nor weighed so much.”³⁸¹ William Donnelly raved about the masculinizing effects of his military routine:

We have done a tremendous lot of hard work, but I am glad to say that it makes me feel better every day. Getting up at 5:30, jumping out of a tent and shaving at a trough in the open, (sometimes in the rain as it rains about every half hour, here), washing, cleaning English mud off our boots, shining our brass, folding and putting away blankets etc. then eating breakfast at 6:00 seems to harden a fellow.³⁸²

Donnelly’s endorsement of the ‘hardening’ effect of military life reflects a contemporary understanding of war that promised an escape from “increasingly feminised office work.”³⁸³ His enthusiasm for the hardening effect of army life was undiminished by his experience at the front:

But though they [challenges of war] gradually become more difficult as we progress, it is a wonderful experience in that it makes a man wonder why he ever used to complain when he really was living in luxury and did not know it – teaches him something of what real difficulties are and how much easier they can be overcome when a fellow simply makes up his mind that it “has to be done” and that to get busy and go at it for all he is worth is the only way to finish it the quickest.³⁸⁴

Donnelly indicated his adherence to martial masculine ideals by stressing that war was a “wonderful experience” that encouraged men to act decisively. Men emphasized that through experiencing the hardship of life in the C.E.F., they were made stronger and wiser. They focused on the ways that the army fostered masculine ideals.

³⁸⁰ Meyer, *Men of War*, 23.

³⁸¹ Jeff Keshen, “Voices of War: The Press and the Personal,” in *The Frontier of Patriotism: Alberta and the First World War*, ed. Adriana Davies and Jeff Keshen, Beyond Boundaries: Canadian Defence and Strategic Studies (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2016), 292.

³⁸² William Donnelly, “William Herbert Donnelly Letter,” Military Correspondence, June 11, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

³⁸³ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 54.

³⁸⁴ William Donnelly, “William Herbert Donnelly Letter,” Military Correspondence, September 21, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

Although the army may have nurtured masculine behaviour, it also pushed men to their limits. They were expected to be unemotional and able to control their bodies and desires.³⁸⁵ The terrifying nature of combat threatened this standard. Hutečka argues that combat-induced fear was “connected to the soldiers’ perceptions of manliness.”³⁸⁶ All men experienced fear. Desmond Morton maintains that “front line soldiers felt fear in all its symptoms,” particularly when “they sat immobile and helpless under an artillery bombardment or waiting for an attack.”³⁸⁷ Fear was too much of a constant to deny its existence, yet controlling fear was necessary to exhibit bravery. This prompted a shift in the masculine ideal. Before the war, men were expected to have “nerve” which was referred to as “the inner source of brave actions.” During the war, men were expected to have “nerves under control” which was “control of fear, a man’s ability to stand and not tremble.”³⁸⁸ Bravery was redefined as having control over fear, rather than a lack of fear itself.

Fear appears in men’s letters as an emotion that had to be subdued and controlled. Harold McGill wrote that “it is all very well for a man in Calgary to talk about not minding shell fire, but the boys that are out here standing up to the music are not saying anything like that.”³⁸⁹ Artillery was a major cause of fear. Although William Donnelly was proud of being cool and calm under shell fire, he also admitted that he was “not entirely void of excitement and was even ‘afraid’ frequently.”³⁹⁰ Eugene Drader admitted a similar phenomenon. Drader

³⁸⁵ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 25.

³⁸⁶ Hutečka, *Men Under Fire*, 14.

³⁸⁷ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 248.

³⁸⁸ Hynes, *A Soldier’s Tale*, 71.

³⁸⁹ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, March 27, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁹⁰ William Donnelly, “William Herbert Donnelly Letter,” Military Correspondence, September 21, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

confided to his mother that “one can never quite get settled to the heavy stuff [artillery].”³⁹¹

Drader’s admission may have been coloured by a recent reminder of his mortality:

Have had it rather warm in spots. Am not supposed to say anything about the matter but so far the Hun has only ripped my breeches with shrapnel and filled my eyes and mouth with sand by a bullet through the parapet which also knocked off my helmet and scared the supreme nerve out of me and wish for shortness, and deafened me temporarily with high explosive shells.³⁹²

Although Drader faced several close calls that “scared” him, he kept his letter positive and relayed the events in a wry humorous tone. Drader’s phlegmatic description of the entire event as “rather warm” underlines that while he experienced fear, he would not dwell on it in his letters home.

Although fear was acknowledged, publicly displaying fear did not align with norms of manliness. Fear was a subject that was “hard to handle with colleagues in the mess or with pals in the dugouts.”³⁹³ Arthur Turner was advised by Captain Robinson, “don’t be ashamed if you feel frightened everybody is whether they admit it or not but don’t show it, what the hell’s the use if you’re going to get it you’ll get it.”³⁹⁴ Robinson’s fatalism was a common response to combat.³⁹⁵ Thomas Riley was reticent to admit fear when he first went to the front lines. He told his father, “considering it all around it was a fine trip for our first time in and I don’t think any of us got very badly scared.”³⁹⁶ When men acknowledged fear, it was rare and often accompanied by dry humour or other descriptions of masculine valour.

³⁹¹ Eugene Drader, “Eugene Drader Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, July 18, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/60992/doc/221>.

³⁹² Eugene Drader, “Eugene Drader Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, July 18, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/60992/doc/221>.

³⁹³ Fletcher, “Patriotism, The Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness,” 62.

³⁹⁴ C.W. Robinson, “Captain Robinson advice for Arthur Turner,” Military Correspondence, Date N/A, CA ACU GBA F1821-S0001-M1255-3-AT944, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁹⁵ Cook, “More a Medicine Than a Beverage,” 8.

³⁹⁶ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Father,” Military Correspondence, May 14, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 54, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

Men affirmed their adherence to masculine codes of conduct by emphasizing that they could control their emotions under artillery fire, a common phenomenon at the front. Captain Robinson advised Arthur Turner: “If you do see action, just remember to keep cool, it has a wonderful affect on the men when they see their own officer cool and collected in a tight corner.”³⁹⁷ Soldiers at the front judged their regimental officers by their “courage or cowardice,” and the degree to which they remained in control of their emotions.³⁹⁸ For an officer, remaining calm was necessary to make the right decisions in the heat of battle. However, all men were expected to remain calm. After nearly three years overseas, Harold McGill noted that “intensive artillery fire must have an appalling and terrifying aspect to the newly arrived soldiers and it is to their everlasting credit that almost to a man they face it without so much as flinching.”³⁹⁹ Many men expressed surprise at how well they were able to handle the conditions of battle. In a letter to his siblings, James Reid noted that after being in the front line, he was “surprised at [himself] once or twice being so cool when lads who at other times would be hard to rattle were feeling it.”⁴⁰⁰ William Donnelly wrote a similar letter after seeing action at Courcelette: “Curious to say and quite a surprise to me, being my first experience, I was not worried a particle with my nerves though shells were bursting all around us for twenty-four hours.”⁴⁰¹

In addition to portraying themselves as calm under fire, men wrote at length about the ‘coolness’ of their comrades. Heroism was not about who “led a charge or shot more

³⁹⁷ C.W. Robinson, “Captain Robinson advice for Arthur Turner,” Military Correspondence, Date N/A, CA ACU GBA F1821-S0001-M1255-3-AT944, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

³⁹⁸ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 111.

³⁹⁹ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, March 2, 1918, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-8, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁰⁰ James Reid, “James Reid Letter to Siblings,” Military Correspondence, July 9, 1916, TMMF0147, Box 1, Series 1, File 1, The Military Museums Archive.

⁴⁰¹ William Donnelly, “William Herbert Donnelly Letter to Parents,” Military Correspondence, September 21, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

Germans than anyone else.”⁴⁰² It was a matter of enduring battle. James Brown told his sister that “thru all this the boys walked calmly on not a waver could be seen anywhere... one other thing that impressed me was how human nerves could be controlled and made to face it.”⁴⁰³ In the face of withering fire, the scene of men marching forward in full control of their faculties aligned with dominant conceptions of masculinity that emphasized adherence to duty, bravery, and emotional control. James Brown claimed that for veterans, it was “easy to understand” how men were able to control themselves.⁴⁰⁴ Military service during the Great War imparted these lessons. Even in difficult conditions, men stressed that nervous breakdowns were rare. As Battalion Medical Officer for the 31st Battalion, McGill was a witness to many instances of shell shock and nervous breakdown. After the battalion’s horrific experience at St. Eloi, Harold told his wife: “I used to wonder why men went insane under shell fire but understand it perfectly now.”⁴⁰⁵ However, McGill emphasized that “we had very few cases of nervous breakdown.”⁴⁰⁶ Staying calm under fire was reaffirmed as a desirable trait.

Men placed a lot of emphasis on the admirability of emotional control and enduring combat because their letters were tempered by their consideration for their domestic audience. Michael Roper argues that “violence could not be openly countenanced.”⁴⁰⁷ Letters were not considered the “appropriate space” for in-depth discussions of killing and battle.⁴⁰⁸ Withstanding danger and exhibiting emotional control was prevalent in framing martial

⁴⁰² Bet-El, “Men and Soldiers,” 89.

⁴⁰³ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Bertha,” Military Correspondence, July 5, 1917, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁰⁴ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Bertha,” Military Correspondence, July 5, 1917, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁰⁵ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, April 15, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁰⁶ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, April 15, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁰⁷ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 168.

⁴⁰⁸ Meyer, *Men of War*, 19.

masculine identities because in letters, “aggression was sublimated into the rhetoric of suffering.”⁴⁰⁹ Thus, men’s descriptions of battle were couched in references to domestic activities like sports and theatre. Men generally avoided graphic descriptions of violence. In the aftermath of Vimy Ridge, Harold McGill told his cousin Birdie that it was “a wonderful battle, the best show I have been in. Our men trimmed the Boche in fine shape and our losses were not heavy”⁴¹⁰ Harold’s description of battle as a ‘show’ was common in letters home. On multiple occasions, he used the word “game” to refer to the war.⁴¹¹ Using “sporting metaphors” to refer to battle “helped to humanize the war and keep at bay its mechanistic nature.”⁴¹² Humanizing war highlighted the significance of male behaviour and performance.

Despite the importance of emotional control to masculinity – tenderness and affection were emotions that were associated with femininity – traumatic conditions of warfare promoted male intimacy.⁴¹³ Men struggled to reconcile gendered expectations of emotional reservation with the intense bonding and emotional connections that were forged in combat. One notable example is the experience of Harold McGill at the Battle of Courcellette. During the fighting, McGill’s close friend and stretcher bearer Teddy Barnes was killed after his leg was “torn off by a shell.” McGill was present for Barnes’ final moments. He told his wife that saying goodbye to Barnes “made me feel like a baby... I could very easily have made a fool of myself.”⁴¹⁴ In a subsequent letter, McGill apologized to his wife for expressing his

⁴⁰⁹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 168.

⁴¹⁰ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Cousin Birdie,” Military Correspondence, April 13, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴¹¹ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, May 31, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴¹² Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 104.

⁴¹³ John Tosh, “Domesticity and Manliness in the Victorian Middle Class: The Family of Edward White Benson,” in *Manful Assertions: Masculinities in Britain since 1800*, ed. Michael Roper and John Tosh (London: Routledge, 1991), 65. And Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 136.

⁴¹⁴ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, October 1, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

emotions: “You would think that a frightfully blue letter of mine; I felt ashamed of it after I sent it off.”⁴¹⁵

McGill’s anguish at the death of his friend, and his subsequent embarrassment about revealing his emotions, illustrates the emotional toll of combat and the rigidity of masculine expectations. Although McGill had every reason to be emotional, he felt uncomfortable relying on his wife for support. His apology indicates an internalized pressure to conceal his emotions. Although McGill transgressed gendered expectations, his experience did not challenge his subjective understanding of masculinity. He adhered to hegemonic norms. Nearly a year later, McGill recalled that on the day Barnes died, he had “an idea what a woman meant when she said she felt like having a good cry.”⁴¹⁶ He did not view his emotions, and the pressure he felt to confide in his wife, as an alternative expression of masculinity but rather as an instance of femininity.

Men were expected to endure conditions of combat that inspired fear and intense emotional responses. The fact that the conditions were dangerous meant that they conferred masculine status. For many officers stuck in England, danger was absent from their lives. By the end of 1916, there was a surplus of officers in reserve battalions in England. Non-commissioned officers were particularly disadvantaged.⁴¹⁷ According to Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, “by 1916, the army in France needed only privates and lieutenants.”⁴¹⁸ Men held back in England, like Acting Corporal Thomas Riley, emphasized the importance of front-line service as a requirement of martial masculinity. Riley arrived in England on 11

⁴¹⁵ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, October 27, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴¹⁶ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, September 3, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴¹⁷ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, February 12, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 6-File 53, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴¹⁸ Desmond Morton and J. L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War 1914-1919*, 1st ed. (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), 51.

November 1916 with the 196th Universities Battalion and was absorbed into the 19th Reserve Battalion on 31 December 1916.⁴¹⁹ In February 1917, Riley told his mother he had requested to revert to the rank of private and expressed his frustration with the duration of time he had spent in England:

I think this is really the best thing I could have done. *All the best men are going over to France on the drafts and I don't want to be left here with the misfits...* I don't know if you will be pleased with what I have done, but you don't know what it is like to stick around a hole like this and see all your friends going away to France.⁴²⁰

Riley viewed the “best” men as those who were going to France. The “misfits” were his comrades in reserve battalions. Furthermore, Riley stressed the significance of his friends being selected for overseas service. The humiliation of remaining in reserve was made all the worse by the fact that men he knew were at the front. In March, Riley wrote that he was “very much fed up with sticking around in the country.”⁴²¹ On 2 April 1917, he wrote to his father:

You don't know what it is to see your best pals going away on a draft while you have to stick around doing things you knew how to do a year ago. You feel like a quitter, and it would certainly be rotten to go back to Canada without getting to France.⁴²²

Nineteen days later, Riley reverted to the rank of private and was taken on strength with the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles and sent to France.⁴²³

⁴¹⁹ Library and Archives Canada, “Thomas Riley Casualty Form Active Service,” n.d., RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 8285 - 20, First World War Personnel Files, 27. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=pffww&IdNumber=618500>.

⁴²⁰ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, February 12, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 6-File 53, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴²¹ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, March 28, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 54, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴²² Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Father,” Military Correspondence, April 2, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 54, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴²³ Library and Archives Canada, “Thomas Riley Casualty Form Active Service,” n.d., RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 8285 - 20, First World War Personnel Files, 27. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=pffww&IdNumber=618500>.

Men publicly demonstrated that they possessed martial masculinity by experiencing the front and all its dangers.⁴²⁴ Thomas Riley expressed his desire to make it overseas to join the ranks of the “best men” and avoid feeling like a “quitter.” He did not want to be associated with the “many slackers” in England who had “no intention of coming” to the front.⁴²⁵ The distress and frustration evident in his writing illustrate how important it was to adhere to masculine ideals. Although Riley was aware of the dangers inherent in trench warfare, this only bolstered his desire to go overseas. He defined his masculine worth as relative to those around him, and in his eyes, the real men were at the front. Riley’s letters allude to the homosocial aspect of martial masculinity. His shame at remaining in camp was related to the fact that his friends had already proceeded to France. By languishing in England, he risked losing masculine status in the eyes of men that he knew. Simply volunteering for service was not enough; to embody martial masculine ideals men had to face actual danger.

Thomas Riley was not the only soldier to correlate masculinity with enduring front-line action. A lack of combat experience formed the basis of a scathing letter from Harold McGill that decried a man who had been invalided to Calgary under spurious circumstances: “When he left here his feet were cold enough to start an ice factory... This man was not in the trenches half a dozen times during the several months he was out here. He is the only member of our battalion, either officer or man, who has shown the white feather and we are naturally not proud of him.”⁴²⁶ McGill highlighted the returned man’s “cold feet” and

⁴²⁴ Meyer, *Men of War*, 61.

⁴²⁵ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, October 13, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴²⁶ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, March 27, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

unwillingness to spend time in the trenches. He noted that the battalion was “not proud” of the man due to his behaviour that transgressed masculine expectations.

Martial masculinity was expressed in men’s letters homes by repeated emphasis on the pride they felt at enduring dangerous front-line conditions. Challenging conditions of warfare were framed as “masculinizing experiences” that would transform “physical weaklings and moral degenerates” into men.⁴²⁷ Even if danger resulted in death, it affirmed masculinity. James Brown argued: “I am sure any mother would sooner have their son die as Archie Brown died than die a slacker at home in Canada.”⁴²⁸ Brown expressed his belief that dying in battle, as his friend had done, was more manly than not serving at all. He was not alone in this expression. “The heroic death in war,” Joanna Bourke argues, “was important to those who lived.” During wartime, the “mere fact of dying was ennobling.”⁴²⁹

Masculine codes of conduct expected men to take death in stride. Descriptions of death were often relayed in a matter-of-fact manner that highlighted men’s stoic and brave demeanours. Very shortly after the 31st Battalion arrived in France, Harold McGill told his wife that “a corporal of signallers was shot through the head and died here in the dugout. He was a fine young chap and very popular in the battalion.”⁴³⁰ William Donnelly recalled that at the Battle of the Somme, he “was buried once about three feet deep, with two other fellows, by a shell, but we all came out without a scratch.”⁴³¹ Neither McGill nor Donnelly were descriptive. Instead, their letters were sanitized.

⁴²⁷ Meyer, *Men of War*, 3.

⁴²⁸ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Bertha,” Military Correspondence, July 5, 1917, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴²⁹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 248-249.

⁴³⁰ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, December 5, 1915, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴³¹ William Donnelly, “William Herbert Donnelly Letter to Parents,” Military Correspondence, September 19, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

Stoic approaches to death were an important part of men's masculine identities. It helped them cope with the more horrific aspects of modern warfare. In a letter to his sister, Albert Nye signed off on a sombre note: "You don't need to worry about me, as what's to be will be, and I might see you all again some day."⁴³² Nye was fatalistic about his military service. "As far as I'm concerned," he commented, "I would just as soon be in the trenches as out and it is just as safe, as you are never safe from shelling wherever you go."⁴³³ Nye was killed in June 1916.⁴³⁴ In a letter to his mother, Eugene Drader noted that while they "go at it a bit strong at times," life in the army was "passable... while it lasts."⁴³⁵ Drader was killed four days later.⁴³⁶ A stoic and fatalistic attitude was a response to the seemingly random nature of death wrought by modern artillery. James Reid reflected on a close call he faced:

It seems strange that although I got this small wound, that if I had been with the Coy I would in all probability have fared worse as the Sgt was killed (a fine young fellow from Calgary) and the man that stood next to me in my section was not to be found at all poor lad, but he would never know anything as it burst right on top of him and lots of my old pals and I can just figure that if it was not that I was elsewhere I would have just been doing what they were and I would not be writing this today.⁴³⁷

Reid was well aware of the random nature of life and death in the trenches. Adopting a fatalistic attitude about death was comforting.⁴³⁸ It fit neatly into the rhetoric of sacrifice that assured men that their deaths would keep them eternally young, heroic, and manly.⁴³⁹

⁴³² Albert Nye, "Albert Nye Letter," Military Correspondence, October 22, 1915, CA ACU GBA F1406-M0028, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴³³ Albert Nye, "Albert Nye Letter," Military Correspondence, April 26, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1406-M0028, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴³⁴ "Two Calgary Men Reported Killed; Several Wounded," *The Calgary Herald*, June 19, 1916, Newspapers.com, 1. <https://www.newspapers.com/article/calgary-herald-two-calgary-men-reported/116249751/>.

⁴³⁵ Eugene Drader, "Eugene Drader Letter to Mother," Military Correspondence, September 12, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/60992/doc/221>.

⁴³⁶ Harry Balfour, "Harry Balfour Letter to parents of Eugene Drader," Military Correspondence, September 21, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/60992/doc/221>.

⁴³⁷ James Reid, "James Reid Letter to Siblings," Military Correspondence, July 9, 1916, TMMF0147, Box 1, Series 1, File 1, The Military Museums Archive.

⁴³⁸ Meyer, *Men of War*, 54.

⁴³⁹ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 110-112.

Serving overseas in France confirmed that men possessed the requisite courage to attain the status of a masculine man. As Harold McGill noted in 1917, “many officers who could make a much better figure at a social gathering are in England doing just that very thing because they lack the courage to face the enemy.”⁴⁴⁰ McGill understood what battle entailed. He believed that men unwilling to serve overseas lacked courage. He emphasized the necessity of front-line service in another letter to his wife much later in the war about the nervousness felt by one of her acquaintances in England:

I am sorry to hear that Mr. Burrell is nervous about coming over to France. It is and is likely to be for some time, “Non bon” for people who are troubled with nerves. England is a nice country in which to do one’s soldiering, but personally I prefer to pick the safest place possible somewhere in the vicinity of the war at least, i.e. so long as I am pretending to be a soldier. I suppose though that the next time I get into a good stiff hostile bombardment I shall be wishing to Heaven that I had accepted the offer of the job in M.D. 13 back in Canada.⁴⁴¹

By 1918 McGill was comfortable in his role as a masculine militarized man. He expressed sympathy for the nervous Burrell but ultimately reinforced the fact that France was no place for such men. In contrast, McGill mentioned his own service in France, near the front and in range of artillery, but not in the most dangerous areas. Although he joked about transferring to Canada, his joke further reiterates that he inhabited a dangerous position, which implies he possessed nerves, in contrast to Burrell.

Any service overseas, even positions that did not engage in combat with the enemy, was evidence of adherence to masculine ideals. Soldiers viewed martial masculinity as “part of the essence of a man who had served or been willing to serve as a soldier or officer at the front.”⁴⁴² Enduring danger and discomfort was defined in terms of “praiseworthy stoicism”

⁴⁴⁰ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, September 17, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁴¹ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” July 16, 1918, in McGill *Medicine and Duty*, 333.

⁴⁴² Gullace, *The Blood of Our Sons*, 93.

and therefore, was a key component of masculinity.⁴⁴³ For example, a stretcher bearer with the 8th Field Ambulance sent back a postcard depicting stretcher bearers at work, with the caption: “Who said that the Red Cross man has a bomb proof job?”⁴⁴⁴ While the caption is partially in jest, the fact that it was sent at all indicates that undergoing danger was regarded as a source of pride. Those who held ‘bomb-proof’ jobs bore a “stigma as well as a sense of isolation” from the group of men who served in the trenches.⁴⁴⁵ Men in positions of danger condemned those in the army that they felt were not incurring their fair share of risk in the front lines. James Brown was particularly vehement in his condemnation of men who sought ‘bomb-proof’ jobs:

I would detest myself and deserve to be detested by all my friends if I had stayed in England or Canada on a Bomb proof job as so many who enlist do... There is nothing I detest more than the men who enlist and look for safety first jobs it would be much more manly for them to not enlist at all than sail under false colours and I despise them as I do young able bodied men who act as fat men.⁴⁴⁶

Brown detested men who enlisted and reaped the social benefits of military service, including respect for their manly qualities, and then shirked their duty and any real danger by transferring to safe jobs behind the line. His condemnation extended to his personal acquaintances. On 1 April 1918, James referred to a man as “a failure” because “he did not reach France until about a year after I did and so far I believe he has only been in the line once.”⁴⁴⁷ James Brown defined the value of his acquaintance by the date on which he arrived in France and the frequency at which he had spent time at the front.

⁴⁴³ Meyer, *Men of War*, 25.

⁴⁴⁴ Henry Howell, “Red Cross Postcard,” Military Correspondence, n.d., CA ACU GBA F0974 M6811-4, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁴⁵ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 78.

⁴⁴⁶ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, November 23, 1916, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁴⁷ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Marion,” Military Correspondence, April 1, 1918, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

Another example of the relationship between danger and masculine ideals can be found in Harold McGill's decision to transfer to a "much less hazardous" role.⁴⁴⁸ After roughly two years as the Medical Officer of the 31st Battalion, McGill transferred to the 5th Canadian Field Ambulance.⁴⁴⁹ He was conflicted about the change to a "semi bomb proof job," away from the "old battalion and [his] friends."⁴⁵⁰ However, the transfer was highly encouraged by his superiors:

He [the A.D.M.S] says that I have done my share of front line work and the D.A.D.M.S. says that if I keep going up often enough I'll get myself killed. Of course I am not in favor of that at all, I mean getting killed... a field ambulance position is not a bomb proof job by any means but it is much less hazardous and less strenuous than that of an infantry Battn. M.O.⁴⁵¹

McGill expressed concern about the gendered optics of transferring to a safer position.

Although he eventually transferred, his reasoning revealed his fears that the transfer would make him appear weak. McGill clarified that the job was "semi-bomb proof," which still carried a degree of danger. Furthermore, he specified that the transfer should be made for "his own interests and that of the service" which portrayed it as a matter of duty, rather than a personal decision to avoid danger.⁴⁵² The high degree of danger and hardship incurred by military service made it a desirable position to demonstrate masculinity.

For some men, regardless of the masculine ideal, military service was unattractive and undesirable. However, as casualties mounted and the war dragged on, it became more crucial than ever for these men to adhere to standards of masculine conduct to pursue the war

⁴⁴⁸ Harold McGill, "Harold McGill Letter to Emma," Military Correspondence, August 6, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁴⁹ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 328.

⁴⁵⁰ Harold McGill, "Harold McGill Letter to Emma," Military Correspondence, August 9, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁵¹ Harold McGill, "Harold McGill Letter to Emma," Military Correspondence, August 6, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁵² Harold McGill, "Harold McGill Letter to Emma," Military Correspondence, August 9, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

to a victorious end. After he returned from a battlefield tour of Europe, Prime Minister Robert Borden indicated his intention to implement conscription.⁴⁵³ On 29 August 1917 the Military Service Act was signed into law.⁴⁵⁴ Conscription was official recognition of the fact that the men who would volunteer for service had already enlisted, those who remained would have to be compelled.⁴⁵⁵ For many in English Canada, which included the vast majority of Calgary soldiers overseas, conscription was a tool to ensure that the sacrifice of men in uniform carrying out their masculine duty was not undermined by the opportunistic and cowardly slackers who remained at home.⁴⁵⁶ The intensity with which men in uniform supported conscription and derided those who had failed to enlist by 1917 was shaped by masculine expectations. Men at the front who had volunteered subscribed to the “myth of the volunteer.”⁴⁵⁷ According to historian Ilana Bet-El, the “myth of the volunteer” was a “particular public construction of masculinity that was based upon a series of equations: a real man = a patriot = a volunteer = a soldier.” Bet-El argues that volunteers embodied hegemonic masculinity because they willingly agreed to serve and embark on a “crusade of chivalry and sacrifice.”⁴⁵⁸

Soldiers viewed conscription as a tool to force men who failed to live up to martial masculine expectations of duty and bravery to enlist. Conscription was a tool for the state to “reinforce masculine norms.”⁴⁵⁹ Duty was gendered, and a man’s duty was to fight. Those who had to be conscripted failed to do their duty. Thomas Riley predicted, “if the boys over

⁴⁵³ J. L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*, Second edition., Heritage (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019), 126. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487571733>.

⁴⁵⁴ Chris Sharpe, “Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1918: A Re-Evaluation,” *Canadian Military History* 24, no. 1 (2015): 42. <https://scholars.wlu.ca/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1753&context=cmh>.

⁴⁵⁵ Millman, *Polarity, Patriotism, and Dissent*, 151.

⁴⁵⁶ Wood, *Militia Myth*, 227.

⁴⁵⁷ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 3.

⁴⁵⁸ Bet-El, “Men and Soldiers,” 74-78.

⁴⁵⁹ Tosh, “Hegemonic Masculinity and the History of Gender,” in *Masculinities in Politics and War*,

here ever have to vote on it there should be very little doubt of the results as they have very little respect for those who have not done their duty.”⁴⁶⁰ Harold McGill referred to anti-conscription advocates as “cowardly bounders” who undermined his own morale to fight.⁴⁶¹ Men were explicitly regarded as lesser due to their refusal to enlist. In the summer of 1917, James Brown wrote: “I cannot understand the creature, *he is not a man*, who still holds back at this stage of the game... what they deserve is to be dumped in the Atlantic and Pacific and allowed to swim to a happy land that is worth fighting for.”⁴⁶² Brown’s comments may have been especially harsh as he was writing to his girlfriend, who remained in Canada amidst the ‘creatures’ in question. For soldiers, enlisting voluntarily fulfilled their masculine duty, demonstrated bravery, and conferred a manly status. To fail and remain home at such a critical moment was unthinkable.

While civilian men were criticized by soldiers for failing to live up to masculine expectations, blame was not applied equally. Before the war, although the soldier hero was a hegemonic masculine ideal, married men occupied a privileged location near the top of the hierarchy of masculinities.⁴⁶³ Masculine men were married and financially successful.⁴⁶⁴ In contrast, bachelors who were perceived as lazy and immoral, occupied the bottom of the hierarchy.⁴⁶⁵ This hierarchy persisted during wartime. Married men were not stigmatized for failing to enlist given their status as “heads of household and breadwinners,” while bachelors

⁴⁶⁰ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Father,” Military Correspondence, September 9, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 56, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁶¹ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, September 12, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁶² James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Bertha,” Military Correspondence, July 5, 1917, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁶³ Bet-El, “Men and Soldiers,” 80.

⁴⁶⁴ Joy Parr, *The Gender of Breadwinners: Women, Men and Change in Two Industrial Towns, 1880-1950* (University of Toronto Press, 2004), 188. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442681347>.

⁴⁶⁵ Bet-El, “Men and Soldiers,” 80.

participating in leisure activities were singled out as targets of conscription.⁴⁶⁶ The specific men that soldiers wanted to conscript demonstrate this hierarchy. Hadden Ellis thought it would “get a lot of those guys around towns doing nothing and some of the fellows who used to throw it into me when I spoke of enlisting.”⁴⁶⁷ James Brown condemned fit single men who remained in Calgary.⁴⁶⁸

Although the married man held a privileged position in the pre-war hierarchy of masculinities, in wartime the hegemonic soldier hero was the dominant masculine ideal. Harold McGill told his fiancée: “I should like to have the work of going around the various pool rooms in Calgary gathering in the conscripts.”⁴⁶⁹ McGill’s letter alludes to the common desire amongst men overseas to conscript young single bachelors. Pool halls, along with bowling alleys, and saloons, were traditionally the recreational activities of choice for young bachelors.⁴⁷⁰ Middle-class reformers viewed bachelors as poor masculine role models due to their drinking, loafing, and “unmanly qualities” that they exhibited in these recreational sites.⁴⁷¹ However, McGill also wrote that “quite a few men in Canada are getting married to escape the draft; their wives must surely be proud of them.”⁴⁷² In McGill’s letters, the single bachelor and the married man were both criticized as unmasculine men who would do

⁴⁶⁶ Laura Ugolini, “The ‘Recruiting Muddle’: Married Men, Conscription and Masculinity in First World War England,” *First World War Studies* 9, no. 1 (2018): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19475020.2018.1520138>.

⁴⁶⁷ Hadden Ellis, “Hadden William Ellis Letter to Sister,” Military Correspondence, August 27, 1917, Hadden William Ellis Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/20824/doc/221>.

⁴⁶⁸ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Bertha,” Military Correspondence, July 5, 1917, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁶⁹ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, September 14, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁷⁰ Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 155. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780691222011>.

⁴⁷¹ Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 112.

⁴⁷² Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, September 14, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

anything to avoid enlisting. Under the pressures of war, marriage was no longer a crowning masculine achievement but a shameful act to avoid masculine duties.

Married men and men in poor physical health were thought to be “windier” than single, physically fit men.⁴⁷³ Harold McGill expressed fear that his marriage during the war would make him a poor soldier. He wrote to his wife: “My love for you will have only one bad effect on me from a military point of view. I am afraid of becoming a coward, for I do so want to live to try and make you happy.”⁴⁷⁴ McGill felt his new domestic identity as a husband was detrimental to his ability to exhibit hegemonic masculine behaviour. Within the doctrine of separate spheres, emotional connection with women diminished men’s manliness.⁴⁷⁵ McGill subsequently asked his wife:

Do you think that being married detracts from a man’s value as a soldier? I am afraid of it for many times a day I catch myself counting up the months that must elapse before my leave again comes due... It isn’t right that an officer should be thinking too much about his leave; he is liable to think less than he should about his duty.⁴⁷⁶

McGill’s anxiety about how his marriage negatively impacted his martial masculine identity illustrates the difficulty of adhering to hegemonic masculine ideals. To transition to manhood, men were expected to reject femininity.⁴⁷⁷ Successful military men were generally uncomfortable interacting with women.⁴⁷⁸ McGill was proud of his military service, but he also loved his wife, and he feared that his domestic identity as a husband was incompatible with his martial identity as a soldier.

⁴⁷³ Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 356.

⁴⁷⁴ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, August 2, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁷⁵ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 24.

⁴⁷⁶ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, January 20, 1918, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-8, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁷⁷ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 24.

⁴⁷⁸ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 32.

McGill's fears demonstrate an important aspect of hegemonic masculinity: men did not achieve ideal masculine status with one decision or action. It was a constant performance that required continuous adherence to norms and expectations. Men's masculinity was judged by the expectations of their comrades. "Don't think that every man who comes to England or even goes to France is a soldier," James Brown recorded, "a number... are nothing more than parasites and a burden."⁴⁷⁹ Some men enlisted but could not stand front-line conditions and 'shirked' their duty. 'Shirking' refers to evading "man's duty to the state and to other men."⁴⁸⁰ In its most extreme form, shirking was deserting the battlefield.⁴⁸¹ However, other forms of shirking such as "dodging parades" or "slipping out of camp," were much more common and accepted.⁴⁸² Harmless shirking was the subject of jokes. Charles Knights told his sister that he was a "reformed character" in the army and felt that "two hours work a day is quite sufficient."⁴⁸³ However, shirking did not align with masculine ideals. "I know you would not want me to shirk my duty for safety's sake," James Brown told his mother, "so far I can clearly say I have shirked nothing."⁴⁸⁴ Men wanted to avoid appearing like a shirker because it would hurt their masculine reputation. As Harold McGill noted in the midst of a massive German offensive in 1918, "it would be taken as evidence of chilly feet for one to apply for a transfer to England," given the "present black military outlook."⁴⁸⁵

When men did write about avoiding danger, it was couched in the language of masculine duty and sacrifice. Staff officers who rarely visited the front were universally

⁴⁷⁹ James Ernest Brown, "James Ernest Brown Letter to Marion," Military Correspondence, November 20, 1917, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁸⁰ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 78.

⁴⁸¹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 78.

⁴⁸² Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 80.

⁴⁸³ Charles Knights, "Charles Knights Letter to Ruth," Military Correspondence, February 22, 1917, TMMF0068-Box 1-Series: Letters, The Military Museums Archive.

⁴⁸⁴ James Ernest Brown, "James Ernest Brown Letter to Mother," Military Correspondence, November 23, 1916, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁸⁵ Harold McGill, "Harold McGill Letter to Emma," Military Correspondence, April 27, 1918, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-8, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

disliked by front-line soldiers.⁴⁸⁶ In contrast, familial relations or men who had been injured while performing masculine activities were excused from remaining at the front. When Eugene Drader found out about the wounding of his nephews, he relayed the news to the family: “Neither are serious and will be lucky to remain away as long as possible.”⁴⁸⁷ Similarly, Thomas Riley wrote about a friend from Calgary who had recently transferred to a safer job which ordinarily would have been cause for a reproach or judgement:

Fergy is not up with us... he has got a bomb proof job at Canadian Corps Headquarters. An officer there who knows the family got him the job, he is with the Intelligence Department. I think I am very glad he has got it for it would have been terrible for his people if anything bad happened to him, after his brother had been killed.⁴⁸⁸

George Ferguson used his family connections to get a bomb-proof job and come out of the line. Ordinarily, Riley’s description of Ferguson’s transfer would have incurred anger and feelings of betrayal. However, because Ferguson’s brother had been killed in action, and because Ferguson was his friend, Riley excused this breach of masculine behaviour. Men were much more accepting of other men they personally knew who sought safer positions, and their own desire for safety. John Cousins did not judge his friend for taking a job that kept “him down in a dugout while in the line.”⁴⁸⁹ Howard Galloway told his sister that he was “thankful” for additional training after his injury which kept him out of France for “three months at least.”⁴⁹⁰

⁴⁸⁶ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 113.

⁴⁸⁷ Eugene Drader, “Eugene Drader Letter to Family,” Military Correspondence, July 1, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/60992/doc/221>.

⁴⁸⁸ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Father,” Military Correspondence, June 21, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 55, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁸⁹ John Moore Cousins, “John Moore Cousins Letter to Mother,” April 3, 1918, CA ACU GBA F0590-M6339, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁹⁰ Howard Galloway, “Howard Galloway Letter to Ruby,” Military Correspondence, June 14, 1917, CA ACU GBA F3155-FL0003, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

The conditional acceptance of transgressions of masculine expectations illustrates that letters home allowed men to occasionally let down their masculine guard. Letters could be an “intimate space” where soldiers could write about feelings that they did not feel comfortable expressing in the trenches.⁴⁹¹ It also reveals the limits of gendered expectations of conduct. Although shirking and applying for bomb-proof jobs did not align with masculine expectations, it was acceptable behaviour in specific situations. Nevertheless, the conditions that allowed men to seek safety away from the lines were limited and often required other demonstrations of masculine ideals. In the above examples, the men who sought safer positions were all combat veterans who were perceived as having experienced a fair share of danger in accordance with masculine expectations.

Although men subscribed to masculine ideals in their wartime letters, they also expressed a desire for domesticity and the homes they had left behind. Joanna Bourke argues that men were not brutalized and turned into militarized machines by war. Rather, they pursued domesticity and femininity in an attempt to find peace within themselves. “Home remained the touchstone,” Bourke argues, the physical location that men strove to escape to in their private correspondence.⁴⁹² Michael Roper agrees. He argues that “the conditions of trench warfare did not create an unbridgeable gap between soldiers and home.”⁴⁹³ Soldiers remained sons, husbands, and fathers, even while they served overseas. In their letters, men connected with home by discussing the weather and performing familiar domestic masculine roles. This connection was an important aspect of their survival in the martial masculine world of warfare.⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹¹ Meyer, *Men of War*, 21.

⁴⁹² Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 22-23.

⁴⁹³ Roper “Maternal Relations,” in *Masculinities in Politics and War*, 307.

⁴⁹⁴ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 72.

Younger soldiers faced different domestic expectations than their older counterparts who had assumed patriarchal roles in the home. They may have been grown men in the eyes of the army, but their mothers still viewed them as children.⁴⁹⁵ Eighteen-year-old Thomas Riley shrugged off his mother's concern for his well-being: "Don't take everything so seriously! When I tell you I have been out in the rain all day, don't try and imagine that I am soaked to the skin."⁴⁹⁶ Riley understood that his mother wanted him as far away from danger as possible. When his unit was taken out of the line, he knew it would be good news because she would "know just exactly what I am doing and won't be worrying about me."⁴⁹⁷ In correspondence with their mothers, soldiers slipped into roles they embodied before the war that had little to do with heroic masculinity.

In contrast, older soldiers and officers took on maternal domestic roles overseas that had more in common with pre-war gender roles than wartime masculine codes of conduct. Domestic activities like preparing meals, washing clothes, and bathing were the backbone of military schedules.⁴⁹⁸ McGill remarked:

The idea of the duty of a military officer possessed by the people at home is one depicting him leading a bunch of heroes up the line under a rain of shells, whereas actually nine tenths of his work consists in hammering at his men to make them shine their buttons, keep their equipment clean and in order, and to prevent them throwing food on the floors of their billets.⁴⁹⁹

Officers engaging in feminine work overseas was an aberration from the masculine model that emphasized martial activity, leadership, and bravery as the core tenets of good officers.

⁴⁹⁵ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 89.

⁴⁹⁶ Thomas Riley, "Thomas Riley Letter to Mother," Military Correspondence, February 4, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 6-File 53, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁹⁷ Thomas Riley, "Thomas Riley Letter to Mother," Military Correspondence, June 29, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 55, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁴⁹⁸ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 122-123.

⁴⁹⁹ Harold McGill, "Harold McGill Letter to Emma," Military Correspondence, January 12, 1918, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-8, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

However, this did not shift definitions of hegemonic masculinity. After the war, men rejected domestic labour as a masculine duty and reasserted hegemonic norms.⁵⁰⁰

While they served overseas, soldiers sought to recreate domesticity in the trenches. They frequently described their attempts to make trenches feel like home.⁵⁰¹ Thomas Riley told his mother that “the one [dugout] I am in right now is pretty good and if we could only stay here a few months we might call it a home.”⁵⁰² Officers had better living conditions. Harold McGill wrote that “the trenches are just what I expected to see... After the first day one feels perfectly at home in them.”⁵⁰³ Repeated language that described efforts to feel ‘at home’ indicates that men expressed a desire for the domestic realm and the comforts of home. It illustrates a “re-creation of the domestic sphere in an all-male environment.”⁵⁰⁴ This challenges the theory that men went to war to escape the constraints of domestic life.⁵⁰⁵

Domestic masculine identities were concealed within letters that concerned the routine and the mundane elements of fighting. Men often mentioned the weather. Bad weather made living conditions abysmal for soldiers who spent most of their time exposed to the elements. Albert Green complained that “the last five days we were in was the worst of the lot. It snowed night and day.”⁵⁰⁶ Poor weather, along with artillery fire, brought about the muddy conditions central to cultural memories of the Great War. Charles Knights wryly remarked to his sister that “life at present consists chiefly of mud, sometimes it is thin and

⁵⁰⁰ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 170.

⁵⁰¹ Meyer, *Men of War*, 32.

⁵⁰² Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, September 16, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 56, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁵⁰³ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Frances,” Military Correspondence, October 10, 1915, embedded in McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 97.

⁵⁰⁴ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 126.

⁵⁰⁵ Adams, *The Great Adventure*, 90 and 92.

⁵⁰⁶ Albert Nye, “Albert Nye Letter,” Military Correspondence, March 6, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1406-M0028, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

sloppy like pea soup, and sometimes it is heavy and sticky, but always it is greasy, and heaven help the man who does not watch his footsteps for his backsliding will be great.”⁵⁰⁷

Discussing the weather was not just idle talk; it helped men connect with their loved ones. Bourke argues that men used letters to relate their wartime existence to the domestic identity they left behind: “The war did *not* frame the real world for many men,” it was an aberration that they sought to endure before returning to the domestic realm.⁵⁰⁸ In letters home, men expressed a desire for their pre-war lives in which they performed domestic masculine identities. Roger Wilson, a farmer before the war, remarked: “I wish... we were all coming home. What are you busy with now, I suppose you will be bringing the young cattle in soon it is getting on to about that time.”⁵⁰⁹ Weather was a common point of reference for soldiers and their loved ones.⁵¹⁰ According to Meyer, “by using the language of home to describe their living conditions and the experiences they were undergoing, men sought to forge connections of familiarity with their audience.”⁵¹¹ For example, Harold McGill frequently remarked in letters to his wife that the weather in France or Belgium was similar to the weather in Alberta.⁵¹² The weather was a point of connection between soldiers overseas and their loved ones at home. Domestic masculine identities were predicated upon the existence of domestic roles and patterns. Discussing the weather was an indication that men sought to connect with their domestic identities.

⁵⁰⁷ Charles Knights, “Charles Knights Letter to Ruth,” Military Correspondence, October 29, 1916, TMMF0068-Box 1-Series: Letters, The Military Museums Archive.

⁵⁰⁸ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 23.

⁵⁰⁹ Roger Wilson, “Roger Wilson Letter to Parents,” Military Correspondence, November 4, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/20769>.

⁵¹⁰ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 53.

⁵¹¹ Meyer *Men of War*, 46.

⁵¹² Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, April 15, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre. And, Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, February 2, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

Victorian domestic standards of masculinity held men responsible for the well-being of their families. To demonstrate “‘true manliness,’ men were expected to protect their mothers, wives, and children.”⁵¹³ For boys to become men, a key aspect of the transition was setting up a household independent from their parents.⁵¹⁴ In the household, men were authority figures. They were husbands and fathers who were expected to protect their loved ones.⁵¹⁵ In wartime letters, men still sought to fulfill these expectations. Letters were written primarily for the benefit of the recipients and not the soldiers.⁵¹⁶ They expressed concern for the well-being of the individuals at home. These concerns were well founded. As Roper argues, “unlike sons, who experienced bouts of intense anxiety in between longer periods of boredom, families were constantly worried.”⁵¹⁷ Eugene Drader implored his family to “[not] worry. I think likely you do more worrying than we.”⁵¹⁸ By expressing concern for their family members and modifying their writing accordingly, men took on a domestic role as protector and caregiver, at the expense of their militarized masculine identities. Bourke argues that because men frequently expressed concern for the well-being of their family members, they found meaning in their domestic masculine identities rather than in their militarized roles overseas.⁵¹⁹

The domestic masculine ideal of protecting one’s family, and the martial masculine ideal of military service, were certainly linked. As Jessica Meyer contends, “the domestic and the heroic facets of ideal masculinity often converged.”⁵²⁰ But a distinction between the two

⁵¹³ Tosh, “Domesticity and Manliness,” in *Manful Assertions*, 67.

⁵¹⁴ Tosh, “What should Historians do with Masculinity?” 185.

⁵¹⁵ Meyer, *Men of War*, 29.

⁵¹⁶ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 51.

⁵¹⁷ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 72.

⁵¹⁸ Eugene Drader, “Eugene Drader Letter to Family,” Military Correspondence, July 1, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/60992/doc/221>.

⁵¹⁹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 21.

⁵²⁰ Meyer, *Men of War*, 46.

is important because they inspired different masculine performances in men's letters. For example, soldiers often hid the dangerous reality of their situations to protect their loved ones. After suffering the ill effects of a gas attack, James Brown told his sister that "it will be alright in a few days so don't worry and don't tell them at home as I have not [and] they might imagine all sorts of silly things!"⁵²¹ Siblings were usually more privy to detailed information about the realities of the front than parents or spouses.⁵²² James Reid told his siblings that while he led a "bombing squad" for a while, he did not tell their parents because "mother has funny notions about them jobs [and] no need to alarm her."⁵²³ Later in the same letter, James preceded his description of an infection he suffered with a disclaimer that "this is not for mother or the others now you burn it and say you must have thrown it on the fire."⁵²⁴

Men's concern for their family members clashed with militarized masculine expectations. Although enduring danger was a tenet of militarized masculinity, men paradoxically tried to assuage their family members' concerns by emphasizing the safety of overseas service. Arthur Turner assured his wife that he was "a long way from the firing line, so don't worry."⁵²⁵ After suffering an injury, James Reid explained, "mine [wound] never bothers me if it was not for a little bump on the side of my head, you would never know. Don't worry I am in perfect safety."⁵²⁶ James Brown dubiously described his experience in a listening post in the middle of no man's land as "quite interesting," but "fairly safe as you are

⁵²¹ James Ernest Brown, "James Ernest Brown Letter," Military Correspondence, April 15, 1918, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁵²² Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 67.

⁵²³ James Reid, "James Reid Letter to Siblings," Military Correspondence, July 9, 1916, TMMF0147, Box 1, Series 1, File 1, The Military Museums Archive.

⁵²⁴ James Reid, "James Reid Letter to Siblings," Military Correspondence, July 9, 1916, TMMF0147, Box 1, Series 1, File 1, The Military Museums Archive.

⁵²⁵ Arthur Turner, "Arthur Turner Letter to Wife," Military Correspondence, February 24, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1821-S0001-M1255-3, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁵²⁶ James Reid, "James Reid Postcard to Mother," Military Correspondence, September 22, 1916, TMMF0147, Box 1, Series 1, File 1, The Military Museums Archive.

in front of their shellfire.”⁵²⁷ Thomas Riley told his mother that the men “observed a policy of do unto others” with the Germans that mitigated casualties.⁵²⁸ Soldiers endeavoured to describe the safety of their positions in terms familiar to those at home. Harold McGill implored his wife not to worry about his well-being as he was “in no more danger of being injured here than I should be of being run over by a taxi or bus in London.”⁵²⁹ Instances in which men highlighted the safety of their positions indicate that domestic masculine considerations impacted their writing.

In some cases, the domestic masculine ideal was incompatible with martial masculine behaviour. Joining the military threatened men’s ability to be breadwinners for their families.⁵³⁰ The basic rate of pay for a soldier in the C.E.F. was \$1.10 per day, higher than a farm worker but lower than the average unskilled labourer’s daily wages.⁵³¹ As early as 1915, even with the Canadian Patriotic Fund and Separation Allowance, a family of five in Alberta which relied on a soldier for income received eight dollars less than needed to buy food, fuel, and rent.⁵³² Military pay could not remain competitive against inflation that raised consumer costs forty-six percent by the end of the war.⁵³³ Officers received more money but they also had more expensive social commitments. Harold McGill told his wife: “I do not see how we

⁵²⁷ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, December 30, 1916, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁵²⁸ Thomas Riley, “Thomas Riley Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, July 16, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 55, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁵²⁹ Harold McGill, “Harold McGill Letter to Emma,” Military Correspondence, October 24, 1918, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-9, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁵³⁰ Hutečka, *Men under Fire*, 254.

⁵³¹ Copp, “The Military Effort,” in *Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, 38.

⁵³² Desmond Morton, “Supporting Soldiers’ Families: Separation Allowance, Assigned Pay, and the Unexpected,” in *Canada and the First World War, Second Edition: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, ed. David MacKenzie, 2nd Edition (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 218, <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781487519681>.

⁵³³ Morton, “Supporting Soldiers’ Families,” in *Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, 217.

could live comfortably at present in England on captain's pay."⁵³⁴ There was a tension between domestic and martial masculine expectations. Military service threatened men's domestic masculine identity even though it remained the masculine expectation.

Despite men's efforts to protect their families and uphold masculine expectations, letters were not sanitized of references to stress, fear, and death. Some men were open with their loved ones about the stress they were under and "families were made to feel their pain."⁵³⁵ William Donnelly recalled that "one poor fellow wanted me to kill him. He had lain there about twenty four hours with a bad shrapnel in side... war is hell. It is awful and may God grant that this will very soon end"⁵³⁶ Letters were a "haven where men let down their masculine guard."⁵³⁷ After relaying his night spent in 'No Man's Land' less than 50 yards from a German trench, Albert Nye wryly remarked: "If I ever get through this I think I will be gray headed."⁵³⁸ Similarly, McGill noted after the 31st Battalion's lengthy engagement in the Somme Campaign, "the severe strain of the past two months took more out of me than I had thought and I did not go in for a very uproarious time when in London."⁵³⁹ Men used letters as an "appropriate space" where they were able to discuss feelings and reactions to warfare that did not align with masculine norms.⁵⁴⁰ Many months after the death of Thomas Riley, his uncle Harold wrote:

France and the war have not had nearly the attraction for me since Tom's death that they had before. I used to go see him and he was always so

⁵³⁴ Harold McGill, "Harold McGill Letter to Emma," Military Correspondence, October 13, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-7, Glenbow Western Research Centre. Harold McGill Letter October 13th 1917 Page 44

⁵³⁵ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 72.

⁵³⁶ William Donnelly, "William Herbert Donnelly Letter to Parents," Military Correspondence, September 21, 1916, William Herbert Donnelly Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/war/468/collection/65719/doc/221>.

⁵³⁷ Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front*, 172.

⁵³⁸ Albert Nye, "Albert Nye Letter," Military Correspondence, March 6, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1406-M0028, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁵³⁹ Harold McGill, "Harold McGill Letter to Emma," Military Correspondence, October 27, 1916, CA ACU GBA F1270-S0001-SS0002-M742-6, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁵⁴⁰ Meyer, *Men of War*, 21.

cheerful and happy... I have lost many dear and valued friends – some of God’s and the world’s best sons – I have been called upon to write so many letters of sympathy that I am afraid I am losing my nerve a bit.⁵⁴¹

Harold’s experience, particularly the loss of his nephew Tom and other friends, impacted his outlook on the war and made him question whether he was losing his nerve. Stress from prolonged service in the line and the deaths of comrades took its toll. Men received emotional support from their loved ones which was crucial to their emotional survival and ability to perform.⁵⁴² Confiding in their families helped men to persevere.

Near the end of the war, James Brown reflected: “To have all the fancies and ambitions of a boy and yet realize that while he may live on his life is lived while he is yet not much over twenty. It is certainly put to those for whom they fought to make life as interesting and pleasant as possible.”⁵⁴³ Brown felt that his masculine purpose had been accomplished. He was not alone. In Calgary men’s letters, hegemonic martial masculine principles were embraced and promoted. These principles remained prominent in men’s letters even as their understanding of warfare evolved. Men wrote about the importance of duty, their enthusiasm to fight, and the physical benefits of military service. They affirmed their willingness to control their emotions and hide their fears. By serving overseas, enduring dangerous conditions, and stoically facing the enemy, men asserted that they were up to the task of performing martial masculinity. As the war progressed and adherence to masculine norms became increasingly tied to national security, men overseas vehemently condemned men who opposed conscription and rejected their duty.

⁵⁴¹ Harold Riley, “Harold Riley Letter to Hattie,” Military Correspondence, March 8, 1918, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 59, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁵⁴² Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 72.

⁵⁴³ James Ernest Brown, “James Ernest Brown Letter to Mother,” Military Correspondence, August 18, 1918, CA ACU GBA F0287-M7410, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

However, the war also stressed masculine ideals. Wartime letters could be therapeutic processes where men lowered their masculine guard and leaned on their families for support. The fear and stress that they displayed are evidence that the experience of war did not simply strengthen martial masculine ideals. Men downplayed the danger they faced and deferred to domestic masculine expectations that pre-dated the twentieth century. Subjective gender identities did not solely align with one definition of masculinity in perpetuity. As historian Alistair Thomson argues, individual “masculine identities are forged and lived in a dynamic tension between the subjective experiences of individual men and shifting social expectations of appropriate masculine behaviour.”⁵⁴⁴ Given the “many-faceted and contradictory” demands of social life, an “absolutely unified and coherent gendered social identity” is an impossibility.⁵⁴⁵ Letters were intimate spaces for men to solicit support from their loved ones. They were also sites of performance where men asserted their newfound militarized identities. In doing so, they denigrated and marginalized men who did not embody masculine virtues and positions. The existence of domestic identities in men’s letters, even as they sought to emphasize their adherence to heroic masculinity overseas, indicates that subjective experiences did not necessarily reflect idealized masculine expectations. No man perfectly embodied hegemonic martial masculinity, despite the fact that many of them were vocal proponents of the importance of duty, bravery, and emotional suppression.

⁵⁴⁴ Alistair Thomson, “A Crisis of Masculinity? Australian Military Manhood in the Great War,” in *Gender and War: Australians at War in the Twentieth Century*, ed. Joy Damousi and Marilyn Lake, Studies in Australian History (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 133.

⁵⁴⁵ Dawson, *Soldier Heroes*, 23.

Chapter Three: “He was absolutely fearless notwithstanding his effeminate ways”: Hegemonic Masculinity in Memoirs

In the foreword to the published version of Harold McGill’s memoir *Medicine and Duty*, Patrick Brennan notes that McGill’s values reflect “what historians have called the culture of manliness and militarism so prevalent in English Canada during the generation before the Great War.”⁵⁴⁶ These “qualities of manhood” included “courage, duty, honour, [and] loyalty” and were “nowhere more clearly manifested than in the life of a soldier risking all not for conquest but the defence of the innocent and the achievement of lasting peace.”⁵⁴⁷ While Brennan is correct that courage, duty, honour, and loyalty are major themes of McGill’s memoir, soldiers in the Great War also used memoirs to discuss issues they were unwilling or unable to raise in their letters home during the war. Memoirs are important sources that can elucidate the degree to which soldiers accepted, rejected, and renegotiated hegemonic masculine ideals to rationalize their own behaviour and the behaviour of those around them. Furthermore, memoirs provided the temporal and spatial distance that allowed men to expand upon their emotions and reactions to war, including fear, stress, shell shock, and disillusionment. Memoirs differed from letters in their lack of connection to the home front. Women are rarely mentioned. According to Jessica Meyer, memoirs present many of the same themes as letters from the front, but men’s emotions are solidified and entrenched by the passage of time. For example, fatalistic resignation present in letters turned into disillusionment in memoirs.⁵⁴⁸ Men who wrote memoirs had time to reflect on what they experienced and process complex traumatic events.⁵⁴⁹ Although memoirs discuss topics that did not align with martial masculine ideals, men did not reject these ideals. Masculine

⁵⁴⁶ Patrick Brennan, “Foreword,” in *Medicine and Duty*, by Harold McGill, viii.

⁵⁴⁷ Brennan, “Foreword,” viii.

⁵⁴⁸ Meyer, *Men of War*, 129.

⁵⁴⁹ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 21.

expectations shaped how men wrote about their wartime experiences. Above all, the memoirs of Great War veterans from Calgary portray a desired and constructed image of their masculine selves. They prized masculine qualities such as enthusiasm, courage, duty, toughness, and physical strength.

Following the Great War, many veterans wrote memoirs. Most were published in two distinct periods – the decade after the conflict as part of the “war books boom” or the 1960s and 1970s, around the 50th anniversary of the war. Memoirs were published as early as 1919 and continue to be posthumously published today. Some memoirs were never intended to be published but exist only to be read by family members and close friends, while others were intended to be read by a public audience.⁵⁵⁰ Soldiers who wrote memoirs wanted to leave a historical record.⁵⁵¹ They engaged in the process to connect their individual lives to the official record of major historical events.⁵⁵²

At their core, memoirs are a personal record. They tell the story of “what happened to *me*.”⁵⁵³ Because they are a personal record of events, they can provide insight into men’s individualized conceptions of masculinity. Writing a memoir is a “process of creating linear stories from disjointed memories.”⁵⁵⁴ It is an attempt by men to make sense of their past and satisfy a need to remember.⁵⁵⁵ While memoirs were a recollection of events, they also served as a form of “auto-therapy” that allowed men to unpack memories.⁵⁵⁶ When compared to more immediate forms of recollection, such as letters and diaries, memoirs are “reflective,

⁵⁵⁰ Meyer, *Men of War*, 128.

⁵⁵¹ Ian Isherwood, *Remembering the Great War: Writing and Publishing the Experiences of World War I*, International Library of Twentieth Century History (London: I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2017), 16 <https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350987777>.

⁵⁵² Samuel Hynes, “The Man Who Was There,” *The Sewanee Review* 103, no. 3 (1995): 397, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/27547056>. Page 397 Samuel Hynes “The Man Who Was There”

⁵⁵³ Hynes, “The Man Who Was There,” 398.

⁵⁵⁴ Isherwood, *Remembering the Great War*, 14.

⁵⁵⁵ Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale*, xiv.

⁵⁵⁶ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 21.

selective, and more self-consciously constructed.”⁵⁵⁷ Because gender identities are performances, memoirs are a medium through which men can perform. They can tell the reader “what it was like, for *this* man, in *his* war.”⁵⁵⁸ As a result, memoirs can be analyzed as a performance of masculinity by reading between the lines of the text to elucidate masculine codes. Whether the events within the memoirs took place exactly as remembered is less important than the emphasis the individual placed on the idea of the events.

Memoirs are not objective records of fact. Samuel Hynes argues that an inherent contradiction of memoirs is apparent in the tension between the writer and the notion of objective truth. Writers often guard their experiences as objective and make “absolute claims for their authority as witnesses.”⁵⁵⁹ They argue that *their* war was the war that most men experienced. For example, Victor Wheeler asserts that his memoir was written in consultation with his “Pitman shorthand notes, made with fidelity in considerable factual and descriptive detail of happenings within hours of their occurrence.”⁵⁶⁰ Memoirs are, however, reproductions of events after the fact. Thus, as Hynes notes, “the man-who-was-there asserts his authority as the only true witness of his war; but the truth that he claims is compromised by the very nature of memory and language.”⁵⁶¹ Despite the most careful efforts, there will always be a gap between what occurred and the author’s recollection of the same events. “At the time I thought it all important to keep a record of casualties and sick, and all my experience of an official nature,” Harold McGill lamented, “but I neglected to jot down notes of many little inconsequential happenings that I would give a good deal to be able to recall now.”⁵⁶² Although he is not from Calgary, Robert Graves’ memoir provides insight into the

⁵⁵⁷ Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale*, xiv.

⁵⁵⁸ Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale*, xiv.

⁵⁵⁹ Hynes, “The Man Who Was There,” 396.

⁵⁶⁰ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 417.

⁵⁶¹ Hynes, “The Man Who Was There,” 411.

⁵⁶² McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 117.

unreliable nature of memory. Graves noted ironically that “the memoirs of a man who went through some of the worst experiences of trench warfare are not truthful if they do not contain a high proportion of falsities.”⁵⁶³ The ability of memoirs to recount a man’s experience at war, with few contradictions or historical inaccuracies, is not perfect even if it is the “closest we can get.”⁵⁶⁴

Taken by themselves, memoirs make for poor works of history. They are “unsatisfactory, restricted, biased, afflicted by emotion and full of errors, lacking the pattern and order that historians can give to their reconstructed war.”⁵⁶⁵ However, they are important documents for determining how men rationalized their war experience, and thus, how they re-interpreted their individualized notions of masculinity to fit their reality overseas. In that sense, memoirs are different from letters that were produced during the war. Memoirs have the temporal distance to allow for the construction of a “coherent narrative.”⁵⁶⁶ The distance “both in time and space” allows them to function as more reflective works that incorporate wartime and post-war experiences in a single narrative.⁵⁶⁷ As a result, memoirs are “generally more reflective about the emotional experience of war than the letter or diary.”⁵⁶⁸

There is no scholarly consensus as to how memoirs differ from letters. Jason Crouthamel’s exploration of German masculinity and sexuality at the front argues that memoirs emphasize estrangement from women and highlight the emotional bonds forged between men. This is the opposite of what Crouthamel finds in the letters from German men during this period.⁵⁶⁹ Alternatively, Jessica Meyer’s study of British masculinity argues that

⁵⁶³ Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory*, 225.

⁵⁶⁴ Hynes, “The Man Who Was There,” 411.

⁵⁶⁵ Hynes, “The Man Who Was There,” 406.

⁵⁶⁶ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 21.

⁵⁶⁷ Meyer, *Men of War*, 159.

⁵⁶⁸ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 21.

⁵⁶⁹ Crouthamel, *An Intimate History of the Front*, 173.

memoirs “bear strong relations to earlier written records of war experiences such as letters,” although their “retrospective nature” shapes their thematic focus.⁵⁷⁰ Meyer finds that within memoirs there was “an intensification of many of the elements of masculine construction seen in other narrative forms.”⁵⁷¹ They discuss courage, pride, and duty in addition to fear, stress, and cowardice, but in more definitive language solidified by the passage of time.

The Great War was a watershed moment in the lives of the men who participated in it. Samuel Hynes notes that “no man goes through a war without being changed by it, and in fundamental ways.”⁵⁷² Jessica Meyer argues that the conflict was “constructed as *the* moment of their lives, their chance to take part in the great adventure.”⁵⁷³ The generation of men who fought the Great War differentiated themselves from subsequent generations.⁵⁷⁴ Those who enlisted right after school or in the middle of an apprenticeship “grew to manhood during the war.”⁵⁷⁵ The terminology they used to refer to the war illustrates its importance. Harvey Daniel Duncan recalled that “the events of ‘The Great Adventure’ were over. As long as life shall last, the memories of the First World War will ever be indelibly printed on my memory.”⁵⁷⁶ Donald Fraser also referred to the conflict as “the Great Adventure” in his memoir.⁵⁷⁷ The experience of war was a trigger for the formation of a generational consciousness.⁵⁷⁸ Victor Wheeler wrote that “only men who have shared the long march together as we have can understand the common mortality which is brotherhood.”⁵⁷⁹ He

⁵⁷⁰ Meyer, *Men of War*, 129.

⁵⁷¹ Meyer, *Men of War*, 159.

⁵⁷² Hynes, *A Soldier's Tale*, 3.

⁵⁷³ Meyer, *Men of War*, 138.

⁵⁷⁴ Cynthia R. Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of a Modern Canada, 1920-1950*, Studies in Childhood and Family in Canada (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 8.

⁵⁷⁵ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 12.

⁵⁷⁶ Bagley and Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage*, 157.

⁵⁷⁷ Donald Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser: 1914-1918 Canadian Expeditionary Force*, ed. Reginald Roy (Nepean: CEF Books, 1998), 145.

⁵⁷⁸ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 8.

⁵⁷⁹ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 405.

lamented the “sad and stark reality that after living and fighting to live, amid scenes of destruction, a soldier’s field of vision could never quite dissociate itself from the fear and horror and devastation in which he had played such a personal part.”⁵⁸⁰ His observation of change was both personal and in reference to the men around him. Wheeler considered himself a fundamentally different person because of the war.

This chapter draws mainly, but not entirely, on the memoirs of three Calgary soldiers. Their memoirs appear more often than the others that were analyzed for this chapter, because they are published works. Thus, they are much longer and provide a far greater quantity of material. The men who wrote these memoirs were British or Canadian born, lower to upper middle class, and emigrated to Calgary between 1910 and 1914 during the city’s boom.

Harold McGill was born and raised in Minnedosa, Manitoba, to parents who had emigrated from Ontario.⁵⁸¹ In 1910, after graduating from university in the United States, he moved to Calgary and opened his own doctor’s practice.⁵⁸² Although he was a newcomer to the city, McGill became involved in Calgary’s social life as expected by a man of his class and profession. In 1913, he joined the 103rd Calgary Rifles Militia unit as a lieutenant, a position he still held at the outbreak of war.⁵⁸³ McGill was “earnest” and “disciplined,” as Patrick Brennan described him, “a textbook product of his times.”⁵⁸⁴

Victor Wheeler emigrated to Calgary from Wolverhampton, England, in 1912 at the age of seventeen to become a rancher.⁵⁸⁵ Perhaps due to his weak heart and bad back, he was unable to realize that goal. Like many immigrants to the west from cities in England, the dream of frontier living and the reality that they encountered were different things. When he

⁵⁸⁰ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 387.

⁵⁸¹ Marjorie Norris, “Editor’s Introduction,” in *Medicine and Duty* by Harold McGill, xviii.

⁵⁸² Norris, “Editor’s Introduction,” xx.

⁵⁸³ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 8.

⁵⁸⁴ Brennan, “Foreword,” viii.

⁵⁸⁵ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 424.

enlisted in 1915, Wheeler was working as a stenographer, a job which gave him a good technical background for the signalling position he soon undertook overseas.⁵⁸⁶ Nevertheless, Victor Wheeler was also “very much a man of his time and his province” who feared God and embraced endurance and emotional control as the highest form of heroism.⁵⁸⁷

Donald Fraser emigrated to Canada in 1906 from his birthplace in Edinburgh, Scotland. Fraser was raised in an upper-middle-class family that valued education. After emigrating, he briefly worked as a farm labourer in Manitoba as he made his way west before he landed a job at Merchant’s Bank in Calgary, working as a clerk. Fraser did not stay for long. In 1911 he moved to Vancouver to work as a clerk at the Royal Trust Company, but he returned to Calgary to enlist.⁵⁸⁸ Fraser was described as quiet and reserved.⁵⁸⁹ Physically, he was an imposing six feet tall with an athletic build.⁵⁹⁰

These three men are typical of the many Calgary men who served during the Great War. They emigrated to the city shortly before the war from other provinces in Canada, or other countries in the British Empire. They represent a range of education levels. Fraser came from the most affluent background of the three, but McGill had the highest social standing at the outbreak of war. All three men were middle class. As was common amongst men in Calgary at the time, they all had some associations with the mythopoeic masculinity of the western frontier. They were all described as men typical of the era in which they lived.

Great War memoirs function as sources in which men were able to construct a ‘coherent narrative’ of their time in uniform which makes them invaluable for discussing

⁵⁸⁶ Library and Archives Canada, “Victor Wheeler Attestation Paper,” January 20, 1918, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 10270 - 21, First World War Personnel Files, 1. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=pffww&IdNumber=310752>.

⁵⁸⁷ Ernest Watkins, “Preface,” in *The 50th Battalion* by Victor Wheeler, 9.

⁵⁸⁸ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 11-12.

⁵⁸⁹ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 51.

⁵⁹⁰ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 11.

masculinity. Although their memoirs may not be entirely accurate, they are important for determining how the war impacted masculinity. Men reconstituted and renegotiated masculine ideals to reflect their lived reality of warfare. Samuel Hynes argues that while memoirs discuss “the Military Virtues, the Big Soldierly Words like Courage and Cowardice,” their meanings shift and change, and an author’s own story is rarely one of “heroic courage; it is about the other kind, endurance.”⁵⁹¹ Men wrote at length about the courage, heroism, cowardice, and fear displayed by other men, but very little about these qualities in themselves. The definitions of words like courage and fear changed to accommodate the behaviour that was necessary in the face of intense artillery bombardment in a war of limited movement. Courage was exhibited by enduring rather than by acting. Fear was an emotion that everyone felt and had to be confronted, rather than a defining feature of cowardice. But memoirs also reflect similar themes as presented by letters in more clearly defined terms. There is no clear distinction between how veterans remembered masculinity and their wartime conceptions of masculinity. The hegemonic masculine ideals that men strove to emulate in their letters home are reflected in their memoirs. In their endorsement of martial masculinity, men of the Great War demonstrated that the “heroic ideal” survived the events of the war. However, it did not survive unchanged. Hegemonic masculinity was redefined to emphasize behaviour specific to the war like endurance in the front line and courage under shellfire, while retaining traditional elements such as duty, physical strength, and enthusiasm.⁵⁹²

Memoirs describe the beginning of military service as a time of enthusiasm and excitement, similar to the newspaper coverage of battalion departure parades. At the outbreak

⁵⁹¹ Hynes, “The Man Who Was There,” 408.

⁵⁹² Isherwood, *Remembering the Great War*, 139.

of hostilities, Harold McGill recalled that the only thought he and his friends had was how to “get into the struggle in some capacity at the earliest possible moment.”⁵⁹³ When the 31st Battalion received orders on 10 May 1915 to leave Calgary, McGill called it “the news we had so long expected and eagerly awaited.”⁵⁹⁴ As the 137th Battalion prepared to leave Calgary in the summer of 1916, Harvey Duncan remembered the jubilant energy that characterized the atmosphere in Calgary: “On Eighth Avenue and over the country, recruiting offices were operating at full strength. White feathers were being handed out to eligible bachelors! Young recruits swaggered around the streets and bars. Many recruits were getting restless and eager to get overseas!”⁵⁹⁵ Duncan’s memoir is particularly nostalgic. He recalled the group he enlisted with as a “motley and cosmopolitan crowd. Labourers, farmers, office workers, men and boys from all walks of life, with little or no military training, all bent on ‘adventure’ and a chance to do ‘their bit’ for King and Country!”⁵⁹⁶ A similar atmosphere existed amongst men making the trip from England to France. Upon receiving word that the 31st Battalion was leaving England, Donald Fraser wrote that “the camp was all excitement. At last we were to witness real fighting. It was almost too good to be true. Everyone was pleased at the idea though a bit dubious of the outcome.”⁵⁹⁷ Memoirs recall enthusiasm to be in the military and on the way to join the fight.

Veterans described enlisting as a masculine duty, rather than a decision made of necessity. This is a claim that has been scrutinized by historians. Desmond Morton and John Herd Thompson cite unemployment as a factor that increased enlistment rates.⁵⁹⁸ Unemployed men needed jobs and the army needed men. This reasoning is rejected in

⁵⁹³ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 8.

⁵⁹⁴ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 43.

⁵⁹⁵ Bagley and Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage*, 81.

⁵⁹⁶ Bagley and Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage*, 79.

⁵⁹⁷ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 23.

⁵⁹⁸ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 13. And Thompson, *The Harvests of War*, 24.

memoirs. The unemployment argument belies the idea that men willingly answered the call of ‘King and Country’ to uphold their duty. This was a cornerstone of martial masculinity: men were expected to enthusiastically and readily answer the call to defend the Empire. The notion that the army was made up of masses of unemployed vagrants was antithetical to men who celebrated martial masculinity and favoured Canada’s role as a loyal Dominion of the British Empire. Harold McGill, who medically examined recruits for the 31st Battalion in November 1914, argued that there were “hundreds of men waiting to be examined and attest, most of them well dressed and many wearing expensive fur-lined overcoats.”⁵⁹⁹ Although the unemployment rate was high in Calgary, McGill claimed to have personally investigated the men’s employment history when they came to be medically inspected.⁶⁰⁰ Of the 240 recruits he examined on the first day, only 28 provided a history of unemployment. McGill argued that those who claimed that unemployment increased enlistment were “men who for reasons best known to themselves had no thought of encountering the discomforts and hazards of war, and who chose for their own excuse the vilification of men better and braver than themselves.”⁶⁰¹

McGill also argued that men felt a sense of duty because it was their ‘natural’ male response to conflict. While others referenced higher ideals such as preserving civilization, democracy, and freedom, McGill claimed that the reason men enlisted was quite simple:

We have heard a lot since of our boys going to war to end war for all time to come. Personally I was never actuated by any such abstract idea, and I doubt very much if the idea ever occurred to a single one of the thousands who enlisted during the early months of the war. It seems to me that men went to war for the same instinctive reason that would induce them to grab

⁵⁹⁹ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 16.

⁶⁰⁰ A Calgary Herald Article from October 17th 1914 reported that 80% of all the building trades were out of work, and the civic labour bureau had reported nearly 3,300 men seeking jobs that did not exist in Calgary. “Trades and Labor Meeting Discusses Winter Problems,” *The Calgary Herald*, (October 17th, 1914) 20. Newspapers.com

⁶⁰¹ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 16-17.

a club if attacked by a savage animal, or to pick up a bucket of water or hose if fire broke out in the house.⁶⁰²

McGill viewed his decision to enlist as the natural male response to war. He strongly doubted “that a single soldier ever enlisted” with the motive of ending war as a means of conflict resolution.⁶⁰³ McGill adhered to hegemonic codes of masculinity and viewed military service as his male duty.

Enlisting entitled men to the social benefits of martial masculinity, including increased attention from women and respect from men. A uniform conferred feminine approval. By “putting on a uniform, men obtained greater possibilities of sexual experimentation.”⁶⁰⁴ After the 137th Battalion landed in England, Harvey Duncan visited a friend’s family in Eastbourne where he “received a fine welcome from the mother and three teen-aged daughters. The latter really looked us over! They admired our Canadian uniforms.”⁶⁰⁵ Harvey recalled another incident at a dance in England where “the English girls were quite vivacious and friendly and we had a good time.”⁶⁰⁶ Harold McGill recalled that when their train had stopped at Fort William, Ontario:

... a bevy of girls went along the train gathering the names of boys so that they might write to them, all of which was very complimentary and gratifying to the troops. In no single instance at any of these stops did I see anything objectionable in the conduct of a single one of our men, nor did I ever hear an offensive expression used in conversation with those gathered at the various stations. Major Stewart remarked to me that nothing on the long trip gave him more pleasure and satisfaction than this gentlemanly behaviour on the part of all on board.⁶⁰⁷

McGill’s account reflects the increased attention that soldiers received from women but also the concerns of officers regarding the conduct of the men in their charge. McGill praised the

⁶⁰² McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 9.

⁶⁰³ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 10.

⁶⁰⁴ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 156.

⁶⁰⁵ Bagley and Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage*, 95.

⁶⁰⁶ Bagley and Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage*, 98.

⁶⁰⁷ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 47.

men's self-discipline and restraint, both of which were "quintessential middle-class male traits."⁶⁰⁸

Men also received respect and even admiration from other men for their service overseas. John Tosh argues that "peer approval" plays a "central role" in the process of "confirming masculine status."⁶⁰⁹ McGill remembered seeing combat veterans from the 1st Division in England: "Needless to say we looked upon these favoured individuals with great awe and respect."⁶¹⁰ Men of the 1st Division, at least initially, were accepted during the first months of the war when sergeants and doctors had the luxury of choosing the most physically capable and militarily experienced.⁶¹¹ This elevated their masculine status. Victor Wheeler remembered his brothers' military service fondly. He recalled that seeing his brother "in the King's uniform gave me a deep sense of personal pride."⁶¹² Victor had four brothers in the army.

Memoirs, as with letters, emphasized the importance of serving at the front as a requirement of being a man. Enduring the trenches was a "painful rite of passage" and an indication of masculine prowess.⁶¹³ McGill admirably remembered Lieutenant Richards, who was offered additional training courses to keep him out of the line: "I always thought he resented this little indication of favour. He was too keen a soldier to desire "Bomb-Proof" duty, and always returned to his unit as soon as possible."⁶¹⁴ Donald Fraser recalled a man

⁶⁰⁸ David Ulbrich and Bobby A. Wintermute, *Race and Gender in Modern Western Warfare* (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2018), 104. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110477467>.

⁶⁰⁹ Tosh, *Manliness and Masculinities*, 71. An example of the importance of masculine approval from the memoirs is on Page 33 of the *Journal of Donald Fraser* when Fraser recalls a man who "had worked himself into a fever heat with rage with, I expect, the idea of impressing me with his fighting importance."

⁶¹⁰ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 68.

⁶¹¹ Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 24.

⁶¹² Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 36.

⁶¹³ Isherwood, *Remembering the Great War*, 67.

⁶¹⁴ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 187.

with the last name “Clyne” who, despite his advanced age of 56, stood “six feet in height and erect as a conifer.”⁶¹⁵

To think that a man of his years was here in the front line trench is enough to make the blood of any righteous man boil with indignation; when over in Canada unashamed were men 22 to 28 years of age, single, without any family ties, in the pink of health, arrant cowards, afraid to match themselves against the Hun.⁶¹⁶

Fraser believed that young, physically fit men had a masculine duty to serve in the trenches. Men in uniform but in non-combatant roles felt ashamed for shirking this duty. McGill recalled the story of a wounded cobbler from the 2nd Pioneers Battalion who was shot while volunteering for a working party. The cobbler told McGill that the reason he volunteered was because “he felt like a slacker sitting back driving pegs into boots while his comrades were exposed to death and wounds.”⁶¹⁷ McGill described the man as having a “small body but a heart as big as a lion’s” and he wrote admirably about his devotion to duty.⁶¹⁸ Duty was a fundamental reason for enlisting and essential to remain in the trenches. It encouraged men to take risks, even with their own lives.

Front-line service garnered, and required, toughness. It was an inherent requirement to survive the war. On the eve of the 137th Battalion’s departure from Calgary, Harvey Duncan recalled that although they were somewhat subdued and saddened at the thought of leaving their homes, “these lads were learning to be tough. This was the Army!”⁶¹⁹ Men recalled instances in which they were toughened up by their wartime experience. Training, work parties, and combat were all arenas that tested men’s fortitude. McGill described training at barracks in Calgary as “not devoid of interest and pleasure; and this despite, or

⁶¹⁵ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 54.

⁶¹⁶ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 117.

⁶¹⁷ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 165.

⁶¹⁸ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 165.

⁶¹⁹ Bagley and Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage*, 84.

possibly because of, long hours and hard work.”⁶²⁰ Duncan recalled that “the work parties were tiresome, but actually I felt well and strong. It was a hardy life.”⁶²¹ Men were pushed to their physical limits, but many remembered the experience as one of positive growth. While the physical rigour of training and working parties tested men, front-line service was the greatest test of masculinity.⁶²² After witnessing a new officer break down under fire, Donald Fraser wrote that it was “strange when realities are encountered how very, very often, the man who feels strong and reliant is the common soldier.”⁶²³ Similarly, Victor Wheeler argued that “where a man discovers his real self” was on duty in a listening post in No Man’s Land.⁶²⁴ Combat was identified in memoirs as an event that forced men to become ‘strong and reliant’ and reveal their ‘true’ nature as part of a process of becoming ‘real’ men.

Toughness, however, came at great expense to a man’s health and safety. Soldiers were injured at an astounding rate. Out of the 470,224 men who served overseas in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 154,361 of them were injured.⁶²⁵ Joanna Bourke argues that the male body “was intended to be mutilated” by combat conditions in the Great War.⁶²⁶ Wounds could result in amputations, disfigurement, and a lifetime of lost income, however the right injury was a permanent marker of masculinity. In peacetime, it was a “manly accomplishment” to possess evidence of injury.⁶²⁷ In wartime, injuries could also be a visual indicator of toughness, physical proof that one exhibited martial masculinity. Victor Wheeler suffered a shrapnel injury to his face during the fighting for Hill 70.⁶²⁸ After it was removed

⁶²⁰ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 29.

⁶²¹ Bagley and Duncan, *A Legacy of Courage*, 127.

⁶²² Joanna Bourke, “Gender Roles in Killing Zones,” in *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume 3: Civil Society*, ed. Jay Winter, vol. 3, The Cambridge History of the First World War (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 167, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHO9780511675683.010>.

⁶²³ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 181.

⁶²⁴ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 88.

⁶²⁵ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 278 and 181.

⁶²⁶ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 31.

⁶²⁷ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 37.

⁶²⁸ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 195.

in the hospital, he wrote: “I felt I had been robbed of the principal evidence that I was a fighter as well as a Signaller.”⁶²⁹ Wheeler compared his injury to the famous duelling scars worn by the Prussian military elite: “I felt as proud of my scarred face as a young Prussian officer whose rapier scar of honour admitted him into the coveted elite inner-circle of fellow officers of his regiment.”⁶³⁰ Wheeler wore his injury with pride, as physical evidence that he was a ‘fighter’ and not ‘just’ a signaller.

Men emphasized the occasions where they persevered through injuries to stay in the line or support comrades. These recollections differed from men’s letters during the war because, in memoirs, men no longer felt pressure to hide injuries from their loved ones. After a near shell burst left him deaf in one ear, Arthur Turner endured weeks of discomfort before seeking medical treatment. After being discharged, he recalled: “I hadn’t gone a half mile from the Hospital before I was deaf again. I didn’t know what to do, I felt sheepish about going back to the Hospital so [I] continued on to Battalion.”⁶³¹ Although he was still injured, Turner was embarrassed to seek additional treatment. On another occasion, he refused to go on sick parade while suffering from dysentery until he collapsed.⁶³² Men took pride in their ability to withstand pain. After suffering a shrapnel wound, John Copeland claimed that he had breakfast before reporting “at Battalion HQ where Capt. Petrie, the medical officer, ordered me back to hospital much against my will. However, the Colonel backed him up and that settled it.”⁶³³ Upon receiving shrapnel injuries to his shoulder and arm at the Battle of Passchendaele, Donald Fraser recalled he “started down the road feeling as strong as an ox

⁶²⁹ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 201.

⁶³⁰ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 202.

⁶³¹ Arthur Turner, “My Experiences with the ‘Lord Strathcona Horse’ (R.C.) (Cavalry) 1914 to 1917 and with 50th Batt’n Infantry 1917-1919,” n.d., CA ACU GBA F1821-S0001-M1255-3, Glenbow Western Research Centre, 18.

⁶³² Turner, “My Experiences,” 21.

⁶³³ John Copeland, “Diary of Lieutenant John B. Copeland 31st Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force, in World War I,” 1929, CA ACU GBA F3065-M8330, Glenbow Western Research Centre, 22.

not even the least bit sickened.” Fraser’s account of his endurance in the face of injury includes a reference to his lengthy service at the front. According to his memoir, when he made it back to the dressing station the medical officer exclaimed, “good God, Fraser, are you still around the line?”⁶³⁴

Men praised their comrades for demonstrating the ability to withstand physical pain. They had a gendered expectation to act stoically and control their emotional response to injury.⁶³⁵ John Copeland remembers that a wounded private defiantly shouting, “I’ll soon be back again to the Thirty-First!” was a “characteristic” incident at the temporary dressing station.⁶³⁶ Donald Fraser recalled the endurance of a friend:

Musgrave had his foot badly injured, his heel being almost blown off. With the aid of silver supports, he made a splendid recovery. Like many of our finest soldiers, he could not stand the red tape and humiliation at the base, and managed, though palpably unfit, to get drafted to France. At Lens he received his quietus; he was a volunteer of the finest calibre.⁶³⁷

Fraser emphasized his comrade’s ability to persevere through his injury and return to the front, even though he was “palpably unfit.” Before the Battle of Vimy Ridge, McGill was determining which men should remain in reserve to remake the battalion in the event of its decimation on the battlefield. He remembered a man he had designated as unfit for front-line duty but who “begged me as a special favour to bind him up securely with bandages so that he might go over the top in the morning, before being sent back to the base.”⁶³⁸

As the 31st Battalion’s medical officer, McGill was a witness to the lengths men would go to in order to stay in the line:

I have often marvelled at the fortitude shown by the men in their refraining from going sick on the eve of a battle. They fully realized the horrors that were close at hand; but many, feeling not in the best of health, would go

⁶³⁴ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 315.

⁶³⁵ Bourke, “Gender Roles in Killing Zones,” 169.

⁶³⁶ Copeland, “Diary of Lieutenant John B. Copeland,” 13.

⁶³⁷ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 118.

⁶³⁸ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 265.

into action with a temperature rather than have their pals think that they were trying to dodge danger.⁶³⁹

McGill illustrates the homosocial aspect of masculinity by praising men for exhibiting toughness and enthusiasm for combat. He recognized that a primary motivator behind this behaviour was a desire to appear masculine in the eyes of their comrades. However, there were instances where it was acceptable to use pain or sickness as an excuse to not perform their duties and still align with masculine codes of conduct. For example, McGill notes that it was common for men to call in sick for working parties.⁶⁴⁰ Activities that were central to the heroic ideal like fighting, protecting comrades, or defending front-line trenches had to be endured. Difficult manual labour such as repairing trenches and resupplying front-line units was not an aspect of the war that was considered exciting or heroic.⁶⁴¹ The masculine ideal, while it was predicated on military service, paradoxically did not include all aspects of being a soldier. Tedious work that was viewed as superfluous to the task of winning the war could be shirked without a requisite loss in masculine status. In the all-male front-line trenches, homosocial praise and recognition were important factors for an activity to fit into the masculine ideal.

Toughness and front-line service were essential aspects of the masculine identities that men performed in their memoirs. But there were more visible indicators of manliness. Physical strength and size were indicators of masculinity and warrior status and were highlighted in memoirs. Physical strength, however, was redefined through men's experience with warfare. Despite the war's obvious threat to physical wellbeing, memoirs noted "a retrospective source of pride" in improved physical fitness.⁶⁴² Being a soldier was a

⁶³⁹ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 221.

⁶⁴⁰ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 221.

⁶⁴¹ Meyer, *Men of War*, 28.

⁶⁴² Meyer, *Men of War*, 148-149.

physically taxing profession. Route marches, a mainstay in the life of an infantryman, were conducted at a pace of 120 steps a minute, or three miles every 50 minutes, with a ten-minute rest every hour.⁶⁴³ Victor Wheeler remembered the difficulties of route marches: “If war is hell, prolonged uninterrupted marching with fifty-five pounds of dead-weight equipment hanging from the hips and shoulders, chest and back was the unmitigated torment of purgatory, and required the stuff that tested the physical and nerve stamina of the best of ‘em.”⁶⁴⁴ But later, Wheeler remembered the physical challenges presented by route marches with a sense of fondness and pride. He recalled: “Men’s magnificent behaviour under great physical and mental strain when on extraordinarily difficult marches was one of the indelible sagas of the War.”⁶⁴⁵ Watching his comrades physically persevere made him “proud to be a Canadian.”⁶⁴⁶ Wheeler attributed their success to the rigour of military training: “There were surprisingly few fall outs... Colonel Mason had trained us the hard way at Sarcee (Calgary) and at Bramshott (Hampshire, England), and regimental pride kept us slogging along.”⁶⁴⁷ Although the physically taxing aspect of the army was bemoaned, men also portrayed it as a struggle that gave them a sense of accomplishment. As Meyer points out that “those who were not killed or permanently injured found that the experience of warfare could make them physically stronger.”⁶⁴⁸

Physically impressive men were admired examples of masculinity. Memoirs did not deviate from the physical masculine ideal laid out in newspapers and wartime letters. John Copeland wrote that his comrade “Kingsley Jull, real man that he was, carried my pack for

⁶⁴³ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 81.

⁶⁴⁴ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 73.

⁶⁴⁵ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 306.

⁶⁴⁶ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 73.

⁶⁴⁷ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 28.

⁶⁴⁸ Meyer, *Men of War*, 149.

me as well as his own,” on a challenging route march.⁶⁴⁹ While the majority of men may have “stoically plodded along,” Wheeler praised the few that “magnificently shouldered their weaker buddy’s load.”⁶⁵⁰ Fraser described a battalion of Grenadier Guards as “undoubtedly the finest body of men I had ever seen and they carried themselves magnificently. Splendidly built men, everyone of them – erect and broad shouldered with finely cut features. They commanded my admiration. A Corporal, several inches over six feet, was following in the rear.”⁶⁵¹ Fraser’s admiration of the Grenadiers highlighted physical features that were considered desirable. Ideal men were tall and broad, with defined facial features and good posture. In contrast, Fraser’s description of German prisoners emphasized their lack of physical masculinity. While he noted that the officers “were of a good physique and intelligent... the rank and file were nothing special.”⁶⁵² The majority of the men were “meek and cringing” and thus did not warrant respect: “Big MacNair, who was beside me, was scrutinizing them closely and finally in disgust remarked, he would take on twenty of them himself. Anyway we felt that we need not be afraid of them in a rough and tumble bayonet scrap.”⁶⁵³ In Fraser’s depiction of the German prisoners, he emphasized their lack of physique and intelligence, criticized them for appearing weak, and expressed his belief that, along with his ‘Big’ counterpart, they would be able to beat the Germans physically in hand-to-hand combat. By criticizing the Germans’ physical features, they were cast as unmasculine, which was the harshest insult.

Poor physical masculinity was thought to indicate a lack of masculine qualities like courage or enthusiasm to fight. Donald Fraser was particularly critical of a member of his

⁶⁴⁹ Copeland, “The Diary of Lieutenant John B. Copeland,” 24.

⁶⁵⁰ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 277.

⁶⁵¹ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 140.

⁶⁵² Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 109.

⁶⁵³ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 109-110.

company, a man he called Skinner, who was “a little Englishman, a useless sort of fellow.” Donald Fraser mocked Skinner’s physicality, labelling him as the “smallest man in the company” and including a story in which the men carried his “bulky form of ninety pounds” amidst “much laughter” to the doctor when Skinner complained about his knees. Fraser’s main criticism, however, was that Skinner was unwilling to remain in the line and perform his duty: “The line did not appeal very strongly to him [Skinner] so he lost no opportunity in endeavouring to develop trouble.” The man garnered no sympathy because “his weakness of heart was very apparent.” Fraser’s reference to Skinner’s heart is not about his actual heart; it is about his lack of courage and bravery. He was “sent back to the base and ultimately to Blighty to swell Canada’s mighty army of misfits.”⁶⁵⁴

Although Fraser reinforced his own masculinity with his criticism of Skinner’s physique, his memoir reveals how the war impacted his subjective perception of the male body:

In peace time, we draw our conclusions of fighting men from their physique and smartness when on the move. We find this is a poor criterion in war time. The best fighter of today may be summed up in the words “fearlessness” and “grit,” two qualities that every husky [man] has not got and qualities that sometimes the weakest, the softest and apparently the most effeminate have. Time and again under trying conditions I have seen great, big, strong, noisy fellows absolutely appalled and dispirited with scarcely a sparkle of life in them and next to them little insignificant runts quite unconcerned and ready to give a good account of themselves.⁶⁵⁵

Fraser’s point is clear: physical masculine traits like strength and size did not correlate with masculine behaviour in combat. His wartime experience proved it. But, that did not make big men effeminate and small men masculine. Fraser still refers to small men “ready to give a good account of themselves” as “little insignificant runts.”⁶⁵⁶ He did not reject masculine

⁶⁵⁴ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 94.

⁶⁵⁵ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 39.

⁶⁵⁶ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 39.

norms but rather renegotiated them to fit his lived experience. In this example, Fraser believed that ideal physical masculine traits did not make men behave bravely and courageously, but that did not change his perception of the ideal physical male body.

The body was just one site where masculinity was performed. More abstract concepts like bravery and courage were central to the masculine ideal.⁶⁵⁷ Exhibiting these traits earned men the admiration of others, even if they failed to live up to other physical masculine standards. In Donald Fraser's memoir, effeminate traits included weakness, pickiness, and idleness. Fraser recalled the arrival of "Lieutenant Robinson" to the 31st Battalion:

At first he was looked upon with amusement, being very particular about his food. He remarked in my presence one night to Lt. Pouncey, in a very effeminate manner, that he had only one cup of tea, he always had two cups of tea, and he must, he must have his tea. We thought him a regular Johnnie. But before many months had passed the men thought the world of him. He was absolutely fearless notwithstanding his effeminate ways. This is a war in which blood counts, not bone; nerve is the test and not strength."⁶⁵⁸

Fraser emphasized that men could overcome their 'feminine' appearance by exhibiting "fearlessness" and doing "daring" work. He wrote about another example of a "dude officer, an out and out "haw haw" Englishman. You would think he had not the strength or grit of a fly, nevertheless this officer would tackle any dangerous work, was about the most daring man they had."⁶⁵⁹ Acting bravely aligned men with masculine expectations and put accusations or suspicions of feminine behaviour to rest. Bravery and courage were deemed inherently masculine traits that could be exhibited "even" by men who might not outwardly appear masculine.

⁶⁵⁷ Hutečka, *Men under Fire*, 8.

⁶⁵⁸ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 81.

⁶⁵⁹ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 81.

Men respected soldiers who demonstrated bravery during artillery bombardments. Arthur Turner recalled that his adjutant “had absolutely no fear of shell fire... he never even ducked.”⁶⁶⁰ John Copeland ironically described his first night in the line as an experience marked by artillery and a gas attack: “A pleasant time was had!”⁶⁶¹ Copeland’s main memory, however, was “the terrible strain of it all and further the real courage displayed by Corporal Black, who in a severe bombardment kept guard himself upstairs.”⁶⁶² Black was admired for his courage to remain above ground despite the ‘terrible strain’ of sustained shellfire, thereby affording the rest of his section the chance to stay relatively safe underground. Harold McGill recalled treating a man in the trenches for a broken collar bone:

The man was hysterical, and believed himself deaf and unable to hear what was said to him. Nevertheless he could hear the scream of an approaching shell, and as each one came down it was pitiable to watch his agitation and distress. He seemed to be trying to crawl in between the sandbags. He was a brave soldier too, but it must be a harrowing experience indeed to lie helpless in a trench with shells bursting in all directions. The unwounded went about their business as though nothing out of the way was going on.⁶⁶³

The use of the word ‘hysterical’ is significant because hysteria was considered an “emotional affliction” experienced by women.⁶⁶⁴ Although McGill acknowledged the breakdown of an otherwise ‘brave’ soldier, he also highlighted the behaviour of the other men. He described the ‘unwounded’ as going about their business as usual, suggesting they were unaffected by both the shellfire and the distress of their wounded comrade.

Men who served in roles other than as front-line soldiers sought to demonstrate that their own jobs also required bravery.⁶⁶⁵ Fred Smithers served as a stretcher bearer with the 8th

⁶⁶⁰ Turner, “My Experiences,” 5.

⁶⁶¹ Copeland, “Diary of Lieutenant John B. Copeland,” 10.

⁶⁶² Copeland, “Diary of Lieutenant John B. Copeland,” 10.

⁶⁶³ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 111.

⁶⁶⁴ Mark Osborne Humphries, *A Weary Road: Shell Shock in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2018), 16. <https://doi.org/10.3138/9781442661400>.

⁶⁶⁵ Bourke, “Gender Roles in Killing Zones,” 167.

Canadian Field Ambulance overseas.⁶⁶⁶ He recalled with pride his unit's actions at the Battle of Vimy Ridge, specifically their willingness to move into the newly established no-man's land even to gather wounded Germans.⁶⁶⁷ He took note of Major General L.J. Lipsett's commendation of the 8th Field Ambulance at the Battle of Passchendaele. Lipsett told the ambulance in a speech that "the men behind the lines had to be possessed of as much courage and endurance as the men who went over the top."⁶⁶⁸ Smithers took care to note his own bravery in the field, as well as the official recognition of that bravery from others. Stretcher bearers were widely recognized as demonstrating inordinate courage. Victor Wheeler noted that "the men with the white band and Red Cross sewn on their arms were among the bravest and most selfless men in the Canadian Expeditionary Force."⁶⁶⁹

Although he recognized and praised the bravery of stretcher bearers, Victor Wheeler sought to highlight his own bravery as both a fighter and signaller. As a stenographer before the war, Wheeler was suited to his position in the 50th Battalion. Signallers were responsible for maintaining communications between groups of soldiers, to ensure that orders could be sent to the front and back.⁶⁷⁰ Wheeler described signalling as a job requiring "nerves steeled against constant peril coupled with technical skills and exceptional courage," indicating the degree to which he felt the job aligned with masculine standards.⁶⁷¹ When taking Wheeler's entire war service into account, however, it is less clear that he was comfortable with his role as a signaller. As previously noted, he expressed dismay when his shrapnel wound was

⁶⁶⁶ Library and Archives Canada, "Fred Smithers Casualty Form Active Service," n.d., RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9127 - 35, First World War Personnel Files, 35. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=pffww&IdNumber=240293>.

⁶⁶⁷ Fred Smithers, "The 8th Field Ambulance," n.d., CA ACU GBA F3106-M9577, Glenbow Western Research Centre, 12.

⁶⁶⁸ Smithers, "The 8th Field Ambulance," 17.

⁶⁶⁹ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 160.

⁶⁷⁰ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 31.

⁶⁷¹ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 40.

healed, robbing him of evidence that he was a soldier in addition to a signaller.⁶⁷²

Furthermore, Wheeler recalled his “uninhibited relish and enthusiasm” for bayonet training: “Plunging cool steel into helpless straw dummies, and pulling the knife out with such violence as to warm the face of the raw blade gave me a weird satisfaction.”⁶⁷³ Wheeler highlighted that being a signaller aligned with masculine expectations of bravery. However, the fact that he emphasized his enjoyment of physical violence and lamented the loss of his injury suggests that he might not have been entirely comfortable with the implications of signalling for his masculine image. Wheeler went to great lengths to stress the ways in which his military service was similar to men in combat positions.

Although men highlighted the bravery of themselves and those around them, the best and bravest men in memoirs were those who died in combat. In *Death So Noble*, Jonathan Vance argues that many Canadians believed that if death was imminent, then “death in battle was by far the best.” Soldiers and civilians described death in battle as a sacrifice rather than a loss or tragedy.⁶⁷⁴ During the Great War, “the mere fact of dying was ennobling.”⁶⁷⁵ In memoirs, the dead were identified as the ‘best’ men. They were brave individuals who sacrificed their lives in pursuit of the greater good. McGill lamented that “the most cruel and depressing thing about war is the way it seems to pick the bravest and best for sacrifice.”⁶⁷⁶ Fraser referred to the blood-soaked ground around Ypres as an area where Canada’s “best manhood” had fallen.⁶⁷⁷ In death, men attained immortal status as martial masculine men. At the battle of St. Eloi, Fraser recalled his dying comrade’s request to “tell his parents that he

⁶⁷² Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 201.

⁶⁷³ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 214.

⁶⁷⁴ Vance, *Death so Noble*, 50.

⁶⁷⁵ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 248.

⁶⁷⁶ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 185.

⁶⁷⁷ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 144.

had died like a soldier.”⁶⁷⁸ At Vimy Ridge, Wheeler recalled that his Lieutenant died, but noted that “he fell forward, facing the enemy.”⁶⁷⁹ Recognition of the bravery of the fallen was a particular emphasis of Wheeler’s memoir. He described a situation where six runners were killed, one after another, while crossing an open field bracketed by artillery as an “epic action” undertaken by “some of Canada’s finest sons, written in blood and memorialized by little white wooden crosses.”⁶⁸⁰ Even though the writers witnessed the horrors of battle, they identified the dead as courageous individuals who had sacrificed their lives representing the best type of man Canada could offer.

Another theme in the memoirs was a sense of pride in service, particularly on the front lines. In Ilana Bet-El’s chapter on British conscripts and masculinity, she argues that the volunteer attained heroic masculine status simply by enlisting, “regardless of any subsequent military performance in the army.”⁶⁸¹ While that may have been true in a civilian context, it was not so simple. Memoirs indicate that suffering, particularly in dangerous situations on the front lines, was crucial to individual constructions of heroic masculinity.⁶⁸² Pride in front-line service was defined in masculine terms. Men indicated their ability to endure as proof of their martial masculinity.⁶⁸³ Those who could not endure combat and did their best to avoid the line were ridiculed. Fraser recalled that “several of our most enthusiastic members for things military whilst in Canada and England changed completely and before many trips were spent in the line, they were busy looking around for safety first jobs or trying their hardest to become sick or unfit so as to be removed from the fighting area.”⁶⁸⁴ Fraser was

⁶⁷⁸ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 117.

⁶⁷⁹ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 133.

⁶⁸⁰ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 332.

⁶⁸¹ Bet-El, “Men and Soldiers,” 78.

⁶⁸² Meyer, *Men of War*, 145.

⁶⁸³ Meyer, *Men of War*, 144.

⁶⁸⁴ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 38.

quick to note that men who were typically ‘enthusiastic members’ were also the ones malingering and seeking ‘safety first’ jobs. *Being* masculine was different than *appearing* masculine. The danger inherent to the trenches was not ignored in these memoirs. Rather it was used to justify the soldier as an ideal of masculinity. Fraser described a soldier’s mental state in the trenches:

Knowing that at any moment he may be hurled into oblivion, his nerves are keyed to a certain pitch and his existence is one of suspense. No wonder the average man’s stay in the trenches is a few months... It is high time some distinction was made between the actual fighting man and his numerous knockers in khaki who take practically no risk at all.⁶⁸⁵

Fraser acknowledged the strain that front-line service put on men, yet he offered no appreciation or understanding for men who would like to avoid it. They were the ‘knockers in khaki’ rather than the ‘actual fighting man’ who occupied the trenches.

Fraser recalled a man who waited in England for eighteen months before he was sent to France who said he would “willingly return to Canada if he was only allowed to put his foot in France and make one trip up the line.”⁶⁸⁶ Harvey Duncan was impressed by the men he encountered on leave in England: “I must note that in every way, the men who had been to France were highly respected by all ranks.”⁶⁸⁷ There was no replacement for front-line experience in demonstrating masculinity. Shortly after landing in France in September of 1915, Harold McGill was distraught when he was left out of a tour of the front. He complained that “the rest of us naturally felt the inferiority of our position, having as yet no actual contact with real warfare; and I, for one, had a strong inclination to emulate the adventurous conduct of our messmates.”⁶⁸⁸ McGill appealed to his commanding officer for permission to go but was denied on the grounds that it was risky and unnecessary. In his

⁶⁸⁵ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 44.

⁶⁸⁶ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 224.

⁶⁸⁷ Bagley and Duncan, *Legacy of Courage*, 150.

⁶⁸⁸ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 84.

account, the front line represented ‘real warfare’ and by visiting it, his comrades were ‘adventurous,’ and therefore, ‘superior’.

Those who wrote memoirs and had the ‘benefit’ of experiencing the front line regularly wrote about the opportunities they had to take safer jobs. They reiterated their commitment to masculine codes of conduct by rejecting any transfers or by emphasizing the continued danger they faced with their new ‘safer’ positions. After several years in and around the front line, Wheeler was offered a transfer to a position as a YMCA counsellor at the convalescent camp in Cayeux. He declined the offer because he missed “the camaraderie of old and tried comrades up the line.” Wheeler expanded on the reasons why he declined the safer position. Due to his “deep sense of patriotism and belief in the rightness of the Allies’ cause,” he wanted to take part in the upcoming Passchendaele offensive. The main reason, however, was because “facing death with my buddies preferred to, and was more self-respecting than, simply looking like a soldier while my comrades were fighting, dying daily.”⁶⁸⁹ Wheeler viewed front-line service as a way to *be* a soldier, rather than just *pretending* to be one. The distinction was important. His decision to voluntarily return to the increased danger of the front was a demonstration of his martial masculinity.

Front-line service, in addition to danger, conferred adventure and excitement. On 12 January 1917, Fraser recorded that he turned down an “easy job” as an orderly room clerk, despite the fact it would have come with a promotion, because it was “too dull and uninteresting.”⁶⁹⁰ When men did accept transfers, they sought to demonstrate the danger that their new job required. John Copeland was transferred to the scout section, which he described as a beneficial change because he was stationed at Battalion Headquarters. He also

⁶⁸⁹ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 210.

⁶⁹⁰ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 243.

went to great lengths to emphasize that he remained a front-line soldier. Copeland stressed that he “never missed a trip in the line, yet there was not the great strain of having to stay in the front line continuously. The man who was in the line constantly ‘got it’ sooner or later for sure, and was lucky if only wounded.” Copeland was uncomfortable with the optics of his decision. Even decades later, he highlighted the exclusivity and bravery of his comrades in the scout section: “Every one of these men had a history – of patrols on the darkest of nights, of guiding under the very worst of conditions, of sniping in the roughest parts of the big battles.”⁶⁹¹ While Copeland admitted that his new position was safer, he emphasized his service in the trenches and reiterated the heroic prowess of the men around him in an attempt to justify his own decision.

Donald Fraser placed considerable emphasis in his memoir on whether a man could endure the front lines. This quality of endurance was a “product of the war” and was distinct from pre-war masculine requirements of emotional self-control.⁶⁹² To demonstrate endurance, men had to control their emotions “not only in the moment of fear and stress but also when confronted with the ongoing horrors of warfare.”⁶⁹³ Fraser condemned officers and instructors who tended to disappear “under the stress of battle to realms of easier work.”⁶⁹⁴ He cited several examples of officers who failed to live up to the expectations of their men. His description of the Regimental Sergeant-Major was scathing:

His part of soldiering, however, was spent in England. He took good care to stay on the safe side of the channel... In England, he used to tap his side gently and remark that this, alluding to his revolver, was for N.C.O.’s who refused to go over the top. I only saw this fire-eater pay a visit to the trenches once. I gave him the periscope to look through. He was very

⁶⁹¹ Copeland, “Diary of Lieutenant John B. Copeland,” 12.

⁶⁹² Meyer, *Men of War*, 142.

⁶⁹³ Meyer, *Men of War*, 143.

⁶⁹⁴ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 39.

uneasy and had a halfhearted glance through it, slinking back to H'Qrs a few minutes afterward.⁶⁹⁵

Fraser was also unimpressed by his Colour Sergeant who “possessed the knack of turning sick when anything was doing. His actual experience of serious fighting was nil.” In his condemnation, Fraser noted a tendency amongst officers to avoid front-line service especially when there was increased danger. His critique was focused on their failure to live up to masculine ideals. Time spent on the front lines incurred dangers associated with a masculine identity and Fraser took issue with the idea that these men would still garner acclaim and honour. He ranted that “when the war is over these are the men who will come back as heroes, parade their length of service, and give the most vivid account of fighting.”⁶⁹⁶

What makes Fraser’s condemnation of other men who avoided danger so revealing is that he spent a portion of his time in the C.E.F. away from the front lines performing clerical work and assisting with transport duties. Fraser was in France, aside from two brief stints on leave, from 18 September 1915 until he was wounded on 5 November 1917 at the Battle of Passchendaele.⁶⁹⁷ During that time, he served with the 31st Battalion, before transferring to the 6th Canadian Machine Gun Company on 22 October 1916.⁶⁹⁸ According to his memoir, however, his time with the 31st Battalion was not entirely spent as a front-line soldier. Fraser possessed clerical skills that were useful for some of the logistical requirements of the battalion.⁶⁹⁹ Therefore, he found a role assisting the Company Quartermaster [Q.M] in keeping track of all battalion supplies.

⁶⁹⁵ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 39.

⁶⁹⁶ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 40.

⁶⁹⁷ Library and Archives Canada, “Donald Fraser Casualty Form Active Service,” n.d., RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3278 - 3, First World War Personnel Files, 91. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=pffww&IdNumber=399161>.

⁶⁹⁸ Library and Archives Canada, “Donald Fraser Casualty Form Active Service,” 91.

⁶⁹⁹ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 51.

Fraser's work alternated between assisting the Company Q.M. and the standard duties expected of a private in the CEF. On 25 September 1915, as the 31st Battalion prepared to enter the front lines for the first time, he recalled that the "fighting spirit rose within me and I rudely severed my connection with him [the Q.M.] and went back to the Company much to the amusement of the platoon officer and sergeant and discomfiture of the Q.M. who had to find a couple of men to take my place."⁷⁰⁰ Fraser emphasized his masculinity, the 'fighting spirit' and the higher degree to which it urged him to action, as he moved closer to the front line. Several months later, in January 1916, he wrote:

Much to my surprise, whilst on sentry, the Q.M. asked me to go back and assist him. Thinking the matter over I came to the conclusion that it would be a decided improvement on the work I am at, which largely consists of working around the trenches, interspersed with shivering spells on the firing step, waiting for Fritz to come over, so I accepted the offer.⁷⁰¹

From this date in January until 4 July 1916, Fraser was employed as a "packer" with the transport section of the Battalion, working to load and unload rations and other equipment.⁷⁰² He described returning to the Q.M. as a good alternative to his cold and boring existence in the trenches. However, he rationalized this decision in his memoir by defining the transport job as a "semi-safety first job."⁷⁰³ Although he admitted that "the danger attached to this work is not great," he argued that it was "a nice change" but one that he would "get tired [of] and go back to scrapping."⁷⁰⁴ Despite transferring to a job behind the front lines, Fraser emphasized that there remained an element of danger and reiterated that he still wanted to fight.

⁷⁰⁰ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 29.

⁷⁰¹ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 78.

⁷⁰² Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 165.

⁷⁰³ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 79.

⁷⁰⁴ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 80.

The case of Donald Fraser is particularly intriguing because decisions as to one's role within the Battalion were not a negotiation. Fraser could not come and go from his job with the Q.M. as the 'fighting spirit' directed him. Several things could afford the opportunity to engage in work away from the front lines. Men suffering from shell shock were sometimes given work behind the lines to give them time to recover.⁷⁰⁵ Alternatively, work with the Q.M. could be given to a man who could not withstand the physical toll of the trenches, perhaps because of an underlying condition or due to age. In Fraser's memoir, while he is critical of other men who exhibit symptoms of shell shock, he does not indicate any personal experience. He was not wounded or sick until Passchendaele, although he was slightly on the older side at 32 years old when he enlisted.⁷⁰⁶

It is unclear why Donald Fraser was given a job transporting rations that took him out of the trenches for extended periods of time. What is clear is that he emphasized his adherence to masculine norms in the framing of his job overseas. He claimed that his 'fighting spirit' brought him to the front. When he left the front in January 1916, Fraser described it as a personal decision. Furthermore, he emphasized that his new job transporting rations was dangerous and he stressed its temporary nature. Fraser chose to accentuate his fighting experience and whenever possible, stress his individual control over his actions and the danger he faced as a member of the transport squad. His memoir indicates that he was uncomfortable with the optics of his move to a job that was regarded as safer and less combative.

⁷⁰⁵ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 102.

⁷⁰⁶ Library and Archives Canada, "Donald Fraser Attestation Paper," November 24, 1914, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3278 - 3, First World War Personnel Files, 1. <https://recherche-collection-search.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/home/record?app=pffww&IdNumber=399161>.

Soldiers renegotiated their masculine identities during the war. They sought to make the “physical realities of day-to-day life” align with masculine abstractions like courage, duty, endurance, and honour.⁷⁰⁷ One example is how veterans discussed shell shock in their memoirs. Shell shock was simultaneously held up as evidence of a man’s failure to endure battlefield conditions but also as an unfortunate fate of heroes, similar to other physical injuries that befell front-line soldiers. Men deplored the ways in which shell-shocked men failed to live up to masculine ideals yet were lenient with those they personally knew who possessed a track record of masculine behaviour. Although the symptoms of shell shock had no place in pre-war hegemonic masculinity, men’s wartime experience prompted a renegotiation of ideal masculine values to account for the reality that many brave men experienced shell shock.

Shell shock was a relatively common injury in the Great War. Arthur Turner defined the condition as a temporary sense of intense fear where a man lost all reason and ran scared in every direction.⁷⁰⁸ In the British Army, 80,000 cases of shell shock were officially recorded but the condition was narrowly defined during the war. Jay Winter argues that by modern mental health standards, roughly 20% of all combat personnel had combat war neurosis, the modern definition of shell shock.⁷⁰⁹ Men could experience shell shock after a short amount of time at the front. On 10 October 1915, just a month after his Battalion had arrived in France, Medical Officer Harold McGill recorded his first case of “nerves” at sick parade.⁷¹⁰

⁷⁰⁷ Meyer, *Men of War*, 10.

⁷⁰⁸ Turner, “My Experiences,” 17.

⁷⁰⁹ Ulbrich and Wintermute, *Race and Gender in Modern Warfare*, 144.

⁷¹⁰ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 98.

Men suffering from shell shock were described in gendered terms. In Canada's official history of the Medical Services during the Great War, shell shock was defined as "a manifestation of childishness and femininity."⁷¹¹ Its legacy was influenced in part by a lack of understanding of the condition. As Desmond Morton notes: "Psychiatry had little place in the CAMC [Canadian Army Medical Corps] when it went to war in 1914. Manly courage was taken for granted; cowardice was an offence under the King's Regulations punishable by death."⁷¹² Medical professionals had many competing theories about what caused shell shock. McGill, for example, posited that high-quality men with active jobs, like stretcher-bearers, were immune from the condition.⁷¹³ In memoirs, however, one thing was clear: suffering from shell shock had dire implications for one's masculinity because it resulted in a complete loss of self-control.⁷¹⁴

Memoirs often perpetuated the understanding of shell shock as a symptom of failed masculinity. Soldiers focused on the fact that victims acted like children and lost control of their emotions. Victor Wheeler's description of a comrade affected by shell shock is unnerving:

Frank [Crosby] might have also been killed outright, as he was found in a frightful state of shell shock. One of war's demons had suddenly turned him into a raving maniac. Every exploding shell induced another hysterical attack. As artillery shells screamed overhead, he tried to "catch those whistling butterflies." Frankie's blood-curdling antics and maniacal laughter sent shivers down our spines. Understandably none of us was eager to take our pathetic comrade out of the front line to the First-Aid Station.⁷¹⁵

Wheeler equated shell shock to a kind of death and used the word 'hysterical'. He compared Frank Crosby's behaviour under artillery fire with the childlike action of chasing butterflies.

⁷¹¹ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 197.

⁷¹² Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 197.

⁷¹³ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 119.

⁷¹⁴ Meyer, *Men of War*, 142.

⁷¹⁵ Wheeler, *No Man's Land*, 104.

After experiencing vicious German artillery at the Battle of St. Eloi, Fraser wrote that “three of our fellows almost lost their reason owing to the terrific fire and murder. They were all aquiver and became as little children.”⁷¹⁶ During the fighting at Courcellette, Fraser recalled that “an officer, a little, middle-aged man, badly shell shocked, his mouth quivering, like a child crying, was being led out by a private, the latter holding his hand. He was a pitiable object. It was hard to believe that he could be reduced to such a state.”⁷¹⁷ Fraser’s judgement of men who suffered from shell shock is clear. By recording that they were reduced to a “childlike state,” the implication is that they were not men. Stripped of their status as men, they were no longer able to function in the front line. They were “pitiable objects.”

Soldiers vilified men, particularly those they did not know, who suffered from shell shock as nuisances and distractions. At Vimy Ridge, Fraser recalled feeling “slightly disgusted” at a man he thought was “shell shocked or frightened out of his wits.”⁷¹⁸ In the same battle, Fraser recalled another man who “was crying like a baby with shell shock. His nerves and control were absolutely gone and he was yelled at by everyone to shut up the moment he whimpered.”⁷¹⁹ Shell-shocked men were viewed with suspicion as individuals attempting to avoid service in the front line. Harold McGill remembered that “complaints of concussion, shock and earache were becoming rather too common,” after just several weeks in France.⁷²⁰

Although memoirs routinely disparage men who suffered from shell shock, there are indications that men grew more understanding of the condition because of their wartime experience. Mark Humphries argues that “comrades could accept psychological breakdown

⁷¹⁶ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 119.

⁷¹⁷ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 213.

⁷¹⁸ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 266.

⁷¹⁹ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 268.

⁷²⁰ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 102.

as a legitimate outcome,” if the man in question was known to them and had incurred an ‘appropriate’ degree of shellfire, time in the front line, or trauma.⁷²¹ For example, Fraser recalled a young man named Jack Powell who broke down after a year in combat and was found “out on the green gambolling and smiling to himself like a five year old youngster.”⁷²² Instead of expressing disdain and questioning Powell’s masculinity, Fraser noted that upon returning to Canada, “he soon became as rational as any one of us.” Fraser did not ridicule Powell as he did other shell-shock victims because he knew Powell personally and saw him in combat. A personal relationship with a victim of shell shock made the condition more understandable.⁷²³ Another example is Victor Wheeler’s willingness to record his personal experience with symptoms of shell shock.⁷²⁴ Wheeler may have been willing to write so candidly because his own brother had been admitted to hospital in 1917 to recover from a case of “shattered nerves.”⁷²⁵ The war had taught men that “willpower alone was not enough” to quell fear.⁷²⁶

Men had to reconcile with the fact that many of the individuals who suffered from shell shock exhibited normative masculine behaviour.⁷²⁷ McGill was responsible for reviewing the men each morning during sick parade and making decisions as to which course of treatment was appropriate. He diagnosed all the shell-shocked men from the 31st Battalion while he served as the Battalion Medical Officer. McGill believed that bravery and a high sense of duty made men more susceptible to the condition:

Often the term was used to describe a condition that was nothing but terror. However, there was a *true* definition of shell shock, but this in my experience never occurred in the case of cowards. Quite the reverse. The

⁷²¹ Humphries, *A Weary Road*, 66.

⁷²² Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 191.

⁷²³ Humphries, *A Weary Road*, 68.

⁷²⁴ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 186.

⁷²⁵ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 92.

⁷²⁶ Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 350.

⁷²⁷ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 111-112.

victims were men of finest moral courage. This combined with a high sense of duty and a lively imagination set the stage for the development of shell-shock. The man's whole physical nature revolted from the sights and sounds of a bombardment. This was much intensified if he was with troops holding a static position and obliged to sit still and take punishment without the opportunity of striking back... All the man's natural physical impulses prompted him to take shelter, and to run away if necessary. On the other hand his spiritual courage, his faith to his duty and his discipline forced him to remain. The result was a conflict under which the nervous system collapsed and the soldier became a gibbering maniac.⁷²⁸

Because of his wartime experience, McGill understood shell shock as a genuine medical condition, not a symptom of cowardice, that was the result of brave men forced to suppress their natural desire to flee the modern battlefield. Thus, shell shock did not indict a man as childish or feminine; it confirmed that one possessed the necessary bravery and moral fortitude to endure shellfire long enough to suffer a nervous collapse.

McGill confirmed his view of shell shock as an affliction of the brave with an anecdotal story. He recalled a young soldier who was reduced to screaming an incessant "high-pitched wailing cry" that "denoted terrible mental anguish." McGill recalled that he "spoke kindly to the boy and asked him if he thought he could really stand the gaff any longer. "I do not know, Sir," he replied. "but I want a chance to try; I may break down again or I may get a 'Blighty' but I'm not going to quit." Tragically, the "poor fellow never had his opportunity to prove that he could overcome shell-shock," because a stray artillery shell killed him in his sleep.⁷²⁹ In McGill's example, there are several hallmarks of masculinity that indicate his understanding of shell shock as an injury that impacted the most courageous men. The young man in this story was undaunted and committed to returning to the line no matter the cost to himself. To McGill, the real tragedy was that this soldier would never be able to prove that he could overcome the shell-shock diagnosis and demonstrate his courage

⁷²⁸ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 172.

⁷²⁹ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 172-173.

and martial vigour. Harold McGill's memoir illustrates how men rationalized the existence of shell shock in their memoirs with their underlying faith in the masculinity of soldier heroes.

Shell shock was not the only issue that men struggled to reconcile with masculine standards. Because memoirs were written many years after the war, men were more open about their emotions. Memoirs differ from newspaper coverage of battalion departures and wartime letters because they illustrate in much greater detail how the war impacted men's emotional state. The time between when the war occurred and when the memoir was written allowed men to process the trauma of combat and better explain feelings and emotions that were hard to describe at the time. As Michael Roper notes in his study of the emotional survival of men, "terror was a feature of trench warfare."⁷³⁰ Under frequent artillery barrages, "brave men cried, [and] fouled themselves."⁷³¹ The fact that fear and stress were experienced by most men was clear from their wartime letters. In memoirs, however, "the discomforts of warfare become increasingly prominent" as men became less preoccupied with reassuring their family members of their well-being and safety.⁷³² Crying, fear, and stress were all common emotional responses to the trials and tribulations of the Great War, despite their incompatibility with masculine standards.

Some men responded to the emotional toll of sustained trench warfare and the loss of comrades by physically breaking down. Crying was commonly associated with infancy. Fraser recalled two men "suffering from shock," one of which "had to be taken out; he was crying like a baby."⁷³³ In another passage describing the aftermath of a battle, Fraser referred to a soldier as "Young Hayden" who "arrived on the scene and overhearing that his brother

⁷³⁰ Roper, *The Secret Battle*, 250.

⁷³¹ Morton and Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon*, 55.

⁷³² Meyer *Men of War*, 159.

⁷³³ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 129.

was killed commenced sobbing, but controlled himself when his brother suddenly appeared in our midst.”⁷³⁴ Crying could also be a response to intense physical demands of service such as long route marches:

To glimpse a comrade, much sturdier than myself, wincing with every troubled step made this Johnny Canuck uneasy. A second glance at his blanched face with crystal globules of tears trickling to the end of his Roman nose, hesitating a moment, then falling onto his khaki tunic, brought the milk of human sympathy to the surface. But when I offered to carry my buddy’s rifle or his harness, he insisted, “No, Vic! I think I can make it all right until our next ten-minutes rest.”⁷³⁵

Wheeler’s comrade cried from the exertion but did not want to burden another man with his gear. Although memoirs allowed crying to be written about more freely than in letters, there was still a negative association with childishness. Men recorded that they felt uncomfortable witnessing weakness and vulnerability.

Crying was described as an intense reaction to sadness, combat, and physical exhaustion. Within Victorian codes of masculinity, weeping was an unacceptable display of emotion for a man.⁷³⁶ The degree to which crying was emotionally repressed is demonstrated by Harold McGill’s recollection of the death of his good friend and stretcher bearer Teddy Barnes. In his letters, as has already been discussed, McGill alluded to his desire to weep before apologizing and admonishing himself in a subsequent letter. In his memoir, he was much more revealing about the emotional toll that Barnes’ death exacted:

He had lost much blood and his face was deathly white; yet he was the coolest of the party... As I bid farewell his eyes were as unwavering and his grip as firm as though nothing had happened. As he shook hands with me and said that he was sorry to leave in the middle of an action, I had to

⁷³⁴ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 208.

⁷³⁵ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 28.

⁷³⁶ Melissa Bellanta, “His Two Mates Around Him Were Crying: Masculine Sentimentality in Late-Victorian Culture,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 20, no. 4 (December 1, 2015): 471-472, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13555502.2015.1090241>.

exert all the will power I possessed to prevent myself breaking into a fit of weeping.⁷³⁷

McGill emphasized the qualities that Barnes possessed that aligned with masculine ideals. Barnes was “cool,” with an unwavering gaze and firm grip, and he calmly apologized that he was unable to fulfill his duty “in the middle of an action.” Barnes is described as the sacrificial heroic archetype. Furthermore, McGill restricted his emotions, even in the face of the immediate loss of his best friend. He exerted all his ‘willpower’ to stop himself from crying.

Fear was another reaction to war that was expressed more freely in memoirs than in letters. During their time overseas, men felt pressure to conform to masculine ideals and hide the fact that they felt afraid.⁷³⁸ Displaying fear opened men up to ridicule and charges of cowardice. Donald Fraser recalled his first trip into the front-line trenches:

Going up the trench, orders were passed down to keep low. The writer respected the command, so did those in front; but the fellow behind me in a spirit of bravado kept taunting me with the remarks, “What was I scared of.” Being of puny dimensions it struck me he could ignore the order with impunity so I ignored him. However he kept on ragging and I was forced to ejaculate, “Shut up you blethering idiot” but to no avail and my dander was beginning to rise.⁷³⁹

Fraser’s story demonstrates the importance of hiding fear to maintain the appearance of masculinity. Although he may not have been scared at the time, the other man’s taunting reinforced fear as an emotion to be suppressed. In addition, the man who taunted Fraser may have even been suppressing his own fear in that moment by putting on a façade of ‘bravado’ and teasing Fraser in a way that was misinterpreted as vindictive. Fraser later admitted that “a jovial temperament seems to be an antidote to morbid thought, fear or cowardice.”⁷⁴⁰

⁷³⁷ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 223.

⁷³⁸ Fletcher, “Patriotism, The Great War and Manliness,” 62.

⁷³⁹ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 32.

⁷⁴⁰ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 201.

Despite the negative connotations associated with fear, men wrote about it at length. No Man's Land, artillery barrages, and active combat were all experiences that invoked fear. "I was scared to death and my heart pounded against my "sunken chest" like an alarm that had been suddenly set off by my own foolishness," Wheeler wrote after he volunteered to deliver a letter to his friend in an advanced listening post in no-man's land.⁷⁴¹ Wheeler expressed his own fear at exposing himself above the edge of the trench and alluded to his 'sunken chest' which a doctor had informed him would prevent him from carrying out front-line duties.

Artillery was a significant source of fear. After experiencing a close call with a dud shell that failed to explode, Arthur Turner remarked that "one thing I was surprised at though was, I felt no fear, usually shell fire scared me stiff. Maybe it all happened so quickly, or maybe because I was too exhausted."⁷⁴² Although he was not afraid at that moment, Arthur Turner admitted that artillery usually caused considerable fear. McGill provided a more eloquent description of the fear that shellfire inspired. While attached to the 31st Battalion near the village of Kemmel in Belgium, he wrote:

As we reached the crest of the ridge over which the road went into Kemmel we had presented to us a fine and rather terrifying site. It was now dark, and the crash of the guns with the lightning-like flashes were very impressive. I confess that I was conscious of a clutch about the heart. The spectacle made one think that it must be a convulsion of nature rather than the handiwork of such a feeble creature as man. For the first, although by no means the last time in my experience, I felt that horrible sinking feeling as though I had been disembowelled. Besides being appalled by the sights and sounds, I was struck by the fear that the village of Kemmel might be shelled while our men were still passing through. My fears seemed ridiculous in retrospect the next morning, for the little show we had witnessed was a mere incident.⁷⁴³

⁷⁴¹ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 89.

⁷⁴² Turner, "My Experiences," 4.

⁷⁴³ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 91.

The sheer terror that artillery wrought was a constant threat to a soldier's ability to control their fear.⁷⁴⁴ McGill felt a "horrible sinking feeling," even though the artillery he witnessed was a "mere incident."

After the Battle of Vimy Ridge, Wheeler recalled that "the sight of the pillage of the sacred soil and of the carnage of a few days ago, together with satanic-smelling air sent me staggering, retching, quaking with a strange fear – a fear unlike anything I had heretofore felt. With a strangled cry I began to fully realize the enormity of the Crime of War."⁷⁴⁵

Wheeler's writing illustrates that fear could grip soldiers even outside the heat of battle. This passage also demonstrates how emotions such as fear were more pronounced in memoirs than in letters. The fear that Wheeler felt in 1917, in the aftermath of Vimy Ridge, was expressed in his memoir as a realization of the "crime of war." He did not feel this way immediately after the battle, but with the passage of time and reflection on his experiences, his views hardened and his fear in that moment became more pronounced in his memory.

Despite their own personal experiences with fear, soldiers still condemned their comrades who were afraid. New recruits had to navigate a complex and contradictory, often unspoken code that outlined what behaviour was or was not acceptable to show in the trenches.⁷⁴⁶ Masculine ideals shaped behaviour. Fraser recalled a new soldier who was "stunned" when he was ordered to go to the front line: "He looked at me and in a quivering voice said he did not see why he should have to go because he was a new man and did not have any war experience."⁷⁴⁷ Fraser denigrated the man for pretending to be sick. Even Wheeler, who expressed fear in numerous instances in his memoir, was critical of an officer

⁷⁴⁴ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 248.

⁷⁴⁵ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 148.

⁷⁴⁶ Humphries, *A Weary Road*, 66.

⁷⁴⁷ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 306.

for failing to live up to martial masculine ideals. Wheeler recalled that he saw an officer “crawling on all fours, like a mole creeping to another hiding place in his dark tunnel.” He noted ironically that the officer was later “evacuated as a serious casualty and decorated by the Canadian Corps Commander for outstanding courage and leadership under fire and against great odds.”⁷⁴⁸ New recruits and bad officers were frequently condemned in memoirs for displaying fear and failing to uphold their duties in the line.

Although stress was not felt by the ideal soldier hero, it was an emotion common to memoirs. Fear was an acute response to an immediate situation while stress was built up over time in response to continued exposure to dangerous situations. Front-line service was stressful. After a spell in the Courcelette region in the winter of 1917, Arthur Turner reported that “when I came out of the line my hair had gone white.”⁷⁴⁹ Service in the front line was carried out on a rotating basis. Even so, over time, men recorded that the cumulative effects of stress were enormous. After a year and a half in France, McGill was asked by his superiors how his “nerves were standing the strain and how [he] was sleeping.” McGill replied: “I was able to assure him that while my nerves seemed all right in times of peace, I had serious doubts as to their condition whenever I came under shell or machine gun fire.”⁷⁵⁰ Continued exposure to enemy machine gun fire and artillery strained McGill’s nerves. During extended periods of conflict, the strain increased. At the Battle of Passchendaele, Wheeler remembered that “men were crazed, some driven stark insane. Unmitigated hell reigned.”⁷⁵¹ For men of all ranks and roles, stress was a constant factor.

⁷⁴⁸ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 18.

⁷⁴⁹ Turner, “My Experiences,” 12.

⁷⁵⁰ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 167.

⁷⁵¹ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 224.

There is little consensus, however, as to what aspect of the war was the most stressful. For John Copeland, “Aeroplane bombing” was “one of the worst experiences of the whole war... nothing could place a more severe strain on the nerves.”⁷⁵² Copeland may have felt this way due to the inability to retaliate against his tormentor, something that was frequently cited as a cause of stress. Fraser thought artillery was the most stressful aspect of war because of his inability to retaliate:

To get up over the parapet and rush to certain death at the hands of machine-gunners or riflemen would be a welcome mental relief to remaining stoically in a trench with an avalanche of shells smashing and burying everything before it. Standing up to shellfire of such method and accuracy is the hardest part by far of a soldier’s trials.⁷⁵³

Enduring prolonged periods of time under artillery fire without recourse to action put a strain on the men in the trenches. As Battalion Medical Officer, McGill endured shellfire and stray machine-gun fire, although he was less exposed to danger than the front-line troops. McGill had different sources of stress: “I was not so worried by the roar of the guns: I knew what that was; but the uncertain and unknown nature of the telephone messages distressed me exceedingly.”⁷⁵⁴ Lying awake in a dugout listening to a constant stream of telegraph messages with unknown contents was more stressful than the distant sounds of artillery that came from a known source. McGill elaborated on what he felt was the most stressful aspect of war:

In sober literal truth, the dreary monotony of war is among its most trying features. Of course there were periods of intense activity and excitement as in the event of a general action; but the wearying round of duties day after day, with its dirt, discomfort, noise and sights of blood and death gradually brought about that condition in a man so graphically described as being “fed up.”⁷⁵⁵

⁷⁵² Copeland, “Diary of Lieutenant John B. Copeland,” 21.

⁷⁵³ Fraser, *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 151.

⁷⁵⁴ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 83.

⁷⁵⁵ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 139.

Given McGill's relative safety in dugouts removed from the front line, he felt that the general monotony of war was the most stressful aspect. Contrary to other memoirs, he recorded a 'general action' as a period of 'intense activity and excitement' that served to break up the monotony and provide a sense of purpose.

The longer a man served in an active duty role, the more stress he incurred and the more his nerves suffered. In Richard Aldington's *Death of a Hero*, a novel based on the author's experience as a British soldier, he argues that any man who had spent six months in the line without experiencing fear or stress was either "superhuman, subnormal, or a liar."⁷⁵⁶

The most extreme response to fear and stress was to injure oneself. Some memoirs discussed the concept of self-inflicted wounds (S.I.W.'s) as a means of gaining temporary relief. Self-injury to escape service was a drastic measure but it was not unheard of. In the C.E.F. there were 582 official cases of S.I.W.⁷⁵⁷ Harold McGill recalled an incident early on in his time overseas where a man shot himself while cleaning his rifle: "I think that in this case the wound was genuinely accidental, although I remember I gave the matter much consideration at the time."⁷⁵⁸ Self-inflicted wounds were the most "dramatic" form of malingering, which generally referred to the practice of embellishing an injury or sickness to get out of work.⁷⁵⁹ According to Victor Wheeler, "Johnny Canuck had all kinds of imaginary (as well as real) ailments, such as toothache, sore arms, swollen feet, sprained hands, any of which, he hoped, would merit an M & L.D. (medicine and light duty)."⁷⁶⁰ Men who were suspected of malingering, even with real sickness or injury, were stigmatized. Joanna Bourke

⁷⁵⁶ Aldington, *Death of a Hero*, 260.

⁷⁵⁷ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 249. By 1917 trench foot was considered a S.I.W. and in 1918 failure to have a gas mask during a gas attack was also considered an S.I.W. On the other hand, some forms of S.I.W. such as giving oneself food poisoning with rotten meat would be incredibly difficult to detect. Both of these make the true number of S.I.W.'s in the war hard to establish definitively.

⁷⁵⁸ McGill, *Medicine and Duty*, 102.

⁷⁵⁹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 86.

⁷⁶⁰ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 66.

argues that although the rank-and-file men were accepting of malingerers, army doctors were much more harsh.⁷⁶¹ Commentators often attacked the masculinity of malingerers. Dr. Hugh Wansey Bayly wrote that “the man who evades service in the field in time of war must be accepted and recognized as an inferior creature.”⁷⁶² Wheeler recalled that during his time in hospital with dysentery and malaria, he was “incredibly suspected as [a] “lead-swinger” and treated accordingly. On the other hand, if blood had been drawn by enemy shellfire or sniper’s bullet, we same sick men would have been cared for as heroes!”⁷⁶³ Wheeler was indignant at being suspected of malingering (or “lead swinging”) and protested at the difference in treatment he received compared to those who had been injured in the line of fire and received masculine recognition and praise as “heroes”.

A desire for a ‘legitimate’ injury, or a “Blighty” to escape from the field of battle for treatment, was more common than a self-inflicted wound or malingering. “Blighty” is an army slang term derived from the Hindi word for “home.” It referred to an injury that was not life-threatening but was serious enough to require a trip to hospital back in England.⁷⁶⁴ A desire for a Blighty was most apparent during the heat of battle. “A Blighty would have been welcomed by any of us,” Wheeler wrote, during the 50th Battalion’s assault on Lens in the summer of 1917.⁷⁶⁵ Arthur Turner wryly recalled that “I personally would have welcomed a leg or an arm wound,” when the 50th Battalion was in the mud of Passchendaele several months later.⁷⁶⁶ In many ways, to be wounded during a general action guaranteed status as a man who had performed his duty to the best of his abilities. When Wheeler’s comrade was shot in the foot, Wheeler envied him because “it would, without stigma, mean a change of

⁷⁶¹ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 102.

⁷⁶² Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 98.

⁷⁶³ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 326.

⁷⁶⁴ Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale*, 71.

⁷⁶⁵ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 161.

⁷⁶⁶ Turner, “My Experiences,” 10.

khaki for hospital blues, a clean, dry bed, the best of medical attention, good hot food, safety and heavenly peace for a few weeks.”⁷⁶⁷ The specific appeal of a Blighty was that it gave soldiers a reprieve without the stigma associated with malingering. The stigma Wheeler referred to was explicitly gendered. Men accused of malingering were viewed as evading their “duty to the state and to other men.”⁷⁶⁸ Receiving a Blighty meant a reprieve from the horrors of war without departing from standards of masculinity.

Given the stigma and shame associated with malingering, self-inflicted wounds were associated with masculine expectations. Wheeler remembered his intention to wound himself as a momentary aberration of emotional control that caused him a considerable degree of guilt and shame:

I myself stepped around a bay unnoticed, with rifle in hand, fully intending to let my left foot get in the way of the barrel of my rifle! A sinister voice within me urged, “Go ahead! Nobody will suspect *you* of an S.I.W – and none will be any the wiser when they see you carried out on a stretcher. You’ve survived your time; now let the reinforcements have a turn!” The awful daring of a moment’s surrender, flashed into my mind like lightning and shrivelled my soul with guilt and shame! I wheeled around in the same instant, feeling as if a hundred of my buddies were staring at me, and assumed Stand-to at my post.⁷⁶⁹

Wheeler’s description of his feelings is expressed in gendered terms. His writing alludes to the homosocial aspect of masculinity by referencing the feeling that hundreds of his friends were staring at him, condemning his desires. Shame and guilt were associated with emotional weakness, an inability to control himself, and concern about letting his comrades down.

Victor Wheeler’s anxiety about self-inflicted wounds illustrates that aligning with ideals of masculinity conferred privilege and authority. Because Wheeler considered injuring himself, he was lenient on the issue in his memoir. He defended the practice as “unfortunate

⁷⁶⁷ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 161.

⁷⁶⁸ Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 78.

⁷⁶⁹ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 162.

and regrettable, but not necessarily reprehensible.” Furthermore, he included the opinion of his friend Waller, who believed that men who injured themselves were “more honest than most of us with our pretentious fearlessness. I must admit I have oftentimes been scared to death. Who knows what oneself will do when his nerves are shattered in this crucible of War?” Wheeler emphasized that Waller had a “personal battle record [that] was exemplary,” and a “reputation for courage [that] was peerless.” Whether Wheeler’s story is apocryphal or true, it reveals an attempt to negotiate and align his actions with hegemonic ideals of masculinity. It establishes that he regained control of his actions and upheld masculine expectations. However, Wheeler had to reconcile with the fact that he had almost injured himself and his internal guilt. He had a conversation with Waller, a man with a strong “battle record” and a reputation for courage, who was sympathetic to Wheeler’s experience. Waller’s sympathy validated Wheeler’s experience because Waller embodied the masculine ideal.⁷⁷⁰

Great War memoirs function as sources that re-assert traditional, hegemonic concepts of masculinity. They provide spaces in which men were able to reflect emotionally on their wartime experience. In discussing why they fought, they emphasized that military service was a natural male duty, a unifying requirement amongst men that they had satisfied by enlisting. Their memoirs illustrate the intricacies of masculine ideals. Men were required to engage in front-line service, control their emotions, and be brave. At the same time, memoirs discuss how men and those around them failed to live up to these ideals. In the tension between the ideal and the lived reality, men’s explanations and justifications for why they or others ‘failed’ to live up to the standard were couched in language that asserted the primacy of hegemonic masculine ideals. Even as memoirs gave space for men to reflect on the fear,

⁷⁷⁰ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 193.

stress, and shock that their wartime service had entailed in reality, they also provided a forum in which men criticized and denigrated other men who failed to live up to lofty standards. In doing so, definitions of these hegemonic masculine ideals were renegotiated and altered, but they were also reinforced. The most important aspects to embody were bravery under fire, presence in the front-line, and control of one's emotions. While memoirs differed in their rigidity to masculine ideals, some men were far more forthcoming and open with their identity than others. For all the men who wrote memoirs, the Great War was a "seminal moment" in their lives.⁷⁷¹

⁷⁷¹ Meyer, *Men of War*, 160.

Conclusion

Soldiers in the Great War were recognized as living examples of hegemonic masculine standards. In death, their masculine status was solidified by their actions in life. The fallen were held up by Canadian society as heroes who committed the ultimate sacrifice.⁷⁷² After a man was killed, letters of condolence were written home to his immediate family to inform them of his death and offer words of consolation. These letters act as “spaces in which images of the remembered dead were constructed and communicated,” often in ways that “reduce the individual to a simplified ideal of what it meant to be both a soldier and a man.”⁷⁷³ Letters of condolence affirmed that men who died in combat had lived up to a hegemonic masculine standard that expected them to behave in certain ways in combat and life.

After Thomas Riley was killed at Passchendaele on 26 October 1917, his friend George Ferguson wrote that he was a “good man” who was “constantly on scouting and patrol duty” and “always cool and resourceful in the line.”⁷⁷⁴ Riley’s uncle, Harold, who also served overseas, described him as a “brave and gallant patriot and soldier” who “fully maintained all the manly qualities and virtues he possessed and exhibited in his home and college life.”⁷⁷⁵ After Victor Galloway was killed on 17 November 1916, his battalion chaplain called him a “manly [and] clean living young fellow.”⁷⁷⁶ Following Eugene Robert Drader’s death during the 49th Battalion’s assault at Courcellette, his friend Harry Balfour

⁷⁷² Vance, *Death so Noble*, 51.

⁷⁷³ Meyer, *Men of War*, 75.

⁷⁷⁴ George Ferguson, “George Ferguson Letter to Mrs. Riley,” Military Correspondence, November 18, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 57, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁷⁷⁵ Harold Riley, “Harold Riley Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Riley,” Military Correspondence, December 20, 1917, CA ACU GBA F1555-S0005-FL0005-Box 7-File 57, Glenbow Western Research Centre.

⁷⁷⁶ Thurlow Fraser, “Thurlow Fraser letter to Mrs. Galloway,” November 25 1916, copied by Ruby Galloway in Diary of Victor Galloway, CA ACU GBA F3155-M9634-Box 1-File 3 “Victor Galloway Diary,” Glenbow Western Research Centre.

emphasized that he led his troops “in the most gallant way imagineable; shells burst all around him but he led us straight on.”⁷⁷⁷ Balfour wrote that Drader did not complain after he was shot through the spine and abdomen, and assured Drader’s parents that he “was game to the very last” and “died a soldier’s death.”⁷⁷⁸ Hadden William Ellis was deemed a “fine, manly boy” after his death on 24 September, 1917.⁷⁷⁹ Letters of condolence affirmed soldiers’ status as masculine men, who committed the ultimate sacrifice in responding to the call of duty and performing honourably overseas.

This thesis analyzes conceptions of masculinity in Calgary men during the Great War. In Calgary, during the years before the war, society viewed masculinity as physical, aggressive, and martial. It was dependent on “certain normative standards of appearance, behavior, and comportment.”⁷⁸⁰ This code took shape across Britain and its dominions. An aggressive, physical, martial masculinity in Calgary was affirmed and supported by immigration, groups such as the Boy Scouts and the Boys' Brigade, and institutions such as the cadets and the militia. Calgary was a choice location for young British men who sought to prove their masculinity on the frontier. In 1914, masculine codes urged men to be adventurous, courageous, stoic, emotionally reserved, physically fit, and patriotic.

As the war began, the hegemonic masculinity of 1914 was put to the test. Nations had to mobilize unprecedented numbers of men for military service. Newspaper coverage of battalion departure parades in Calgary reinforced dominant masculine expectations. Men

⁷⁷⁷ Harry Balfour, “Harry Balfour Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Drader,” Military Correspondence, September 21, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/60992/doc/221>.

⁷⁷⁸ Harry Balfour, “Harry Balfour Letter to Mr. and Mrs. Drader,” Military Correspondence, September 21, 1916, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/60992/doc/221>

⁷⁷⁹ Joseph Lee, “Joseph Lee Letter to Mr. Ellis,” Military Correspondence, October 4, 1917, Hadden William Ellis Collection, Canadian Letters and Images Project, <https://www.canadianletters.ca/collections/all/collection/20824/doc/221>.

⁷⁸⁰ Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 8.

were measured against a standard of martial masculinity that prized physical prowess and patriotic service. This definition of masculinity was dominant across the British Empire.⁷⁸¹ Battalion departure parades were ritualized celebrations of men who occupied the hegemonic position in gender hierarchies after 1914. They were celebrated for their physical attributes, courageous behaviour, and emotional control as they paraded through the city. Martial music connected the men to the enthusiastic crowds that lined the streets. Parades helped local recruiting efforts by highlighting men in uniform and calling on those who remained to do their masculine duty. Even as the war devolved into a protracted struggle, military service remained the ultimate expression of masculinity. The men who served and died overseas, sacrificing their lives in dangerous conditions, reinforced military service as a masculine ideal. Enduring deadly conditions in the trenches became an indicator of courage, duty, and masculine vigour. Newspaper coverage of battalion departure parades in Calgary throughout the Great War illustrates that hegemonic masculine expectations required military service.

However, local newspapers only indicate the masculine traits and values that were widely accepted in society. They reflect the common definitions of words like “manly” and provide normative expectations for men. Alone, they are inadequate to analyze the masculine identities of the men who went overseas. Personal sources that highlight autobiographical experiences are essential for establishing a “properly grounded notion of identity.”⁷⁸² It is these sources, wartime letters and personal memoirs, that illuminate how the war impacted the masculine identities of the men who experienced it.

⁷⁸¹ Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 347. Fletcher, “Patriotism, The Great War and the Decline of Victorian Manliness,” 42. Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West*, 166. Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 55.

⁷⁸² Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 345.

Letters from Calgary men serving overseas highlight the differences and similarities between masculine expectations and individual conceptions of masculinity. Letters were a medium through which gender roles were performed, information was transmitted, and men remained in contact with their loved ones at home. On the one hand, letters revealed that soldiers identified with hegemonic martial masculine ideals throughout the war. Men wrote about the fact that they were enthusiastic to fight, adopted a stoic approach to life, and praised the positive impact of military service on their masculine identity. They celebrated men who were brave, physically tough, emotionally controlled, and cool under fire. Furthermore, they denigrated men who shirked their duty or who transgressed the aforementioned masculine expectations that they held dear.

On the other hand, letters also provided a space where men departed from hegemonic masculine expectations. They adopted domestic masculine identities in their letters home, they downplayed the danger that they faced overseas, and they wrote about the fear and stress that they were unable to display in the all-male environment of the trenches. Their efforts to protect their loved ones at the expense of cultivating a martial masculine identity illustrate that individual identities were more complex and nuanced than the hegemonic ideal. However, the fact that men failed to always adhere to masculine ideals in their letters does not suggest a rejection of norms. Rather, it proves that even amongst the men who are most closely aligned with those norms, subjective masculine identities do not perfectly emulate the ideal. For example, while Harold McGill displayed excessive emotion after the death of his friend Teddy Barnes, his conception of ideal masculinity did not include crying. Another example is that men accepted shirking, but only from their friends who they knew had performed admirably, and only from events that did not fit the masculine ideal like working

parties or church parades. Even while men strayed from masculine expectations, their letters illustrated the strength of the soldier hero as an ideal.

Veterans' memoirs written after the war further illustrate the enduring strength of wartime definitions of masculinity. Men performed masculine roles in their memoirs. They highlighted instances in which they upheld gendered expectations through bravery under fire, emotional control, endurance, and lengthy service on the front lines. Furthermore, they wrote at length about their comrades' adherence to masculine norms, particularly in combat situations and concerning their physical masculinity. However, memoirs also afforded men the time and space from the events they depicted to discuss subjects that did not align with hegemonic masculinity. As Christopher Forth notes, "the performance of gender is also prone to failures, lapses, and refusals."⁷⁸³ Men wrote about the fear and stress they felt under fire in much greater detail than they did during the war. Topics like shell shock and self-inflicted wounds that were left unsaid in their letters home formed an important part of their recollections. Although men discussed the ways in which they failed to embody the masculine ideal, they also reasserted these ideals in their discussion of taboo subjects by denigrating shell-shocked men and deriding men who took 'bomb-proof' jobs in the rear as opposed to fighting at the front. In memoirs, despite men's wartime experience, the strong, brave man was masculine, while the weak, cowardly man was an object of pity. The wartime soldier hero ideal was not dissected and destroyed in veteran's memoirs. It was celebrated and reinforced, even as postwar bitterness and disillusionment altered public understanding of the war.

Mary Georgina Chaktsiris' dissertation on the Great War in Toronto notes that she "looks past the loudest imperial, pro-war sentiments" to explore the "contested and varied

⁷⁸³ Forth, *Masculinity in the Modern West*, 2.

responses” to the war that existed in the city.⁷⁸⁴ This thesis approaches masculinity differently by comparing how individual, personalized accounts of war rejected, renegotiated, or re-affirmed a hegemonic definition of masculinity that was dominant during the war. It is a response to Chaktsiris’ call for other studies to “take into account personal accounts/memoirs published after the war.”⁷⁸⁵ It uses the personal records of veterans to assess the degree to which masculine expectations impacted the lives of real men. This thesis does not address marginalized masculinities that exist in opposition to hegemonic masculine expectations. Racialized Canadians, conscientious objectors, and socio-economically disadvantaged men were far less likely to subscribe to the same hegemonic masculine expectations. They are not the subjects of this thesis. This thesis isolates a hegemonic conception of masculinity in Calgary, as demonstrated through local institutions and newspapers, and assesses the degree to which individual men from Calgary adhered to or rejected hegemonic norms during their time overseas and after the war had concluded in their memoirs. By focusing on men most likely to adhere to the hegemonic norm, two goals are accomplished. First, a nuanced and complex hegemonic masculine norm can be established. Second, the fact that even these men did not perfectly embody the hegemonic masculine ideal illustrates that a wide variety of masculine behaviours existed. If the poster boys of hegemonic masculinity were not ideal men, then who was?

Hegemonic masculine expectations were influential in men’s writing both during and after the war. The soldier hero archetype was subscribed to in men’s letters through their depictions of bravery, pride in uniform, duty, endurance, and the primacy of front-line

⁷⁸⁴ Mary Georgina Chaktsiris, “A Great War of Expectations: Men, Mothers, and Monsters in Toronto, 1914-1918” (Kingston, Queens University, 2015), 31. <https://www.lib.uwo.ca/cgi-bin/ezpauthn.cgi?url=http://search.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/great-war-expectations-men-mothers-monsters/docview/2529202872/se-2>.

⁷⁸⁵ Chaktsiris, “A Great War of Expectations,” 220.

service. The war did not kill the soldier hero. It did not end the association between manliness, courage, sacrifice, camaraderie, and “the image of the warrior.”⁷⁸⁶ Memoirs overwhelmingly emphasize the physical benefits of the military, the courage of their comrades in uniform, and the superior manliness of men who enthusiastically enlisted and faced dangerous fighting conditions. However, individual correspondence and recollections were not uniform narratives that endorsed dominant conceptions of masculinity, even though they were arguably written by the men who aligned most closely with the ideal. Subjective personal sources reveal “masculinity as a process in which social scripts are negotiated.”⁷⁸⁷ Men’s domestic masculine identities impacted the degree to which they emphasized their martial exploits overseas in wartime letters. Experiencing warfare changed men’s understanding of courage and shell shock. Memoirs allowed men to express their emotions in ways that were restricted by masculine expectations during the war. Given the wide range of men included in this thesis, there are differences in their writing that indicate that hegemonic masculine expectations were not always reached on an individual level. Ultimately, however, while none of the men included in this thesis were “perfect” practitioners of hegemonic masculinity, all of them displayed an effort to adhere to masculine norms and ideals in their writing throughout and after the war. Their writing reveals that the war reinforced pre-existing conceptions of masculinity that emphasized military service and a wide range of traits including physical size, courage, and stoicism. Although experiencing combat made actions such as taking a “bomb-proof job” or shirking a working party understandable, it did not make those activities masculine.

⁷⁸⁶ Mosse, *The Image of Man*, 108.

⁷⁸⁷ Roper, “Between Manliness and Masculinity,” 360.

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