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## And the Men Returned: Canadian Veterans and the Aftermath of the Great War

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Doctor of Philosophy degree in History

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## Abstract

The Great War was a formative event for men who came of age between 1914 and 1918. They believed the experience forged them into a distinct generation. This collective identification more than shaped a sense of self; it influenced understanding of the conflict's meaning. Canadian historians, however, have overlooked the war's generational impact, partly because they reject notions of a disillusioned Lost Generation. Unlike European or American youths, it is argued that Canadian veterans did not suffer postwar disillusionment. Rather, they embraced the war alongside a renewed Canadian nationalism. This generation *was* proud of their nation's wartime achievements, notably those of the Canadian Corps, but the conflict's meaning was rooted in more than battlefield history. Its validity was inseparable from the postwar life for which veterans believed they had fought for. Yet, despite hopes to return home to a 'square deal', economic and international instability marred life in interwar Canada, dashing the generation's confidence in the future.

This discontent is obscured by histories heavily focused on memory and a corresponding reliance on cultural sources, such as war books, to explain the conflict's social history. While an important part of the war's legacy, retrospective focus on commemoration is a poor guide to the lived realities of the postwar present. In the war's aftermath many young veterans struggled to find work. Combined with the prospect of renewed war in Europe, their unemployment added to a growing list of postwar grievances, including failure to secure adequate assistance for wounded and traumatized veterans. These unresolved complaints about the pension system, the soldier

settlement schemes, and the mishandling of postwar canteen funds (particularly in Ontario) more than undermined the war generation's belief in the war, it left them deeply disillusioned with its meaning.

## Keywords

Great War, First World War, Canada, Ontario, generation, disillusionment, Canteen Fund, veterans.

Dedicated to Audrey and Donald Scott

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My grandparents, Audrey and Donald Scott, to whom this dissertation is dedicated, helped spark my love of history and I am forever thankful for their encouragement. Bruce and Susanne, my parents, as well as my brother Brendan and his wife Joanne, provided significant financial, moral, and intellectual support, not least by enduring lengthy discussions about arcane points of Canadian history. The same should be said of my parents-in-law, Danny and Grace. Together, my family kept me grounded and helped me see this project to completion.

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## Introduction

On 3 June 1916, private A.Y. Jackson huddled in a trench with shells exploding all around. He was a member of the 60<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). The future Group of Seven member was witnessing the battle of Mount Sorrel, near Ypres. The day before, the German army detonated four mines under the British lines and the result was chaos. By morning, a “hurricane of fire” erupted in the trenches that left the Canadians stunned, deaf, and unable to retaliate.<sup>1</sup> Major-General Malcolm Mercer, commander of the newly formed Canadian 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, was killed, along with most who held the front lines. Reserve and communication trenches were in disarray. There were conflicting messages about whether the battalion should proceed and the German shelling made it “impossible to get the men in position.”<sup>2</sup> Jackson’s battalion formed part of the Canadian counter-attack. “They just simply plastered us,” he recalled, as the remaining troops were forced to advance among the

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<sup>1</sup> Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916* (Toronto: Viking, 2007), 350.

<sup>2</sup> Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 4942, 60th Battalion War Diary, 3 June 1916.

corpses. He further remembered how “You’d look down and see a little kid of about fifteen.”<sup>3</sup>

The shellfire increased. Suddenly another barrage came crashing down, covering the troops with “dirt, dust, and pieces of brick.” A shell burst a few feet away with a “wicked sound,” followed by a “green yellow ball of smoke.” Next came the “cries and groans.” Jackson’s lieutenant turned pale and fell “in a huddled heap.” A comrade looked “in dismay at a great spurt of blood coming from his arm, which was only hanging by a few shreds of flesh.”<sup>4</sup> By day’s end, Jackson was wounded with a shrapnel ball in his shoulder.

The fighting left A.Y. Jackson disillusioned. With little desire to return to the front, he wrote his cousin, Florence Clement, telling her that he had lost all “illusions” about war. “I don’t care how long I take to get ready for the trenches,” he confessed. He would do as ordered “but not much more.” In Jackson’s mind, the war had become mass slaughter. There was no place for individual distinction. “Glory and decorations are not for the private soldiers,” he wrote. He commented to Florence that individual men were less important than “a box of jam.”<sup>5</sup> Ironically, the average

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3 LAC, RG 41 [Hereafter *Flanders’ Fields*], Vol. 16, 85th Battalion (misfiled), A.Y. Jackson, tape 3/3.

4 LAC, MG 30, D 111 [Hereafter MacDonald papers], Vol. 1, folder 2, Jackson to MacDonald, 10 September 1916.

5 LAC, MG 30, D 351 [Hereafter Jackson papers], Vol. 95, folder 6, Jackson to Florence Clement, 26 August 1916.

soldier only stood out when he resisted. A “private is nothing, unless he disobeys orders.” Then a “big fuss” ensues and he “gets shot.”<sup>6</sup>

Jackson rarely spoke about the war in the years that followed and his autobiography glosses over his time in the trenches.<sup>7</sup> Despite this silence, however, his sense of the war’s futility lasted long after the conflict ended. In the early 1960s, he sat down with the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) to record an interview as part of its First World War series, *Flanders’ Fields*.<sup>8</sup> The program marked the fiftieth anniversary of the war and its producers interviewed hundreds of veterans about their experiences. Jackson explained that he considered the war “sheer murder.”

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6 LAC, MacDonald papers, Vol. 1, folder 2, Jackson to MacDonald, 31 May 1916.

7 The autobiography focuses almost exclusively on his time as a war artist. His experiences prior to this, including his enlistment and time spent in the 60th Battalion, are relegated to two brief paragraphs. These say nothing about how the war affected him and limit comment of the war to the weather, Jackson’s inability to paint in the trenches, and the “weird, ruined landscapes” of Ypres.

He describes the experience as follows: “Our first day in France was not auspicious. We marched through Le Havre in snow and slush, with no one taking any notice of us. A five-mile march brought us to an empty camp in the dark; the flaps had not been tied up and the tents were full of wet snow. And, army fashion, our field kitchens had gone astray. We crawled into the tents and huddled together for warmth, having had nothing to eat since breakfast.

But Flanders in early spring was beautiful, as we Ypres by moonlight and the weird ruined landscapes under the light of flares or rockets. Apart from a few diagrams, enlargements from maps and plans of the sectors we were in, I had no chance of doing any sketching.” See A.Y. Jackson, *A Painter’s Country: The Autobiography of A.Y. Jackson* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, & Co., 1967 [1958]), 36-37.

8 See Teresa Iacobelli, “A Participant’s History?: The CBC and the Manipulation of Oral History,” *Oral History Review* 38.2 (Fall-Winter 2011): 331-348 for a discussion of this series. While Iacobelli points out that the interviewers asked leading questions to manage the answers they received, the interviews themselves, rather than the broadcast transcript, are more revealing about what veterans recalled during these interviews.

Passchendaele, for example, was a “perfectly useless” battle.<sup>9</sup> The Group of Seven artist was in his early eighties at the time of the interview but it was clear that his wartime disillusion remained. And yet, he did not regret serving. Jackson was proud of his experiences, both because of what they taught him about humanity and for what he and his comrades experienced overseas. Together, they built “a wonderful army” that was “Canadian and independent.”<sup>10</sup> He was thankful that his experiences had given him a “great respect for human beings.”<sup>11</sup>

Greg Clark was another veteran to the Great War. As a young journalist, he enlisted with the Canadian Mounted Rifles in 1916 and served more than two years overseas. At Vimy Ridge, he took command of his unit when the battalion’s officers were killed, an action that earned the young lieutenant the Military Cross. Clark diared some of these experiences in 1919 and 1920. Combat, he wrote, was an experience “too vast, too unknown for conception,” filled with “terror” and a “paralyzing, terrific tumult.”<sup>12</sup> Other recollections were more graphic. During one artillery barrage, Clark was struck by his friend’s leg, which was “severed at the hip” and hurled through the air. Seconds later, Clark wrote, “over our

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9 LAC, *Flanders’ Fields*, Vol. 16, 85th Battalion, A.Y. Jackson, 2/3.

10 LAC, MacDonald papers, Vol. 1, folder 2, Jackson to MacDonald, 6 April 1918.

11 LAC, *Flanders’ Fields*, Vol. 16, 85th Battalion, A.Y. Jackson, 1/3.

12 LAC, R8258 [Hereafter Clark papers], Vol 2, Diary and Memoir (Dec 1919-1920).

heads sailed the rest of Johnson, landing 40 yards from where he was first hit.”<sup>13</sup>

Such experiences inevitably affected Clark’s psyche: “Two years [of] continuous service with the [Battalion], with no relaxation whatever, just endless indolence fringed with a petty fussing activity, did something serious to my mind and spirit.”<sup>14</sup> Yet whatever horrors he endured, Clark maintained that he had “a decent time ... compared with so many others.” Decades later, in the 1960s, he took solace that his experiences had shaped him as a man. “I was a bookworm, a quiet little bookworm when I went [off to war],” Clark explained, “and I came home a rather tough character.”

Clark’s experience as a journalist, combined with his memories of his service, made him an ideal subject for the CBC’s *Flanders’ Fields*, the same program that interviewed A.Y. Jackson in the 1960s. Clark’s memories of the conflict, however, did not conform to the program’s preconceived narrative that portrayed the war as futile. While some veterans (including A.Y. Jackson) held this view, Clark did not.<sup>15</sup> He believed the war experience had matured him as a man and he bristled at suggestions to the contrary. Nonetheless, his sense of the conflict’s wider meaning was less certain. Many veterans struggled in the aftermath of the war and Clark

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13 LAC, Clark papers, Vol. 2, Diary and Memoir (Dec 1919-1920).

14 LAC, Clark papers, Vol. 2, Diary and Memoir (Dec 1919-1920).

15 French veterans held similar views to Canadians. See Leonard V. Smith, *The Embattled Self: French Soldiers’ Testimony of the Great War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 201.

believed their plight was as much a part of the conflict's legacy as his maturation.<sup>16</sup>

The war that these men endured was a tragedy. It exposed them to unimaginable horrors, often with little discernible sense of purpose, either on the battlefield or at the diplomatic tables. When it finally ended, the armistice and resulting peace proved a pyrrhic victory, achieving little except halting the war's slaughter. Peacetime proved an even greater disappointment. In place of the ideal world they had hoped for, veterans returned to economic uncertainty, declining health, and the prospect of another war. As Lester Pearson, future Prime Minister and Great War veteran, recalled, war's end "saved ... my generation and gave the world, not peace, but a reprieve."<sup>17</sup>

By 1919, it was already clear that the war transformed the lives of those who lived it. The conflict was a shocking experience and many men, including A.Y. Jackson and Greg Clark, considered it the formative event in their lives. The war remolded Jackson's views of Canada; it recast his approach to art; it reshaped his identity.<sup>18</sup> So important was the experience that he, like countless men of his generation, considered it *the* central dividing line for the rest of their lives. As Jackson explained, the war's

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16 LAC, RG41, Vol. 17, 4th C.M.R., *Flanders' Fields*: Greg Clark, tape 2/3, n.d.

17 Lester B. Pearson, *Mike: The Memoirs of the Rt. Hon. Lester B. Pearson*, Vol. 1 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1972), 38.

18 Laura Brandon, *Transformations: A.Y. Jackson & Otto Dix* (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of History, 2014). See too Brandon, "Shattered Landscape: The Great War and the Art of the Group of Seven," *Canadian Military History*, 10:1 (Winter 2001): 58-66.



impact was such that “before the war” and “after the war” became a chronological divide, as important as “B.C. and A.D.”<sup>19</sup> His experience was not unique. Countless veterans considered the war a defining moment. It demarcated their lives into distinct periods: “before the war, during the war, and after the war.”<sup>20</sup> These men came of age during the conflict and the fact that they could be intensely proud and at the same time deeply disillusioned by the experience reflects a central paradox of the generation’s understanding of the Great War.

This dissertation attempts to explain this paradox. But how powerful and influential was this sense of disillusionment? How did it manifest in the generation that fought the war as this group of men struggled to find meaning in the postwar world? What role did it play in shaping the interwar period in Canada? The unique approach offered in this study rests on Lester Pearson’s reference to “my generation.” Men who joined up to serve between 1914 and 1918 were predominantly young. With survival came a sense of transformation that reshaped their collective sense of self. While postwar life in the 1920s and 1930s was difficult for most people in Canada, the war generation maintained that it was uniquely affected, indeed shaped, by this tragic conflict. Those who went to war grappled with haunting memories and restlessness, as well as the physical, psychological, and emotional traumas that clearly set them apart. They

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19 LAC, *Flanders’ Fields*, Vol. 16, 85th Battalion, A.Y Jackson, 1/3.

20 Dan Vernon’s interview with the War and Canadian Society Project’s oral history is found in Daphne Read, ed., *The Great War and Canadian Society: An Oral History* (New Hogtown Press, 1978), 215. Dan Vernon is a pseudonym.

came to identify 'generationally', an identification that bound them together for the rest of their lives.

Canadians at home lived a very different war. It was every bit as real but, being more distant and abstract than life in the trenches, the experience did not forge a comparable collective identity. Even those who lost loved ones could never understand what their sons, brothers, or fathers, went through. These 'different wars' in turn shaped reactions to the conflict's aftermath.<sup>21</sup> When the war ended, commemoration of the conflict was widely embraced and Canadians celebrated their victory while mourning the nation's fallen. These public displays of grief helped the nation come to terms with its staggering losses and bridged divisions that spanned the frontlines and the home front. Few veterans disagreed with a desire to enshrine remembrance at the forefront of public discourse. But, for the war generation, the conflict's meaning amounted to more than its memory. Postwar life was a world for which they had fought and sacrificed. Its challenges also influenced their understanding of the conflict and, as they endured countless setbacks in the years and decades that followed, men's criticisms of the war and life in Canada increased.

Between 1914 and 1918, men 'joined up' for different reasons. While these motivations varied, by the time the war ended, they shared common expectations for the future. Often, these remained little more than vague notions of a better life, what many described simply as a 'square deal'. As time passed, however, veterans' struggle to create this future fell on deaf

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<sup>21</sup> Janet K. Watson, *Fighting Different Wars: Experience, Memory, and the First World War in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

ears. Canadians, veterans complained, were more concerned with remembering the dead than embracing the plight of the living. Faced with rising unemployment, beset by war-related injuries, and denied their pensions, support, and life they believed they had earned, men started to question the meaning and value of their sacrifices.

This wave of postwar disillusionment was not unique to Canada. It swept through Germany, Britain, and the United States. Veterans identified as a Lost Generation. Yet, despite the widespread nature of their discontent, a disillusioned war generation does not fit the general interpretation of postwar Canada. Histories of the era highlight the growth of nationalism, not the existence of a Canadian lost generation. Disillusionment did not fit the national narrative. Accounts of the war's memory are dismissive of disillusioned veterans, a group also ignored in examinations of postwar economic discord. Even histories of the veterans' movement manage to shy away from discussion of the war's wider meaning or how it was shaped by life in postwar Canada.

Public commemoration was a sacred cow, which men found difficult to critique without risking rebuke. A lack of postwar debate about veterans' grievances does not, however, mean that debate did not exist. Rather it occurred in a different context to public commemoration. Such criticisms were often private and deeply rooted in the war experience. To these veterans, their position honoured, rather than insulted, the war's memory. If anything, it was postwar Canada that failed to ensure that the nation's sacrifices were properly valued.

Outside of Canada, veterans from other nations reacted bitterly to the war. German Dadaists, such as George Grosz and Otto Dix, produced grotesque artwork that critiqued the worst of the war's horrors. Others found a voice for their discontent in the written word. This international literature, which included novels such as Ernst Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*, was highly personal, reflecting the transformative power the conflict had on young men. It took many forms, from poetry and novels to memoirs, as well as political, social, and cultural critiques. Collectively, it was identified as the work of a lost generation—a term that encompassed postwar disappointment and the importance youth played in shaping these veterans' place in postwar society.

Canadians, however, did not produce war books in comparable numbers to British, American, or German writers. These works are perhaps the most important cultural record of this generation's discontent, but without a tradition of 'lost' dissent, Canadians have looked elsewhere to study the war's aftermath. Historians turned their attention to the war's public commemoration to argue that Canada did not experience postwar discontent. As a result, Canada's lost generation remains overlooked. While many of the nation's veterans—including Greg Clark—were proud of their part in the war, they could not divorce its experience from the challenges veterans faced. To these men, its legacy was inseparable from its aftermath. Continued focus on the public's reaction to the war, however, overlooks the relationship between its meaning and men's wartime and postwar lives. It does not explain how the nation's veterans responded generationally; it

does not indicate that they were as critical of postwar life as veterans from other nations.

Canada's war generation was young. It came of age with the war but despite identifying generationally with the conflict, it did not openly discuss its private views of this formative event. Nonetheless, the men's efforts to shape their postwar future demonstrate how the war's aftermath influenced their understanding of the conflict. This generational response also highlights how disparate groups willingly identified with each other and makes the link between the war's aftermath and postwar disillusion. Yet, the understanding of men's war experience was never static. It began during the war and continued to evolve as their lives moved forward. The events men experienced during the conflict took on new and often altered meanings in light of the challenges and opportunities of the 1920s, 1930s, and beyond. And, while each veteran's recollection of his wartime experience was legitimate, this dissertation privileges the private discussions men shared with each other and with the organizations that made up the expanding veterans health and financial bureaucracies emerging during and after the war. The letters and statements made in these contexts were rarely concerned with how the war was publicly remembered. Instead, they focused on the central questions of this dissertation: what were the war's consequences and how did they affect men's understanding of the conflict in its aftermath?

What follows is not an exhaustive history of a Canadian generation or of Canada's Great War. Rather, it is a study of the consequences of war,

revealed by a group of men who identified generationally.<sup>22</sup> The concept of a generation appealed to them because it captured their sense of shared experience and collective difference. Although often reluctant to speak publicly, collectively they did so in ways that cut across a spectrum of sources. These range from art to poetry, to writings on economics, politics, and the war itself. Their understanding of the conflict was, nonetheless, unique to each man and cannot be told chronologically. Despite this understanding, their sense of the war's meaning shared common themes, including an embrace of a generational identity, empathy with other returned men, a desire to ensure veterans received a fair postwar deal, and the importance of the war's memory.

Chapter One introduces the relationship between age and different understandings of the war's meaning. It makes a demographic case for reconsidering the existence of a Canadian war generation. It further argues that Canadians did identify generationally and that analysis of their collective identity helps us to better understand how veterans made sense of their Great War experience. In addition, the chapter contextualizes the history of the lost generation to explain why Canadian historians have shied away from generational analyses of the war and its impact.

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22 Women, as Grace Morris Craig pointed out, could take ownership of the war experience as much as men. Over 3,000 nursing sisters took part in the First World War and women at home unquestionably experienced the war's impact. Nonetheless, this study focuses on the male response. Experience was a critical part of the war generation's self-identity, particularly for veterans. Women were not in the trenches, their experiences were different, and so they could not understand what the men suffered. Despite this, the focus on men does not mean that female sources or perspectives are ignored. Indeed, the letters from women to provincial aid agencies, often written on behalf of their husbands (and sometimes without their husband's knowledge), are revealing. See Grace Morris Craig, *But This Is Our War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

Chapter Two argues that a focus on the war's literary legacy has overshadowed the war's generational impact. Canadians knew what the war cost but there were stark divisions between generations over how to understand these costs. To those who came of age with the conflict, it seemed as if their elders did not appreciate the transformative aspect of the war. Such differences played out in the era's literature, but the distinctions between Canada's literary market and those in England and the U.S. obscure how formative an event the Great War was for Canada's young men and reflect the disillusionment of the war generation.

Canada's interwar fiction may not have addressed the generational disillusionment but some writers certainly did. Although disparate, their critiques of postwar life demonstrate how men's youth, rather than politics or profession, defined their understanding of the conflict. Chapter Three examines how the men who came of age with the war discussed its aftermath in Canada. The generation's leading voices were varied. They included conservative politicians, such as George Drew and Robert Manion, historians such as Frank Underhill, book reviewers such as Bill Deacon, and writers such as Will Bird and Frank Parker Day. The papers of Bird and Deacon also include correspondence from 'average' Canadians whose views aligned closely to these more public men. Collectively, this diverse group analyzed the war's memory, the direction of postwar Canada, and the state of international affairs. Their concerns over another European conflict were also echoed in the halls of power, but bureaucrats such as Clifford Clark and O.D. Skelton limited their criticisms to private memoranda and ministerial advice. The debate Canadians were having

outside the halls of power reveals the levels of disenchantment of the war generation with postwar society.

Although maintaining peace remained an overarching goal for the war generation throughout the interwar period, an inability to prevent another war was not the leading cause of disillusionment. Rather, the most disheartened of veterans were disillusioned because postwar Canada failed to live up to wartime ideals. Returned men fought the war for a 'square deal', but recession and then depression crippled efforts at economic re-integration. Canadian officials continued to promise support for veterans but, despite such commitments, the veterans felt let down. Notwithstanding this ongoing political engagement, commitments to address the problem of the returned man remained vague. These solutions also failed to address the challenge of postwar unemployment, a leading cause of the generation's disenchantment.

Chapter Four discusses how the difficulties in finding jobs impacted veterans. While any examination of returned men and their failure to find work during the 1920s and 1930s is hampered by a lack of statistical data, the available records, particularly those from provincial Soldiers' Aid Commissions, reveal that veterans faced a more dire employment situation than is generally acknowledged. The tendency to cast the interwar era as a period of boom and bust, framed by the Roaring Twenties and the Dirty Thirties has masked how unemployment proved an ongoing issue. Yet, for countless veterans the struggle to find work was real and, by the time of the Depression, it had systematically undermined belief in the war's meaning.



An inability to find work was only one contributing factor to the war generation's postwar disillusionment. The system of veterans' assistance also challenged men's sense of the war's purpose. Chapter Five considers the relationship between the economic challenges veterans faced and their relationship to wider problems of demobilization and re-establishment. Between 1914 and 1918, Canada's leaders made sweeping promises of support to the country's soldiers —including a commitment to provide viable postwar employment. Apart from a rehabilitative program for invalided soldiers, however, a pension was often the extent of available aid. Yet, during the 1920s and early 1930s, the vast majority of returned men did not qualify for a federal pension. For these 'able-bodied' men, the only option for employment assistance was the soldier settlement plans in the Canadian West and at Kapuskasing, in northern Ontario. While support for these farming schemes remained strong, they proved ill suited to the needs of veterans. Their failure was made worse by the veterans' sense that they had become lost and abandoned amidst the maze-like layers of the postwar re-establishment system.

When historians in Canada have considered the 'problem of the returned man', they often focus on the role of the federal government. Ottawa's soldier settlement schemes, the pension system, and the government's relationship with organized veterans' associations are all important parts of this history. Yet, the provinces were just as involved in programs of re-integration and rehabilitation. Provincial control over health and education meant that the majority of able-bodied men interacted as readily with their respective province as they did with Ottawa. Ontario's

academic and provincial archives provide critical sources for this dissertation. Nearly one-third of all soldiers hailed from Ontario and the sheer size of this contribution forced Queen's Park to take an active role in the lives of returned soldiers. It was one of only two provinces that established a soldier settlement plan (the other was in B.C.), and the only one to call a royal commission to investigate why a settlement scheme failed. Ontario's Soldiers' Aid Commission was also at the forefront of the country's response to re-establishing returned men. The scope of records that survive from these institutions is second only to those created by the federal government. In the case of the provincial canteen funds, the records for Ontario exceed anything surviving in Ottawa or the rest of Canada.

The Ontario source base complements the federal records and those from individual veterans. The inter-relationship between the federal government, the provinces, and returned men is further demonstrated by the case of Canada's canteen funds. Chapters Six and Seven present a case study of Ontario's fund in particular to illustrate how the problem of the returned man, veterans' organizations, and failed efforts by federal and provincial governments were inextricably linked.

The canteen funds comprised the profits of soldiers' canteen purchases while overseas. After the war, they were divided between the provinces and used to supplement the federal pension system. Chapter Six traces the history of the fund from its wartime inception to its eventual disbursement in the late 1920s. Chapter Seven picks up the story in Ontario specifically and focuses on how men used the fund in the subsequent decades. The province contributed the largest number of men to the war

effort and, as a result, received the lion's share of the fund's profits. The surviving records from its canteen files contain thousands of letters written by returned men and their families which detail how failure to address veterans' economic and health challenges affected the family economy, men's belief in their position as breadwinner, and their broader understanding of their generation's place in society and its relation to the war's meaning. Their letters indicate how this generation did not limit its postwar engagement with the war to commemoration and remembrance. The war was intimately related to their postwar world and their correspondence with the canteen fund trustees demonstrates their anger at its failure to meet their expectations.

## Chapter 1

### A Generation of Men

*"I knew those at home would never understand ... [and we], of the brotherhood, could understand the soldier but never explain him. All of us would remain a separate, definite people, as if branded by a monstrous despotism."*<sup>1</sup>

- Will Bird, *And We Go On* (1930)

"Age and differences of age," the sociologist S.N. Eisenstadt wrote, "are among the most basic and crucial aspects of human life and determinants of human destiny."<sup>2</sup> This was the case for those who came of age with the Great War. The war generation was profoundly shaped by this cataclysmic event. The experience set it apart from society and influenced its understanding of the conflict well into old age.

The Lost Generation and its postwar disillusionment is one description of this generational reaction. Others include the 'generation of 1914' and the

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<sup>1</sup> Will R. Bird, *And We Go On: A Memoir of the Great War* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014), 231.

<sup>2</sup> S.N. Eisenstadt, *From Generation to Generation: Age Groups and Social Structure* (New Jersey: Transaction, 2009), 21.

'front generation.'<sup>3</sup> Whatever the term, the conflict's transformative power was widely recognized during and after the war, so much so that British journalist Philip Gibbs believed the idea influenced "millions of men" across the Western world. This notion that the Great War forged a distinct generation took fullest form shortly after the conflict ended, particularly in the era's literature and sociological study. It was then that theorists such as Karl Mannheim, who authored a pioneering essay on the formation of generations in 1923, began to investigate generation as a social category. Authors, including Ernest Hemingway and Erich Maria Remarque, also employed the concept in their work, much of which analyzed the war and its aftermath.<sup>4</sup> In the 1920s and 1930s veterans were increasingly troubled by the

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3 See for example Robert Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979) and Richard Bessel, "The 'Front Generation' and the Politics of Weimar Germany," in Mark Roseman, ed., *Generations in Conflict: Youth Revolt and Generation Formation in Germany, 1770-1968* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

4 Karl Mannheim, "The Problem of Generations," in Paul Kecskemeti, ed., *Karl Mannheim: Essays* (London: Routledge, 1952), 276-322. Mannheim, along with others such as José Ortega y Gasset, devoted considerable study to this new interest in generations, helping to popularize it as a concept. He combined generation with class to demonstrate that generational groups were framed by more than birth years. Such groupings were formed by common life-stages as well as historical events. When combined, these two categories were recognized as critical to the formation of the individual. Such theories appealed to the war generation because it acknowledged that historic events, such as war, could shape a generation's outlook. Mannheim's work gave voice to what this group already sensed: they were different because of their war experience. The popularity of generation increased as a result of the war. In the postwar era, generation was understood as more than an historical force. According to Cynthia Comaccio, it was a "theory of social change as well as a means of identification." See Cynthia Comaccio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 7. Hemingway opened his breakthrough novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, with the epitaph "You are all a lost generation," which he attributed to Gertrude Stein. See Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises* (New York: Scribner, 2006 [1926]). He discussed the conversation that led to this comment in greater detail in *A Moveable Feast* (New York: Scribner's, 1964), 25-31. Robert Graves, *Goodbye*

absence of a “clear line of thought or conviction” that explained why the conflict had been fought or what its effects would be. They found themselves “thinking hard” over the conflict’s meaning, especially since the war’s outcome lacked the certainty of purpose that originally led them to arms. And, as their expected postwar lives failed to materialize, they became ever more critical of its outcome.<sup>5</sup>

Disillusionment set in, a legacy now embodied in the notion of a Lost Generation. Whether in Germany, Britain, the U.S., or Canada, after the war disaffected youths struggled to make sense of the conflict. The British officer T.E. Lawrence, best known as Lawrence of Arabia, tried for years to distance himself from his wartime experience. He complained that he could not “get away” from the war. There was no escape. His friend—the poet and classicist Robert Graves—suffered similar postwar distress. Lawrence realized that Graves was “riddled” like an “old table-leg with worms.” Their contemporary—the writer and poet Siegfried Sassoon—was also troubled and seemed to Lawrence to be “yawing about like a ship ablack.” He posed a germane question: “What’s the matter with us all?” Lawrence lamented that the war infected his generation with a malarial-like disease, which kept “coming out months and years after in recurrent attacks.”<sup>6</sup>

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to *All That* (London: Penguin, 1960 [1929]). Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (New York: Ballantyne, 1982 [1929]).

5 Philip Gibbs, *Now It Can Be Told* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1920), 513, 519.

6 T.E. Lawrence to Robert Graves, n.d. [possibly 1924], David Garnett, ed., *The Letters of T.E. Lawrence of Arabia* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1938), 463.

In his war novel, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, perhaps the most famous piece of war literature written by an ex-combatant, Remarque grappled with a similar sense of disenchantment. He linked the war and the idea of generation directly. As the epitaph explained, his book intended to “tell of a generation of men who, even though they may have escaped shells, were destroyed by the war.”<sup>7</sup> This sense that even the survivors were destroyed by the war resonated deeply for those reeling from loss. Individuals, families, and communities had all suffered. A lost generation, whatever its individual definition, served as an all-encompassing idea that helped society share in the trauma of the war.

For years after the conflict ended, the war generation found itself haunted by memories. Strive as they might, these men struggled to give their recollections meaningful shape. Lawrence remained troubled by how the memory of the Great War dwarfed those of all “other wars, so that they seem trivial, half-amusing incidents.” By 1923, he admitted that his war experience was a “nightmare.” He tried in vain to exorcize the demons by writing a memoir, *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (1922), but the process led him to go “off [his] head.” As he explained to Graves, he failed to find “peace of mind.”<sup>8</sup>

While Lawrence never succeeded in coming to terms with his war experience, other writers, including Robert Graves, had more success. His memoir, *Goodbye to All That*, resonated with his peers because it said “something that all our generation is trying to say.” Even Lawrence was able

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<sup>7</sup> Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (New York: Ballantine, 1987), n.p.

<sup>8</sup> Lawrence to Graves, 8 September 1923, *Letters of T.E. Lawrence*, 430-431.

to identify with Graves' book.<sup>9</sup> But, while some writers produced work that spoke to the war generation, most published material which presented a distorted view of the conflict. The desire for explanations of the war increased after 1918 and publishing houses attempted to feed demand with accounts and depictions of all types. The resulting histories and overviews, however, added little clarity. They tried to explain the conflict's causes, conduct, and strategy, but offered little about what the war was like as a human experience. These accounts lacked the sense of personal perspective required to understand its impact on the men who lived it.

The novels and memoirs of the war generation provided an antidote to strategic histories. But they were about more than an individual's war experience. They personalized the conflict at the expense of discussion of the war's wider context or causes. Remarque's *All Quiet*, for example, is not a novel about Germany at war. Rather, it begins and ends with the life of its main character, Paul Bäumer. The same is true of Edmund Blunden's *Undertones of War*. It opens with Blunden joining the war and ends not with 11 November, but when he returns to England in March 1918.<sup>10</sup> Canadian works followed a similar pattern. James Pedley's memoir, *Only This* (1927), begins in France and ends with the Hundred Days, after Pedley is wounded.<sup>11</sup> Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* (1930) starts with its main character's enlistment in Montreal and ends with his wounding in 1918. Will

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9 Lawrence to Graves, 5 May 1929, *Letters of T.E. Lawrence*, 658.

10 Samuel Hynes, *A War Imagined: The First World War and English Culture* (London: Random House, 1990), 426.

11 James Pedley, *Only This: A War Retrospect* (Ottawa: Graphic, 1927).



Bird's memoir, *And We Go On* (1930), is similarly focused on his war experience. It opens with Bird's attempt to enlist and ends aboard a troop ship as he returns to Canada.<sup>12</sup> These books did not explain what the war was about. They described what it was like to experience.

This literary exploration of the war highlighted the importance of youth to veterans' understanding of the conflict. Harrison dedicated his book to "the bewildered youths—British, Australian, Canadian, and German—who were killed in that wood a few miles beyond Amiens on August 8, 1918."<sup>13</sup> His intentions were similar to those of Remarque, who felt critics misunderstood *All Quiet* by mistakenly interpreting the book as a study of the war rather than its intended purpose—an examination of the war's impact on the young men who lived it. In Germany, Remarque was so riled by this misinterpretation that he wrote a sequel, *The Road Back*, which clarified his original intention: "I merely wanted to awaken understanding for a generation that more than all others had found it difficult to make its way back from four years of death, struggle, and terror, to the peaceful fields of work and progress."<sup>14</sup>

The driving force behind this generational identity was an interconnected relationship that hinged on age, memory, and experience. The majority of men who went to war between 1914 and 1918 were young and

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<sup>12</sup> Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed* (London: Noel Douglas, 1930).

<sup>13</sup> Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed*, n.p.

<sup>14</sup> Remarque, quoted in Modris Eksteins, *The Rites of Spring: The Great War and the Birth of the Modern Age* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1989), 283.

their youth was integral to their future self-identification as the generation of 1914. In Canada, most men who enlisted were under thirty, and the majority of these (nearly fifty percent) were between eighteen and twenty-four years of age.<sup>15</sup> These are critical ages in the development of an adult's sense of self because, as Howard Schuman and Amy Coring argue, they constitute a key period for the "formation of long-term memories."<sup>16</sup> They also coincide with the peak reference points for collective memories. For these men, the war experience had a unique and powerful impact on their development.<sup>17</sup> It primed them to understand the war's importance differently than those older or younger. While young men were not the only group to draw lessons from the experience, their age meant that the war retained a unique position as a remembered event in their adult lives. This shared experience simultaneously united and separated the war generation from the rest of society.

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15 See Figure 1. Data derived from the LAC CEF Service File open data set and figures from the Canadian Great War Project. See [www.canadiangreatwarproject.com](http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com)

16 Howard Schuman and Amy Coring, "Collective Memory and Autobiographical Memory: Similar But Not the Same," *Memory Studies* 7:2 (2014): 146. See too Schuman's earlier work with Jacqueline Scott, "Generations and Collective Memory," *American Sociological Review* 54 (June 1989): 359-81.

17 Schuman and Coring, "Collective Memory and Autobiographical Memory," 151.

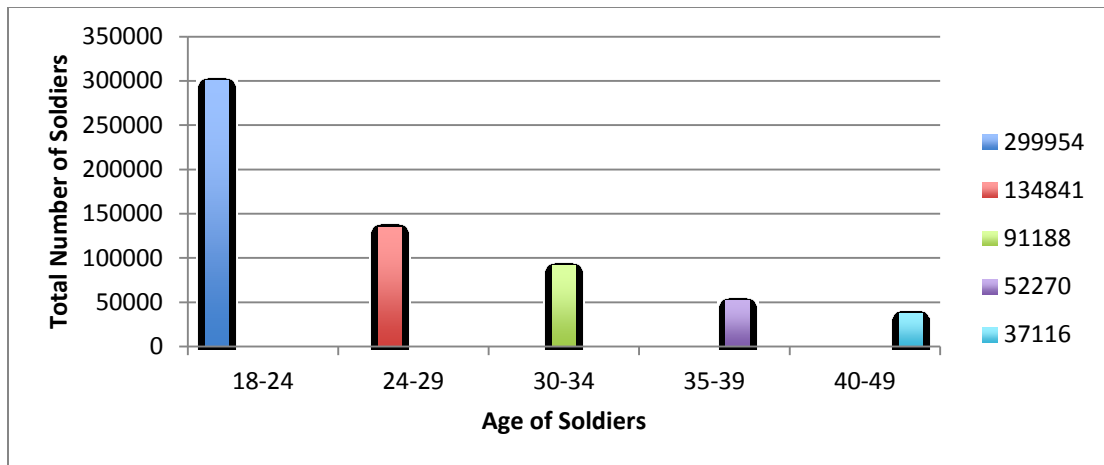


Figure 1. Canadian Soldiers by age at enlistment, aged 18-49

The relationship between early adulthood and the formation of an individual's identity was not exclusive to the war generation. What set it apart, however, was a collective inability to explain the war to the rest of society. From the time they returned home, veterans argued that those who were not there could "never understand" the conflict.<sup>18</sup> "You in Canada with your reading of the war," Canadian Group of Seven painter F.H. Varley maintained, "cannot realize at all what war is like." Varley only reached France in the latter stages of 1918, but he was a keen observer and his accounts make it clear that he was not spared the conflict's horrors.<sup>19</sup> The

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18 Will R. Bird, *And We Go On* (Toronto: Hunter-Rose, 1930), 342.

19 His letters home contain vivid descriptions of ghastly scenes. Some of the most disturbing describe "turned up graves," with "freakishly mutilated" dead, some "[h]eadless, legless, [or] stomachless," and others a "perfect body and a passive face," save for a "broken empty skull." See LAC, MG 30 D401 [Hereafter Varley papers], Vol. 1, folder D, Varley to Maud, n.d. These observations date from Varley's time as an official war artist. His baptism of fire came during the carnage of the Last Hundred Days, which were witness to some of the most difficult fighting of the entire conflict. During that period the Canadian Corps suffered 42,600 casualties, most of which, Tim Cook points out, would have been sustained by the infantry "at the sharp end," who numbered 50,000 men. See Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Viking, 2008), 552. Jack Granatstein cites similar figures, noting that the Corps suffered 45,83 killed, wounded, or missing between 8

sights he witnessed convinced him of the relationship between direct experience and a detached understanding of the war. Anybody wishing to make sense of the experience, he told his wife Maud, had to both “see it & live it.” Otherwise, “you cannot know.”<sup>20</sup> Varley’s descriptions of the brutal realities of trench warfare were as detailed as any personal account, but even vivid details were incapable of conveying what the war was truly like.<sup>21</sup>

Veterans brought this belief in an experiential gulf home with them.<sup>22</sup> It was not only painful to relive and attempt to relay to others; it was also futile. “[He] talked about the experience of those four years to nobody,” John Berger recalled about his father’s postwar silence.<sup>23</sup> Will Bird’s daughter remembered her father refusing to talk about the war. Instead, he dealt with it

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August 1918 and 11 November. See J.L. Granatstein, *The Greatest Victory: Canada’s One Hundred Days, 1918* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2014), 174. See too Shane Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (St. Catharines: Vanwell, 2004).

20 LAC, Varley papers, Vol. 1, folder D, Varley to Maud, n.d. Such observations were not limited to Canadians, or to the ground war. In his well regarded memoir, V.M. Yeates wrote about the air war that “‘It’s no use telling the truth ... They won’t believe it. They have to find it out for themselves.’” Yeates, *Winged Victory* (London: Grub Street, 2005 [1934]), 13.

21 Varley’s literary descriptions carry special weight during this period because, although officially in France as a war artist, he was seriously considering writing as a new career. See his letters to Maud for 1918 for multiple examples of his belief in his literary prospects, LAC, Varley papers, Vol. 1, letters to Maud, 1918.

22 Will Bird described how men worried about talking to their families on his boat ride home. “I had been trying to imagine how I would express my feelings when I got home,” he wrote, “and now I knew I never could, none of us could.” See Bird, *And We Go On*, (Rose), 342.

23 John Berger, “Preface” to Gabriel Chevalier, *Fear: A Novel of World War I* (New York: New York Review Books, 2011), xiv.

internally and “sometimes shouted in his sleep.”<sup>24</sup> Charles Yale Harrison suffered “depression, alcohol and drug abuse, and writer’s block in later life.”<sup>25</sup> Varley told Maud that he felt “handicapped” when it came to telling her about the war.<sup>26</sup> Bird, who was perhaps the most prolific of Canada’s war writers, summed up his generation’s inability to describe its experiences when he explained that returned men were doomed to live “in a world apart, prisoners, in chains that would never loosen.”<sup>27</sup>

Each veteran’s isolation was different. Some distanced themselves when writing letters home from the front. Others did so once they returned to Canada. But no matter when their alienation occurred, it became an accepted and common trait that the veterans refused to talk about their war experiences.<sup>28</sup> This reluctance was interpreted as a product of a generation

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24 David Williams, “Introduction” to Bird, *And We Go On* (MQUP), xviii.

25 Peter Webb, “Occupants of Memory: War in Twentieth-Century Canadian Fiction” (Ph.D. diss., Ottawa, 2007), 89.

26 LAC, Varley papers, Vol. 1, Varley to Maud, n.d., “Usual address in London.” Canadians were not alone in their inability to describe the war. British writer Richard Aldington wrote about a similar inability to write about the war: “Those who have attempted to convey any real war experience ... must have felt the torturing sense of something incommunicable.” Aldington quoted in Hynes, *A War Imagined*, 424.

27 Bird, *And We Go On* (Rose), 342.

28 A.Y. Jackson is an example of the many men who began to self-censor as soon as they began corresponding with their families. His letters to his family are long and often detailed aspects of life overseas, but they omit the worst of his experiences in favour of recycled stories and assurances that he was doing well. In reality, however, the war was taking a serious toll, both physically and psychologically. He admitted as much to his friend and mentor J.E.H Macdonald in 1916, telling him how “You feel at times so very insignificant” and that trench warfare was “exasperating, it rouses no martial ardour within you. You may get blown to bits five miles back from the trenches, and be quite safe in the trenches, a hundred yards from the Hun. I don’t know what effect it is having on me. My emotions are

and era in which men did not communicate their feelings. For others, it was viewed as a coping mechanism. According to Ted Barris, men could “never tell the rough stories, the remembrances of destruction,” or “revisit the moments of death and dying” which risked bringing back the horrors. They needed to remain stoic and “under no circumstances” could they let loved ones see them “break down and cry.” Men protected their families “from the truth” by recalling only the war’s antics, quirky tales, or “the odd near miss.”<sup>29</sup>

The silence of the war generation made it easier to bury the “fear, hardship and suffering.” According to General E.M.L. Burns, nobody “*want[ed]* to remember that he was afraid; to remember the death of comrades, the man beside one cut off from life in a second by a rifle or machine-gun bullet, an exploding shell’s conversion of the human body from the image of God to offal.” It was a “merciful dispensation,” Burns explained in his memoir, *General Mud*, that humans were capable of remembering the good in place of the bad.<sup>30</sup> Manipulating memories helped men dwell on

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not stirred very much by it. I don’t feel heroic in the least. ... It’s all so complicated and far away as it is. We have not heroes, and we don’t know nothing except what we see in the newspapers, and we know that’s not true.” See LAC, MacDonald papers, Vol 1, folder 2, Jackson to MacDonald, 31 May 1916.

29 Ted Barris, *Breaking the Silence: Veterans’ Untold Stories from the Great War to Afghanistan* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 2009), 11.

30 Lt-Gen. E.M.L. Burns, *General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., 1970), 7. During his distinguished career, Burns served as a signal officer and staff captain in the First World War, as Commander of the 1st Canadian Corps in Italy during the Second World War, and finally as Commander of the United Nations forces during the United Nations Emergency Force (UNEF) mission to the Suez in 1957. Leslie Frost had similar recollections and described men’s ability to suppress the war’s worst memories as follows: “It is a normal human reaction to avoid the painful descriptions and concentrate on

happier, “funny incidents” and recollections of “better times.” These coping strategies, however, further obscured the links between experience and understanding.

Attempts to understand this generation and its sense of disillusionment have produced considerable scholarship.<sup>31</sup> Much of this work, including Samuel Hynes’ *A War Imagined* (1990), argued that the war’s survivors were “shocked, disillusioned and embittered by their war experiences.” In an earlier book, Stanley Cooperman argued that the impact of the war was “unparalleled” because it “shattered a cultural universe and ... shaped the literature of a generation.”<sup>32</sup> John W. Aldridge believed that authors such as Hemingway wrote under the influence “of the climate of war” and that his generation was both “lost” and “profoundly affected by

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the light and humourous side of the conflict.” See Frost, *Fighting Men* (Toronto: Clarke & Irwin, 1967), 151. Robert Taylor also notes this trend, observing that Victoria’s veterans “prefer[ed] to recall service incidents that were amusing—probably a universal phenomenon.” See Robert Ratcliffe Taylor, *The Ones Who Have to Pay: The Soldier-Poets of Victoria BC in the Great War 1914-1918* (Bloomington: Trafford Publishing, 2013), 70.

31 In addition to the cited work by Bond, Bourke, Eksteins, Fussell, Hynes, Meyer, Watson, and Winter, see too for example Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *1914-1918: Understanding the Great War* (London: Profile Books, 2012); Jean-Jacque Becker, *The Great War and the French People* (Oxford: Berg, 1993); Douglas Mackaman and Michael Mays, eds., *World War I and the Cultures of Modernity* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2000); Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory: The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Review, 2002); Daniel Sherman, *The Construction of Memory in Interwar France* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1999); Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Hambledon and London, 2005); Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995)

32 Stanley Cooperman, *World War I and the American Novel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1967), vii.

[the war] as well as by the literary movements they stimulated.”<sup>33</sup> According to Hynes, the war generation’s critical portrayal of the conflict rejected the values of prewar society and “separated their own generation from the past and from their cultural inheritance.” This particular version of history took form as a “Myth of the War” and resulted in a constructed tale that confirmed “what the war was and what it meant.”<sup>34</sup> The generation was disillusioned because its war had “shattered the possibility of pursuing what society would consider a normal existence.” And, as Modris Eksteins argued, their literary efforts to deal with this disenchantment explored how the war “destroyed the ties, psychological, moral, and real, between the generation at the front and society at home.”<sup>35</sup>

Recognition of the generation’s disillusionment was immediate. In 1922 the English journalist C.E. Montague published *Disenchantment*, one of the earliest critiques of the war’s conduct. Reviewers of the war books also noted the generation’s disaffection. Towards the end of the 1930s David Garnett, the English writer and publisher, summed up how this literature was received: it was the product of “the disgust and bitterness of the generation which had fought and won the war and which found all it had fought for was betrayed.”<sup>36</sup> By the 1960s, the war generation’s disillusionment was widely

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33 John W. Aldridge, *After the Lost Generation: A Critical Study of the Writers of Two World Wars* (New York: Noonday Press, 1959), x.

34 Hynes, *A War imagined*, xi-xii.

35 Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*, 282.

36 David Garnett, ed., “Introduction to Part Three,” *Letters of T.E. Lawrence*, 262. Garnett’s reference to the generation’s disillusionment, their ‘disgust and bitterness’ is an



accepted. As Barbara Tuchman argued in *The Guns of August* (1962), “the war had many diverse results and one dominant one transcending all others: disillusion.”<sup>37</sup>

In the 1970s, acceptance of disillusionment became so entrenched that it was cited as explanation for wider social and political events. Paul Fussell’s highly influential evaluation of the war’s cultural impact, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (1976), linked the generation’s sense of disillusion to its literary embrace of irony, which he believed was central to the cultural memory of the war.<sup>38</sup> Modris Eksteins expanded this argument for the war’s influence on modern memory in *The Rites of Spring*, which argued that the generation’s disenchantment was integral to the development of twentieth-century modernism.<sup>39</sup> The idea of a lost, or disillusioned generation, however, is not without its critics.

Some of the most pointed critiques of postwar disillusionment argue that the literary output of the so-called ‘lost generation’ was not representative of its era. The average soldier did not possess the same levels of education as a T.E. Lawrence, Robert Graves, or Siegfried Sassoon. These ‘elite’ literary accounts, however insightful, are dismissed by scholars such as Rosa Maria Bracco for being “highbrow” and disconnected from the general

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important reminder that such references preceded their popularity in the decades following 1950.

37 Barbara Tuchman, *The Guns of August* (New York: Ballantine, 1994 [1962]), 440.

38 Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977), 28-31.

39 Eksteins, *Rites of Spring*.

sentiments of readers in the 1920s and 1930s. In place of an educated lost generation, Bracco calls for an examination of middlebrow authors, who, she argues, were more representative of how the general public understood the war. Their works, which continued to employ traditional concepts of honour and heroism, were more conventional and less critical of the conflict.<sup>40</sup> The middlebrow version of the war, Janet K. Watson argues, reflected the existence of “different wars” which, if not dismissed by historians, can add new voices to the history of the war’s aftermath. The focus on a specific group of war writers, she claims, has unduly “narrowed” historical perceptions of the “culturally legitimate experience” of the war. In response, Watson calls for more emphasis on experiences outside the front-line trenches. The efforts of these non-combatant roles, including nursing and munitions work, were valuable. Too often, however, these efforts are viewed as secondary to front-line experience, resulting in the marginalization of “alternative views,” especially the roles of women, labourers, and others not clearly defined as “the soldier in the trenches.”<sup>41</sup>

The use of literary sources and personal accounts to make sense of the war’s meaning has also been criticized for distorting the postwar handling of the conflict. Brian Bond criticizes the focus on war books as a study of “*individuals*.” His research considers how men in the British army understood the war while it was being waged. Bond concedes that “numerous”

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40 See for example Rosa Maria Bracco, *Merchants of Hope: British Middlebrow Writers and the First World War, 1919-1939* (Oxford: Berg, 1993) and *Between and Between: Middle Brow Fiction and English Society in the Twenties and Thirties* (History Department: University of Melbourne, 1990) for examples relating to privileging of a select group of British authors.

41 Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, 186

individual accounts exist to support the disenchantment thesis, but argues that concentrating on them exclusively obscures the fact that the military was composed of “groups” and that collective morale remained high throughout the war.<sup>42</sup> David Reynolds is equally dismissive of the value of personal accounts. “Reducing the war conflict to personal tragedies,” he argues, has resulted in a loss of “the big picture.” The war’s history has been “distilled into poetry.” Reynolds also takes issue with the focus on commemoration and mourning, which has further obscured the “direct” impacts of the war. The dead may well have seemed ever-present in the aftermath of the conflict but “life went on after 1918.”<sup>43</sup>

Such criticisms hinge on the argument that these disillusioned works are poor guides to the war’s history. Personal experiences offered vivid descriptions of the horrors of war, but they “largely evaded the crucial issues of what the war was ‘about’ – both on the political and strategic levels.” In Bond’s view, historians who rely too heavily on these accounts fail to acknowledge the limits of their sources. Their subsequent evaluations present a skewed appraisal of the war’s history that assumes the “anti-war” writers were synonymous with those of wider society.<sup>44</sup>

Ironically, the war generation would have likely agreed with this assessment. These ‘lost’ writers never intended to produce explanations of the

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42 Brian Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front: Britain’s Role in Literature and History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 14. Emphasis original.

43 David Reynolds, *The Long Shadow: The Great War and the Twentieth Century* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2013), xv-xvi.

44 Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front*, 28.

war that resonated with society writ large. Although read by the wider public, their books were written with a more limited goal: to explain how the war personally impacted them. In short, their books, novels, and diaries helped shape their memories.<sup>45</sup> The need to bear witness to their time at war reflected a strong desire to record, or testify, to the experience.<sup>46</sup> Some, like Canadian artilleryman Wilfrid Kerr, wished to record his generation's "thoughts, mental attitudes, [and] reactions" for posterity. Kerr hoped that if he shared his knowledge of the war, then it would ensure that the "coming generation" might better understand what he had gone through.<sup>47</sup> Others focused directly on their own experience, including Robert Graves, whose intention for his memoir was to present "the fate of a generation of young men who, at the critical age when they were just beginning to feel the pulse of life, were set face to face with death."<sup>48</sup>

In addition to disillusionment, these writers were also united by a belief in a collective generational identity.<sup>49</sup> As Robert Wohl argued, the idea that the war forged a "generation of 1914" resonated in the two decades that

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<sup>45</sup> Smith, *The Embattled Self*, 13.

<sup>46</sup> Canada's Will Bird, for instance, penned his memoir to examine the "psychic effect it had on its participants." See Bird, *And We Go On* (Rose), 4. Smith, *The Embattled Self*, especially chapter four, "The Novel and the Search for closure," 148-194.

<sup>47</sup> Wilfred Kerr, "Foreword" to *Shrieks and Crashes: The Memoir of Wilfred Kerr, Canadian Field Artillery, 1917* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2005 [1929]), n.p.

<sup>48</sup> Graves to General Ian Hamilton, cited in Wohl, *The Generation of 1914* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1979), 106-107.

<sup>49</sup> Bond argues that not all of the generation's writers identified as disillusioned, but he does not address their wider generational identification. See Bond, *The Unquiet Western Front*, 33-34.

followed. His examination emphasized the elite status of the lost generation authors whom he concluded were never more than a “minority within the elite of the European educated classes.” But he went on to note that their status “in no way annuls the importance that this idea had in the history and consciousness of Europeans,” especially for those who came of age during the war. The popularity of generational thinking, or “generationalism,” remained one of their “most widespread and deeply enrooted convictions.” The postwar emergence of a transnational ‘generation of 1914’ coincided with a “wave of generational thinking.” As a concept, Wohl argues, generation came into its own in tandem with the Great War and he identifies three of the most prominent generational theorists from the period: François Mentré, Karl Mannheim, and José Ortega y Gasset. Wohl claims that their appeal was rooted in an “ideology of youth,” which operated on the premise that “youth was a superior stage of life, beyond which lay degeneration.” For Wohl, the youth of the generation of 1914 was central to its collective identity. Those who survived could more easily divide their lives into pre and post-war, categories that equated with life stages: “youth, young manhood, and maturity.”<sup>50</sup>

More recent scholarship supports Wohl’s conclusions. Joanna Bourke is critical of ideas of disillusion, but she also recognizes that British men who came of age with the war developed a strong generational consciousness. Bourke outlines how men’s bodies were endowed with signs of “age,

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50 Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*, 208, 210, 236-37.

generation, class and ethnicity.”<sup>51</sup> She argues that the war provoked a “major crisis” in British men, which was the result of a need to “reassert manliness” in a society “undergoing rapid change.”<sup>52</sup> Many were bitter about such changes, but their “bitterness was only *one* response to wartime experience.” Her work challenges romanticized portrayals of the importance of wartime comradeship and she finds that servicemen were often alienated from each other. Nonetheless, she contends that a generation of men “were transformed” by the experience and that their “aesthetics of the body” reflected these changes.<sup>53</sup>

Jessica Meyer’s work locates similar links between generation and masculinity. Her study clarifies the relationship between crisis and disillusionment. According to Meyer, men used their experiences in the Great War to “define themselves as men.”<sup>54</sup> While the conflict raged, they viewed their experiences as transformative, creating “healthy, broad-minded men.” More negative views of the war were only expressed after it ended.<sup>55</sup> Disabled

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51 Joanna Burke, *Dismembering the Male: Men’s Bodies, Britain, and the Great War* (London: Reaktion Books, 1996), 11.

52 Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 13-14.

53 Bourke, *Dismembering the Male*, 19-20.

54 Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 2. See too Meyer, “‘The Tuition of Manhood: ‘Sapper’s’ Fiction and the Literature of War” in Mary Hammond and Shafquat Towheed, eds., *Publishing in the First World War: Essays in Book History* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 113-128.

55 See too Stephen Cullen, “Gender and the Great War: British combatants, masculinity and perceptions of women, 1918-1939,” (PhD Diss., Oxford, 1998) and Cullen, “‘The Land of My Dreams,’ The Gendered Utopian Dreams and Disenchantment of British Literary Ex-Combatants of the Great War,” *Cultural and Social History* 8:2 (2011): 195-221.

veterans, for example, found that their wounds undermined ideals of heroic service and domestic and financial independence. Similarly, Meyer argues that many of the ambivalent sentiments found in wartime sources were re-conceptualized after the war as postwar disillusion. Despite the varying nature of men's recollections, the conflict "remained a seminal moment." Although she does not address the existence of a lost generation, Meyer concludes that the "war changed men." Whether through death, physical injury, a developing sense of maturity, or the broadening of horizons, men saw themselves as different, the recognition of which caused them to "construct themselves as a separate generation."<sup>56</sup>

Australian and New Zealand historians have reached similar conclusions about the importance of youth, experience, and a generational understanding of the war's meaning. Bill Gammage argued that "war and youth had bound men closely."<sup>57</sup> Having bonded while overseas, this generation struggled to come to terms with the war's aftermath. According to Gammage, what these men achieved during the war

did not immediately concern most soldiers. They confronted their return to civilian life, and the war and their own expectations had ill equipped them for this. ... Some soldiers, at a disadvantage beside those who had never sailed to defend their country, feared to become civilians again. They felt lost in

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<sup>56</sup> Meyer, *Men of War*, 127, 160-162.

<sup>57</sup> Bill Gammage, *The Broken Years: Australian Soldiers in the Great War* (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974), 266.

a community that could not use the skilled trades of war, and they dreaded a new fight for a livelihood.<sup>58</sup>

Australia and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) veterans believed their wartime ideals were part of their common experience. When the rest of society failed to see this, the generation “stood apart” until it seemed “to some that the war in Europe had created ‘a nation within a nation’” to which only veterans were admitted. “They had become men apart” whose isolation was as much a matter of pride as a burden.<sup>59</sup>

Despite criticism of the disillusionment thesis, historical consensus is emerging that age influenced how “people experienced and responded to the war.” These different understandings were generational, with each cohort interpreting the conflict “through the prism of its own preoccupations.”<sup>60</sup> In Canada, however, debate about the lost generation, and indeed the crucial link between war and generation, has been largely ignored. Canadian historians have never made the case for the war’s generational impact. Instead, they have embraced a nation-building narrative which argues that the Great War was a painful but important step forward in Canada’s inexorable march from colony to nation. These nationalistic blinders have resulted in the privileging of certain voices over others. One result is an assumption that English Canada’s view of the war was largely homogenous. Indeed, with the possible exception of some voices of opposition in rural

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<sup>58</sup> Gammage, *Broken Years*, 269.

<sup>59</sup> Gammage, *Broken Years*, 274-75.

<sup>60</sup> Toby Thacker, *British Culture and the First World War: Experience, Representation and Memory* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 8-9, 268.



farming communities, left-wing radicals, and pacifists,<sup>61</sup> it is generally argued that Canadians' postwar understanding of the war was positive and cut across the boundaries of "region, class, religion, and generation."<sup>62</sup> As a result, the idea of a war generation has never taken hold in Canada. Instead, historians continued to revisit an entrenched narrative that casts Canada's soldiers as heroes, charting the nation's path up and down Vimy Ridge.<sup>63</sup>

The claim that Canada 'matured' during wartime is not new. Early iterations of the thesis date to the Boer War when Colonel George T. Denison, a leader of the Canada First movement, suggested that Canada had a duty to send troops in aid of Britain because Canadians had "been children long enough" and it was time "to show the empire that we have grown to manhood."<sup>64</sup> By the time of the Great War, Max Aitken's *Canada in Flanders* expanded the argument by associating the quality of Canada's "manhood" with its battlefield successes, especially during the defense of Ypres in 1915.<sup>65</sup>

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61 See for example the debates over masculinity and self-worth that Robert Stead explores with his character Gander in *Grain* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2010 [1926]).

62 Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 40.

63 At his 2014 Joanne Goodman Lectures, Ian McKay cast the prevalence of this myth as "Vimyism."

64 Colonel T. Denison cited in Gwynne Dyer, *Canada in the Great Power Game, 1914-2014* (Toronto: Random House, 2014), 10.

65 Max Aitken, *Canada in Flanders: The Official Story of the Canadian Expeditionary Force*, Vol. I (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916), 3. General Sir Arthur Currie made similar postwar statements. In an open letter in a reconstruction newsletter, *Back to Mufti*, he wrote that Canadian men "have made permanently secure the freedom and prosperity of the country. They have written 'Canada' in bold outstanding letters in the world's roll of honour. They have secured Canada the right to speak as a nation admired and respected in the

Subsequent postwar histories, such as George Drew's *Canada's Fighting Airmen*, extended the thesis beyond the battlefield. The country's airmen, Drew noted proudly, performed "out of all proportion to her population" and their deeds were requisite in "building the character of the nation."<sup>66</sup> This "unfortunate identification" of the Canadian people with the Canadian state continued well into the 1970s, when Russell Hann recognized that the conflation of individual Canadians and their country's nationhood remained a "popular view of the meaning of the war."<sup>67</sup>

Arthur Lower pioneered the "colony to nation" thesis in the 1940s and 1950s. He saw the war as the catalyst for Canada's postwar nationalism. But the picture he painted did not present Canada as emerging fully formed from the war. Rather, the trenches of France and Flanders only gave birth to the "spirit of Canadian nationalism." Despite being dated, Lower's work remains one of the most valuable contributions to the historiography of Canada's veterans. His account of postwar nationalism was not blind to the challenges and disenchantment following 1918, which he linked in early evaluations of the war and its national impact. According to Lower, the war generation was the most affected by this spiritual awakening. These men were exposed to European culture, an experience that ultimately killed the

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concert of nations." See "A Stirring Peace Message," *Back to Mufti: A Magazine in the interests of Canadians who have been 'Over There'* 1:1 (February 1919), 3.

<sup>66</sup> George Drew, *Canada's Fighting Airmen* (Toronto: Maclean, 1930) 2, 10.

<sup>67</sup> Russell G. Hann, "Introduction," *The Great War and Canadian Society*, 25.

nation's "old parochialism," and which, "for better or worse," led Canadians to tear themselves "loose from [the] simplicity" of an earlier era.<sup>68</sup>

The 'spirit' Lower identified still had to mature after the war and he did not hesitate discussing how veterans were forced to struggle in the years that followed. These men did not seem to fit into society. Instead of re-integrating they "began to prove 'difficult.'" Lower believed they were struggling because they had "outgrown the stuffiness of the lower-middle-class society that marked most of Canada." Their distemper "accelerated" postwar change. Lower explained the anger and disenchantment of veterans in postwar society by arguing that domestic Canada failed to understand how the war changed their outlook and expectations. While the war touched households across the country, those who stayed home missed a "deep spiritual experience" and they remained comparatively untouched by the spirit of reform. As a result, "much of the generous gain that might have come out of World War I, from a sense of duty done, and gratuitously done, was frittered away."<sup>69</sup>

Lower lived through this 'frittering'. He served in the navy during the war and believed himself too close to the events in question to offer a "complete assessment" of its history.<sup>70</sup> His account of the war's aftermath nonetheless presented an early discussion of disenchantment. Lower pointed

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<sup>68</sup> Arthur Lower, *Colony to Nation: A History of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1946) 459-460.

<sup>69</sup> Lower, *Canadians in the Making: A Social History of Canada* (Toronto: Longmans, Green and Co., 1958), 405-406.

<sup>70</sup> Lower, *Canadians in the Making*, 405-406.

out that at least a third of those who served overseas were wounded and that “the broken soldier became a familiar sight.” Their wounds were physical, as well as psychological and spiritual, and Lower believed the latter could be as “serious as the physical.” He also noted that returned men were restless and “burned out.” During the late 1920s and early 1930’s, he wrote, “the deaths of ex-service men in their forties were reported with inescapable frequency.”<sup>71</sup>

By linking disenchantment with the suffering of veterans in the war’s aftermath, Lower presented one of the earliest descriptions of Canada’s war generation.<sup>72</sup> Few of his peers followed suit, however, and work by his immediate contemporaries ignored veterans and their reactions to the conflict. In the 1960s, when critics in Britain and the US devoted considerable attention to the war’s generational legacy, Canadian historians, such as W.L. Morton, rejected these same links among the war, disillusion, and generational identity. Morton’s *The Kingdom of Canada* (1963), which completely ignored veterans, moved from an analysis of the war years and the immediate aftermath to labour unrest, Canada’s push for representation

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<sup>71</sup> Lower, *Colony to Nation*, 459-460.

<sup>72</sup> Another historian of the era, Donald Creighton, made vague attempts to capture the tenor of the era, but his efforts lacked Lower’s specificity. In his general history of Canada, *Dominion of the North* (1944), Creighton identified the “angry ambiguities” and the “profound unsettlement” of the early postwar years, but did little more than attribute them to the war’s “tragic legacy.” See Donald Creighton, *Dominion of the North: A History of Canada*, Revised Edition (Toronto: Macmillan, 1957), 455, 471. Later analysis in *Canada’s First Century* (1970) continued in the same vein. Creighton recognized that the years following 1918 were filled with “confusing economic and social turmoil,” but apart from arguing that this awakened “a sullen feeling of injustice in many Canadians,” he devoted no discussion to how the war contributed to this malaise or individuals’ reactions to it. The war’s impact on veterans, how they understood the conflict, or whether their views were equally ‘confused’ is again left unaddressed. See Creighton, *Canada’s First Century, 1867-1967* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1970), 158.

on the Imperial War Cabinet, and a position at the Paris Peace Conference and in the League of Nations.<sup>73</sup> His study of the 1920s was even more dismissive of the war's generational impact. It concluded that Canadians were not disillusioned and asserted that the war did not create a collective generational identity. Instead of producing a disillusioned "Anthem for Doomed Youth," Canada's literary output failed to account for the war.<sup>74</sup> Canadians in the 1920s were "backwards in mind," and their literature was incapable of accounting for the country's "fierce transition" from the Victorian to the modern era. Critically, Morton's explanation for this failure rested on the assumption that the country had escaped the "psychological impact of the Great War."<sup>75</sup> Yet, in spite of the certainty of his conclusion,

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73 W.L. Morton, *The Kingdom of Canada: A General History from the Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1963), 428-431.

74 Wilfred Owen, "Anthem for a Doomed Youth," in Jon Silkin, ed., *The Penguin Book of First World War Poetry*, 2nd ed. (New York: Penguin, 1982), 183-184.

75 W.L. Morton, "1920s," in J.M.S. Careless and R. Craig Brown, eds., *The Canadians* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1967), 226. Studies of Canadian literature also ignore the war's generational impact, partly because literary critics limit their analysis to works produced or set during the war. As a result, the interwar period and its connections to the war are ignored. Dagmar Novak is one of only a few critics to examine the era's war literature. Compared to international studies of the war, she notes that the conflict and its development is "largely ignored" in Canada. While her study of the Canadian novel in the two world wars goes a long way to filling the gap, Novak only deals with novels directly about the war. In consequence, important works that were clearly reactions to the war, such as Douglas Durkin's *The Magpie* (1923), are not considered. Literary criticism examining how life after the war influenced the conflict's meaning remains as underdeveloped as the historiography. Nonetheless, scholarly examinations of the literature of Canada's war experience far exceed studies of its history.

Some of the most important include Peter Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: British, American, and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987); Nils Clauss, "Charles Yale Harrison's 'Little-Known Minor Masterpiece': Generals Die in Bed, Modernism, and the Canon of World War I Fiction," *War, Literature & the Arts* 23 (2011); Evelyn Cobley, *Representing War: Form and Ideology in First World War Narratives* (Toronto:

Morton provided little evidence for his assertions. He declared that there was an absence of disillusionment in Canada and claimed that this explained the differences between Canada and its allies' postwar experiences. He did not cite Canadian war literature or authors critical of postwar Canada. The only novelist referenced by Morton was Morley Callaghan, who was born in 1903, and not old enough to take part in the war. By equating disillusionment with generation, and then by offhandedly rejecting both, Morton's analysis separated Canada's experience from other Western nations. The ensuing historiography has continued to support Morton's reading and there has been almost no consideration of generation in Canada's Great War experience.

In their contribution to the Centenary Series, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (1985), Allen Seager and John Thompson echoed Morton in equating generation with disillusionment. They argued that Canadians escaped the "bitter cynicism" of the lost generation so characteristic of Western Europe and the US. In its place Canadians "celebrate[d] their native

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University of Toronto Press, 1996); Tim Cook, "Quill and Canon: Writing the Great War in Canada," *The American Review of Canadian Studies* 35:3 (Autumn 2005), 503-530; Dominique Dumontet, "'Lest We Forget': Canadian Combatant Narratives of the Great War," (PhD Diss., Manitoba, 2010); Neta Gordon, *Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014); Colin Hill, *Modern Realism in English-Canadian Fiction* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012) and Hill, "Generic Experiment and Confusion in Early Canadian Novels of the Great War," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 34:2 (2009); Crawford Kilian, "The Great War and the Canadian Novel, 1915-1926," (M.A. Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1972); Robert Neilsen, "Barely Perceptible Limp: The First World War in Canadian Fiction (1914-1939)," (MA Thesis, University of Guelph, 1971); Dagmar Novak, *Dubious Glory: The Two World Wars and the Canadian Novel* (New York: Peter Lang, 2000); Eric Thompson, "Canadian Fiction of the Great War," *Canadian Literature* 91 (Winter 1981), 81-96; Jonathan Vance, "The Soldier as Novelist: Literature, History, and the Great War" *Canadian Literature* 179 (Winter 2003): 22-37, Peter Webb, "Occupants of Memory"; Jeanne Yardley, "Writing the Great War: Language and Structures in English-Canadian Prose Narratives of World War I (PhD. Diss, York, 1989), and "'The Bitterness and the Greatness': Reading F.G. Scott's War," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 16:1 (1991).

land” in a wave of postwar nationalism.<sup>76</sup> In another book, Thompson argued that the war was a catalyst for regional nationalism. “Western Canada,” he wrote “‘came of age’ within the Dominion in the same way that Canada itself matured within the Empire and the international community.”<sup>77</sup>

Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook’s *A Nation Transformed* also overlooked how returned men understood the war. These historians concluded that “the patriotism and idealism let loose by the war centered on the idea of building a better Canadian nation. Only in this fashion could the great sacrifices of the war be repaid.” Despite noting that the war unleashed underlying tensions in terms of race, class, region, and ethnicity, Brown and Cook shrugged off veterans’ grievances as mere “problems of demobilization.”<sup>78</sup> The generations in other countries—including Britain and the U.S.—may have been disillusioned, but the “predominant Canadian view,” Christopher Moore notes, “vehemently denied the war had been meaningless.”<sup>79</sup>

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76 Allen Seager and John Herd Thompson, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), 161. Thompson also questions the existence of a disillusioned generation in “Canada and the ‘Third British Empire’, 1901-1939,” in Phillip A. Buckner, ed., *Canada and the British Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 97.

77 Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914-1918* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989), 170.

78 Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada: 1896-1921, A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1974), 303, 320, 322. The primary mention veterans receive in the text is in reference to their nativism. See pages 222-226.

79 Moore, “1914 in 2014,” 430. Tim Cook, perhaps Canada’s most prolific Great War historian, supports this position, arguing that the nation’s losses were first “perceived” and then “articulated” as examples of a just war, sacrifices that proved to Canadians that the country had served “in a worthwhile cause.” See Cook, “Battles of the Imagined Past,” 418. Moreover, according to Robert Engen, Canada’s staggering losses were more than “worthwhile,” they were “socially sanctioned, and even *holy*.” Emphasis original. See Robert

More recent work makes the same connection. Jonathan Vance argues that Canadians were not disillusioned by the war. Instead, they continued to believe in its “transformative power,” especially its “curative” properties which helped elevate men to “saviour status.”<sup>80</sup> According to Jeff Keshen, civilians resisted disillusionment because, in public, the war “still constituted causes for celebration.”<sup>81</sup> C.P. Champion also rejects disillusionment,

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Engen, *Canadians Under Fire: Infantry Effectiveness in the Second World War* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 55. Failure to analyze Canada’s war generation or its reactions to the First World War and its aftermath reflects a general lack of historical attention to the postwar decades, an oversight Susan Trofimenkoff noted as early as 1972. She argued that the 1920s amounted to an “Unknown Decade” that historians ignore by leaping “from the glorious days of the First World War to the grim ones of the Depression.” The period still remains largely unexplored. In 2015, Bryan Tennyson notes that little historical work has been conducted in the interim. “Curiously, not much has been written about the aftermath of the war,” he lamented, before observing how “This general lack of interest in the 1920s is especially notable in Canada, which historians have generally skipped over lightly on their way to the seemingly more interesting 1930s.” See Susan Trofimenkoff, *Mercury Series, History Division Paper No. 1: The Twenties in Western Canada, Papers of the Western Canadian Studies Conference, March 1972* (Ottawa: History Division, National Museum of Man, 1972), 1. See too Brian Douglas Tennyson, “Review of Alan Bowker, *A Time Such as There Never Was Before*,” *Canadian Military History* (1 April 2015) <http://canadianmilitaryhistory.ca/review-of-alan-bowkers-a-time-such-as-there-never-was-before-canada-after-the-great-war-by-brian-tennyson/>. Bowker’s book is a welcome exception to this trend and one of the only works of synthesis covering the early postwar years. Nonetheless, much of its discussion of veterans is derived from the limited historiography, notably the work of Tim Cook, Desmond Morton, and Jonathan Vance. Bowker explains that his chapter on veterans, “Returning Heroes,” “relies heavily” on Morton and Wright’s *Winning the Second Battle*. See Bowker, 410, in “Notes,” online at [http://www.alanbowker.ca/sites/default/files/book\\_files/A%20Time%20Such%20As%20-%20corrected%20notes.pdf](http://www.alanbowker.ca/sites/default/files/book_files/A%20Time%20Such%20As%20-%20corrected%20notes.pdf). See Bowker, *A Time Such as There Never Was Before: Canada After the Great War* (Toronto: Dundurn, 2014).

<sup>80</sup> Jonathan Vance, “Remembering Armageddon,” David Mackenzie, ed., *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 418.

<sup>81</sup> Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada’s Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 192.



believing that it did not take hold until “decades” after the war.<sup>82</sup> For Mark Sheftall, Canada’s postwar nationalism proved “impervious to the contagion of disenchantment,” in part because no Canadian writers “shared the sense of post-war disenchantment” present across the Atlantic.<sup>83</sup>

Canadian historians have touched on the war generation’s disenchantment in discussions of veterans’ organizations.<sup>84</sup> These groups, which included the Great War Veterans’ Association (GWVA), the Army and Navy League (ANL), the United Veterans League (UVL), and, later, the Canadian Legion, struggled throughout the 1920s to mobilize as effective advocates for veterans. With few exceptions, however, their campaigns, including the ‘bonus’ campaign and calls for more generous pensions, failed. Historians have focused on the divisions between the veterans’ movement and the federal government’s plan to assist men with rehabilitation and re-establishment. In one of the earliest examinations of the veterans’ movement, James Eayrs criticized the treatment returned men received after 1918. “What,” he asked “had been bought by all those lives and limbs, seemingly so recklessly squandered?” He blamed the failure to secure a better postwar life on the division between veterans’ groups which “unnecessarily retarded the

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82 C.P. Champion, *The Strange Demise of British Canada: The Liberals and Canadian Nationalism, 1964-1968* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), 111, 112-113.

83 Mark Sheftall, *Altered Memories of the Great War: Divergent Narratives of Britain, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2009), 154-156.

84 See, for example, the opening chapters to Peter Neary, *On to Civvy Street: Canada’s Rehabilitation Program for Veterans of the Second World War* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2011) and Neary, “‘Without the Stigma of Pauperism’: Canadian Veterans in the 1930s,” *British Journal of Canadian Studies* 22:1 (2009).

formation" of the Canadian Legion. Although he did not push his analysis further, Eayrs implied that had veterans united sooner, they could have done more. In place of such advocacy, however, all these men could do was "vent their anger" at government.<sup>85</sup>

Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright added to the understanding of the veterans' movement with a series of articles that culminated with the book *Winning the Second Battle* (1987). It was path-breaking work which presented the first overview of the GWVA's formation and its fight with the federal government to secure more generous assistance for veterans. But it remains one of the few considerations of Canada's veterans.<sup>86</sup> In fact, with the exception of Peter Neary's and Serge Durflinger's work, few historians have broached the topic.<sup>87</sup> Some historians have devoted additional study to the

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<sup>85</sup> James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: From the Great War to the Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), 41-44.

<sup>86</sup> Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), xii. The paucity of material on Canada's war generation is driven home by two works on memory and veterans. In 2002 Mark David Sheftall observed, "As far as Canada is concerned, studying the nation's cultural memory of the Great War is almost like exploring virgin territory." See Sheftall, "The Glory and the Sadness: Shaping the Memory of the First World War in Great Britain, Canada and Australia, 1914-1939" (Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 2002), iv. In 2012 Nathan Smith's dissertation concluded that veterans remained "an under-studied historical group." See Smith, "Comrades and Citizens: Great War Veterans in Toronto, 1915-1919" (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 2012), 16.

<sup>87</sup> See, for example, Neary, *On to Civvy Street*, and Serge Durflinger, *Veterans with a Vision: Canada's War Blinded in Peace and War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010). Another important exception is Mike Wert's article "From Enlistment to the Grave: The Impact of the First World War on 52 Canadian Solidiers," *Canadian Military History* 9:2 (Spring 2000): 43-58.

pension question,<sup>88</sup> as well as examining the role of veterans in the labour movements of the interwar period, but these works do not consider the views of individual men.<sup>89</sup>

Morton and Wright highlight the importance of the veteran organizations and their relationships with all levels of government but the positions of these associations should not be considered synonymous with those of returned men more generally. The organizations had their own politics (a fact Lower recognized as early as the 1940s) and their interests did not always align with those of individual veterans.<sup>90</sup> Moreover, the vast

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88 See Mark Humphries, "War's Long Shadow: Masculinity, Medicine, and the Gendered Politics of Trauma, 1914-1939," *Canadian Historical Review* 91:3 (September 2010):503-531 and Chelsea Clark, "Not Attributable to Service: First World War Veterans' 'Second Battle' with the Canadian Pension System" (MA Thesis, University of Calagary, 2009).

89 Craig Heron and Myer Siemiatycki, "The Great War, the State, and Working-Class Canada," in Craig Heron, ed., *The Worker's Revolt in Canada, 1917-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), 17. Additional examples of returned men's role in labour history include: Harold Logan, *The History of Trade-Union Organizations in Canada* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1928): 372-4; David Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations and the General Strike* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990 [1974]); Bercuson, *Fools and Wise Men: The Rise and Fall of the One Big Union* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1978); Ian McKay and Suzanne Morton, "The Maritimes: Expanding the Circle of Resistance," in Heron, ed., *The Worker's Revolt in Canada*, 47-48; Ian McKay, 'War, Revolution, and General Strike,' in *Reasoning Otherwise Reasoning Otherwise: Leftists and the People's Enlightenment in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto, Between the Lines Press, 2008), 417-496; and James Wood, *Militia Myths: Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier, 1896-1921* (Vancouver, Toronto: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 254-8. See too James Struthers' work in the opening sections of *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983).

90 In *Canadians in the Making*, Lower argued "The veterans, to judge from their organizations, came to stand for conservatism, a certain imperialistic jingoism and the small favours that they could extract from government. But there were also thousands of ex-servicemen who did not maintain active associations with veterans' organizations." See p. 404.

majority of returned men did not join a veterans' organization or the Legion during the first two decades after war's end.

Continued focus on the war as *the* central nation-building event of the twentieth century has ensured that the personal experiences of men like A.Y. Jackson have been silenced.<sup>91</sup> This situation started to change to an extent in the 1980s when Canadians began to recognize that the generation's personal accounts offered a "distinctly human and personal point of view."<sup>92</sup> Examinations of these testimonies, however, are less concerned with how these men understood the war and focus instead on how their experiences support the colony-to-nation thesis. Instead of investigating their relationship to a generational identity, historians highlight how these experiences contributed to Canada's national development. As a result, the war is presented as more than a formative experience for the country's young men; it also acts as a coming-of-age site for the nation.

Nationalist interpretations of the war's history continue to hold powerful sway in Canada. Pierre Berton's popular and influential book *Vimy* (1986) directly linked the experiences of Canadians on the battlefield with the nation's development. Berton claimed that the war's battles turned men "into Canadians."<sup>93</sup> Based on personal interviews with veterans, the book opens with the onset of battle of Vimy Ridge before examining the Canadian Corps'

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91 Gus Richardson, preface to Read, *The Great War and Canadian Society*, 7.

92 Timothy Humphries, "Over the Top: The Archives of Ontario's WWI Onsite Exhibit," ActiveHistory.ca, 16 September 2014. <http://activehistory.ca/2014/09/over-the-top-the-archives-of-ontarios-wwi-onsite-exhibit/#more-13942> Accessed: 16 September 2014.

93 Pierre Berton, *Vimy* (Toronto: Anchor Books, 2001 [1986]), 292, 297.

planning and execution of its attack in April 1917.<sup>94</sup> The final chapter, “Aftermath,” broadens the focus to ask if Vimy, and by extension the wider war, was “worth it.”<sup>95</sup> Berton did not think so but he softened this conclusion by explaining that the war generation would have disagreed. To those who lived it, he contended, the war remained defensible because it had to be. The death and devastation required the war have meaning. Otherwise, there was only disillusionment. When this proved a false hope, Canadians could cling to notions that the conflict had built their nation: “Because of Vimy, Canada came of age; because of Vimy, [their] country found its manhood.”<sup>96</sup>

Recent Canadian scholarship still echoes Berton’s conclusions. Tim Cook’s two-volume *Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1918* (2007, 2008), uses men’s accounts of their experiences to emphasize Canada’s maturation. He argues that these sources shed light on the “full experience” of the war, including “what it meant” to the men themselves.<sup>97</sup> Cook’s work is less deterministic than earlier nationalist scholarship and admits that the war’s sacrifices nearly “destroyed the country.” But his conclusion that battlefield successes helped ensure Canada was “forged during the Great War”

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94 Berton’s researchers, notably Barbara Sears, conducted more than seventy interviews with veterans of the battle. See A.B. McKillop, *Pierre Berton: A Biography* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2010), 592.

95. Berton, *Vimy*, 292

96 Berton, *Vimy*, 307-308. See too McKillop, *Pierre Berton*, 593.

97 Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 2-3.

continues the link between the study of men's experiences and the colony-to-nation thesis.<sup>98</sup>

J.L. Granatstein's *The Greatest Victory* (2014) seeks to debunk the Vimy myth by arguing that the Canadian Corps' victories in 1918—breaking the Drocourt-Quéant Line, crossing the Canal du Nord, and taking Cambrai, Valenciennes, and Mons—were more impressive than Canada's role in April 1917. But while he tries to move Canadians beyond Vimy, Granatstein ends up linking the wartime prowess of the Corps with the birth of Canadian nationalism and echoes Berton when he replaces Vimy with the exploits of the Last Hundred Days to argue that these successes “made Canada anew.”<sup>99</sup>

The war generation and its importance to Canada's coming of age are now so closely integrated into the colony-to-nation thesis that historians have described the pairing as the historiography's “core focus.”<sup>100</sup> Yet, as important as individual experiences are to these arguments, the context in which they are cited remains limited to arguments about the development of the Canadian state and its military commitments overseas.<sup>101</sup> The views of the

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98 Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2006), 253. Cook reiterates this conclusion in *Shock Troops*, stating “Canada had come of age during the war,” 628. Jeff Keshen agrees that the colony-to-nation thesis continues to remain legitimate. See Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship*, xvii.

99 J.L. Granatstein, *The Greatest Victory*, 193.

100 Mark Humphries, “Between Commemoration and History: The Historiography of Canadian Corps and Military Overseas,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 95:3 (September 2014): 384.

101 In a recent evaluation of Canada's historiography of the First World War the dominance of some form of colony-to-nation thesis was acknowledged by Tim Cook, Mark

war generation have not undergone critical analysis and, despite a heavy emphasis and interest in the Great War among Canadian historians, there has not been a corresponding interest in how these men privately understood the war's meaning.

The entrenchment of the colony-to-nation thesis became evident in the reaction of historians David Bercuson and Jonathan Vance had to Robert Fulford's review of Niall Ferguson's *The Pity of War* in 2000. Ferguson's book stirred up controversy for its claim that Britain's declaration of war was a colossal mistake, a decision the author called "nothing less than the greatest error of modern history." Fulford praised Ferguson's work and was impressed that the historian was willing to "judge" the war. His review then posed a controversial question for Canadians: had their country really come of age between 1914 and 1918?<sup>102</sup> The journalist was well aware of the potency of Canada's colony-to-nation narrative and its place in "conventional wisdom."<sup>103</sup> Fulford admitted, however, that the notion that his country "became a nation on the battlefields of France," always struck him as rather "dubious." He praised Ferguson's work for its willingness to ask new

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Humphries, Christopher Moore, and Amy Shaw. See Cook, "Battles of the Imagined Past: Canada's Great War and Memory," *Canadian Historical Review*, 95:3 (September, 2014); Humphries, "Between Commemoration and History: The Historiography of the Canadian Corps and Military Overseas," *Canadian Historical Review*, 95:3 (September, 2014): 384; Moore, "1914 in 2014: What We Commemorate When We Commemorate the First World War," *Canadian Historical Review*, 95:3 (September, 2014): 430; Shaw, "Expanding the Narrative: A First World War with Women, Children and Grief," *Canadian Historical Review*, 95:3 (September, 2014): 398.

102 Robert Fulford, "Our Darkest Hour," *National Post* (8 February 2000), A18.

103 Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative: Storytelling in the Age of Mass Culture* (Toronto: Anasi Press, 1999) and "Our Darkest Hour."

questions of old history. Canadian historians, by contrast, did not seem interested in a similar project. The war may have been a formative event, but “dealing with it in a fresh and honest way isn't even on our agenda.” Instead, Canadians appeared content to “stick with the clichés of the past.”<sup>104</sup>

Both Bercuson and Vance, two leading Canadian historians, challenged Fulford's position. They argued that Ferguson's work was not a model to emulate. It engaged in counterfactual history and its thesis was supported by little more than “science fiction.”<sup>105</sup> There was no need to question the war's role as a “catalyst that transformed Canada into a nation,” because it was “true.”<sup>106</sup> To make their case, the historians laid out a two-pronged defense of the colony-to-nation thesis. Bercuson defended it by pointing to the “leverage” Canada's participation gave Prime Minister Robert Borden in his push for constitutional equality within the British Empire.<sup>107</sup> Vance took a different approach, citing Canadians' use of the war to create an independent culture and identity. He also highlighted changes in Canada's relationship with Britain, particularly how Canadian authors pushed back against the wider British cultural influence. “The great Canadian novelists of the 1920s—Durkin, Ostenso, Grove—,” Vance wrote in defense of an emergent postwar Canadian nationalism, “came into their own because Canadian readers were no longer satisfied with Ralph Connor's anglophile

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104 Fulford, “Our Darkest Hour,” A18.

105 David Bercuson, “Crime or commitment?” *National Post* (11 February 2000), A18.

106 Jonathan Vance, “Turning Point of a Nation,” *National Post* (11 February 2000), A18.

107 Bercuson, “Crime or commitment?”



brand of Victorian muscular Christianity.”<sup>108</sup> The country, they argued, had no choice but to join the war. In 1914, Canada was not yet independent and when Britain was at war Canada was at war. “To suggest today that [the country] might realistically have chosen another course,” Bercuson wrote, was “to pretend that Canada was something other than what it was.”<sup>109</sup> By questioning the judgment and reactions of Canadians during and after the war, Fulford was guilty of using hindsight to frame the past. His critique was unfair history, offered from the “lofty heights of the present” rather than with the “eyes, ... minds, [and] ... hearts” of the generation who lived the war. If the reactions of Canadians to the war are understood historically, Vance argued, then “there is nothing mysterious about the persistence of this cliché.” The war made Canadians “feel distinct from Britain” and to “suggest otherwise simply because it also produced discord [was] to employ a crude reductionism.”<sup>110</sup> It was incorrect to assume, Vance pointed out, that Canada’s Great War generation would react to the horror of war as we do today. Rather than dwell on their losses, the war generation coped by looking to its positives, which they found “in a new sense of Canadian nationality.”<sup>111</sup>

Fulford, however, was not asking how Canadian historians *already* understood the conflict. He wanted to know how it *might* be understood differently. Neither historian offered a new interpretation of the colony-to-

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108 Vance, “Turning Point of a Nation.”

109 Bercuson, “Crime or commitment.”

110 Vance, “Turning Point of a Nation.”

111 Vance, “Turning Point of a Nation.”

nation thesis because they believed there was no need. The existing thesis seemed to explain the history sufficiently. The professional historians rebuffed the journalist, but Fulford raised an important question about the experience of the veterans. He felt strongly that their experiences justified his continued skepticism of Canada's colony-to-nation mythology. The veterans he knew would never have agreed with either historian. If presented with this debate, he argued, they "would have snorted with disgust at the idea that the calamity in which they took part was an act of nation-building."<sup>112</sup>

Jonathan Vance explained his interpretation of the war's meaning in *Death So Noble* (1997), the first serious consideration of the subject in Canada.<sup>113</sup> Vance examines the construction of the public memory of the war during the interwar period, particularly how Canadians "conceived of the war, how they represented it, and how they accommodated it into their collective consciousness." His work rejects notions of postwar disillusionment and argues that during the 1920s and 1930s, Canadians constructed a

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112 Fulford, "Looking back on the First World War".

113 Some of Vance's conclusions were anticipated in a short article by John Scott, which used the formation of the Canadian Legion to point out how ill served the war generation was in Canadian historiography. His subject was the reception veterans gave Earl Haig during his visit in 1925 and the article prefigured a renewed focus on veterans in the 1920s. Scott criticized scholars who cited novels such as *Generals Die in Bed* to "reinforce" Paul Fussell's argument that a "strong sense of alienation developed between the ordinary soldier and his leaders." In place of this alienation, Scott argued that Canadians had a "very different memory" than Harrison's novel indicated. They retained images of "honour, affection, loyalty and esteem" for their commander and, by extension, for the war itself. While Scott cites *Generals Die in Bed* in his work, the absence of any supporting evidence for his conclusion that "historians" have used it in support of Fussell's arguments is telling. John Scott, "'Three Cheers for Earl Haig' Canadian Veterans and the Visit of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig to Canada in the Summer of 1925," *Canadian Military History* 5:1 (Spring 1996): 35-40.

mythical history of the war, which ensured its legacy was one of “promise, certainty, and goodness.” Vance’s study changed how historians consider the war’s legacy in Canada. In place of veterans and fights over federal pensions, he focused on collective memory and public understanding of the war’s meaning. The war may have been awful, but the myth Canadians constructed “crafted a memory ... that [also] recognized the gifts it conferred on those who took part.”<sup>114</sup>

Vance engages the generation’s war writers, its artists, and its veterans, as well as Canadian society at large. He agrees with critics such as Bracco, who argue against overemphasizing the writing of elites, by concentrating on how Canadian society commemorated the war. Vance rejects ideas of a lost generation, arguing that the disillusioned were unrepresentative of Canada’s wider collective memory. Elites might have been disenchanted but average Canadians embraced the war myth. The strong critiques of literary and academic leaders, such as O.D. Skelton, paled in comparison to the positive response of the general public. Thus, the “impassioned pleas” of Arthur Lower, Escott Reid, or O.D. Skelton, Vance writes, “against repeating the folly of 1914-18” may have “impressed generations of historians” but it is “unwise” to give “such people undue weight.” To examine the views of the “Canadian mosaic,” Vance ventures beyond the “narrow band of traditional sources,” using cultural artifacts such as remembrance programs, church windows, and “deplorable verse,” to bare witness to a more “representative

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114 Vance, *Death So Noble*, 2, 196, 266.

range of interpretation.”<sup>115</sup> He identifies key sites of memory and remembrance to demonstrate how this public mythology emerged. Canadians’ sense of a just war created a ‘legitimate’ memory of the conflict. The result is a single, unifying mythology, which proved a fountainhead for an emergent Canadian nationalism.

Vance argues that Remembrance Day serves as a poignant example of Canadians embracing the positive war mythology constructed during the interwar era.<sup>116</sup> But he also recognizes that there were limits to the day’s utility, especially for returned men, who were increasingly unhappy with the direction of postwar life. For these Canadians, the mere paying of “tribute” on 11 November was insufficient insurance that the war’s legacy was being respected. They understood that the only way to ensure the war’s meaning was to “complete the task” begun in France and Flanders. Postwar Canada had to ensure that the war “was indeed the progenitor of good.” Otherwise, Canadians’ sacrifices would be “meaninglessness.”<sup>117</sup> To ensure this was not the case, Vance contends that Canadians used the war myth to build a better,

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115 Vance, *Death So Noble*, 6-7.

116 According to Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, the act of remembrance lends itself to traditional motifs. In the case of 11 November, when thousands gathered at war memorials to mark the eleventh hour signing of the Armistice, these motifs take form in a unified sense of place, time, and action. It should come as no surprise, then, that the study of Canada’s efforts to commemorate the war finds evidence of its continued meaning. The very act of remembering is predicated on the existence of an accepted meaningful event to remember. Neither the public, nor veterans, argued with postwar Canada’s embrace of Remembrance Day, but outside of such contexts the war generation struggled articulate their understanding of the war experience. See Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *1914-1918*, 186.

117 Vance, *Death So Noble*, 219.

postwar version of the nation. He acknowledges that many Canadians were not living up to the ideal established in wartime, but despite recognizing that ex-soldiers were disenchanted, disillusion did not take hold.

Ian McKay has challenged Vance's reading of this history. McKay concedes that mythic, romanticized ideas remained "part of the core explanation" of the war's meaning, but argues that Canadians did not generally accept this interpretation.<sup>118</sup> Veterans such as Tommy Burns and Will Bird wrote critically about the war. Burns' writing in the 1920s, for example, "cut through the cant of patriotism to get at the war's futile tragedy."<sup>119</sup> Will Bird also "resisted" the war myth.<sup>120</sup> Instead of seeing Bird as a singular example of the myth, McKay argues that his writing is open to "multiple readings."<sup>121</sup> According to McKay, Vance reads Bird as part of a traditional High Tory view of the war. McKay, however, argues that he is better read as an example of interwar liberalism, which remembered the war differently. In place of a conservative mythology that "confirmed the justice of the preexisting social hierarchy," people like Bird shaped the postwar world by "focusing on the future ... [and] by firmly insisting that strong

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118 Ian McKay and Jamie Swift, *Warrior Nation: Rebranding Canada in an Age of Anxiety* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2012), 83.

119 McKay and Swift, *Warrior Nation*, 82.

120 Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History: The Making of the Public Past in Twentieth Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 134.

121 Arguably this is an oversimplification. Vance does claim that Bird embodied many qualities of the war myth, but he also notes that Bird was "disillusioned." This tension, however, is not resolved in Vance's work and it leaves his characterization of Bird open to interpretation. See Vance, *Death So Noble* and "The Soldier as Novelist."

people should get over it." Vance focuses on how Canadians created a social memory of the war experience, regardless of the resulting myth's accuracy. McKay, on the other hand, is less concerned with the war's memory. Instead he critiques how the conflict should be studied. To do otherwise, he argues, risks "not troubling to analyze and understand" a war that cost millions of lives. In this reading, the postwar impact cannot be understood before "conclusively resolving ... the underlying political issues" over which the war was fought. McKay argues that the conflict was not a nation-building experience, at least not in so far as the Vimy myth suggests: "This was never a war for democracy, freedom, or 'Canada,' but a war fought between empires." In place of "individual acts of valour and selfless nation-building," the war should instead be understood as the outcome of the world's "socio-economic order."<sup>122</sup>

The writing of Will Bird serves as a revealing example of these varying approaches. Both historians agree that Bird's writing re-constructed his war experience and they acknowledge that he was highly critical of "realism." Vance interprets this criticism as an example of how Canadians constructed a positive postwar mythology. Bird's war was thus "balanced," "credible," and "optimistic."<sup>123</sup> McKay argues that Bird created an imagined Great War that confirmed the "innocence" of his liberal worldview.<sup>124</sup> This innocence was a conscious choice that "rejected analytic reasoning" to ensure the war

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<sup>122</sup> McKay and Swift, *Warrior Nation*, 68-69.

<sup>123</sup> Vance, *Death So Noble*, 196.

<sup>124</sup> McKay and Swift, *Warrior Nation*, 68

reinforced the “primacy of the individual.”<sup>125</sup> Both readings suggest that Will Bird was uncomfortable rejecting the war as futile. In Vance’s case, Bird’s positive outlook is explained by his finding solace in the brotherhood of the trenches. While Bird could be critical of the conflict, he always balanced his observations by stressing the “inherent good in his Flanders adventure.” For McKay, Bird’s version of the war was less benign. Instead of reflecting the purposefulness of the conflict, he argues that Bird’s positivism was the product of the war’s psychological horrors. The burden of trench warfare, McKay writes, “permanently changed the mentality” of the men who lived it. Men like Bird refused to reflect critically on the war because their psychological survival depended on it.<sup>126</sup>

Vance does not deny that some men experienced “psychological problems” after the war. He argues, however, that they were the exceptions that confirmed the validity of the war myth. While some men may have struggled, veterans could not be turned into “an animal or an empty shell” because their cause was “righteous.”<sup>127</sup> The few who are identified as disillusioned, moreover, are pushed aside in favour of a discussion of Canadians’ efforts to make sure the country’s youth, immigrants, First Nations, and French Canadians were all adhering to the proper meaning of the war.<sup>128</sup>

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125 McKay and Bates, *In the Province of History*, 132-33.

126. McKay and Bates, *In the Province of History*, 143-44.

127. Vance, *Death So Noble*, 53.

128 See especially Chapter Eight, “To Found a Country,” in *Death So Noble*, 226-256.

In the war's aftermath the average Canadian veteran had larger concerns than debating how the war was portrayed in novels and poetry. The failed bonus campaign, inadequate access to pensions, rampant unemployment, health struggles, and denial of access to assistance programs influenced the generation's understanding of the conflict. None of these issues are discussed in the debates over imagined wars and war myths. Nevertheless, they were the practical, everyday causes of postwar disillusionment. Despite not being considered part of the public dialogue about the war's memory, they influenced the meaning of the conflict. In these cases, however, the war experience was not employed in relation to remembrance or commemoration. Rather, it was the day-to-day challenges, including the economy, men's health, and the ever-increasing prospect of another European conflict that ended up shaping the generation's understanding of the war's meaning.

The differences between the war generation's personal experiences and public commemoration of the war also illustrate how private and collective memories can coexist simultaneously. Collective memory is defined by an "interaction between public and private memory."<sup>129</sup> Public memories are also informed by collective experience, but studies have determined that traumatic events remembered as part of collective memory need not be the same as an individual's private memories. According to Anita Shapira, an individual's experiences can be all but ignored in public commemoration, with "collective memory" acting as a "blanket" that hides "all vestige of

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129 Sue Haugbolle, "Public and Private Memory of the Lebanese Civil War," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 25:1 (2005), 191.



private memory, of personal experience.”<sup>130</sup> Historian Jay Winter, who also distinguishes between private and collective memory, cites Maurice Halbwach to argue that private or passive memory is composed largely of an individual’s “personal recollections.” Collective memory, however, is constructed “through the action of groups and individuals in the light of day” and is created when people “enter the public domain, and comment about or commemorate the past.” Although related, the two are not interchangeable and private memories differ from collective memory.<sup>131</sup>

Despite such distinctions, little effort has been made to distinguish between Canadians’ private and collective reactions to the war. Even histories of local responses have focused on a community’s “popular and public experiences.”<sup>132</sup> Private memories remain so understudied that collective memory risks being mistaken as the singular explanation for how Canadians responded to the war. Outside of Canada, however, historians and literary critics have critiqued the dominance of this collective response. Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, for example, argue that we need to “cast doubt” on the “‘effectiveness’ of commemoration” because the very public nature of collective mourning did little to diminish “individual

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130 Anita Shapira, “The Holocaust: Private Memories, Public Memory,” *Jewish Social Studies, New Series*, 4:2 (Winter 1998), 50.

131 Jay Winter, *Remembering War: The Great War Between Memory and History in the Twentieth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 22.

132 Robert Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons: Local Responses to Canada’s Great War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), xiii.

bereavement.”<sup>133</sup> Janet Watson’s argument for the differences between experience and memory also suggests that we should consider different reactions to the war as readily as we now recognize existence of “different wars.”<sup>134</sup> Peter Webb, one of the few Canadian literary critics to address the subject, supports the idea of collective reactions to the war. He argues for shared memories rather than collective memories. “There are many myths, many experiences,” Webb writes, and the idea of shared memories emphasizes “how a given war experience may be common to a particular social group ... without assuming that the experience is universal to all members of a nation, gender, or culture.”<sup>135</sup>

As an example of shared memories, Webb cites the war writing of Ralph Connor (the pen name of Rev. Charles Gordon) and Charles Yale Harrison. They witnessed the war firsthand, yet their respective works are “polar opposites in terms of ideology, diction, and political outlook.” In *The Sky Pilot in No Man’s Land* (1919), Gordon describes self-sacrificing wartime deaths that were “splendid” and “Perfectly glorious!”<sup>136</sup> Harrison’s *Generals Die in Bed* rejects Gordon’s romanticism entirely. His characters are killed without glory. They fall “clumsily” after being shot; they are heard

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133 Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, *1914-1918*, 220-221.

134 Watson, *Fighting Different Wars*, 4-5. Smith finds that Watson’s distinction between memory and experience is too “severe” and argues instead that we need to recognize that soldier-authors’ texts used narrative to construct identities both during and after the war and that memory and experience cannot be constructed along wartime and postwar lines. See Smith, *The Embattled Self*, 13.

135 Webb, “Occupants of Memory,” 17.

136 Ralph Connor, *The Sky Pilot in No Man’s Land* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1919), 256.

“shrieking;” some are so badly mutilated that what remains of their bodies “convulse and jerk spasmodically.”<sup>137</sup> Webb sees the differences between these two authors as a clash between romance and realism, a dichotomy which he considers fundamental to the makeup of early twentieth-century Canadian fiction.<sup>138</sup> But there is another overlooked explanation for why these two authors differed so markedly in their treatment of the First World War: their age and place within the war generation.

Gordon was born in 1860, while Harrison was born in 1898. When the war broke out, the former was fifty-four years old; the latter was sixteen. In Connor’s case, the war “reinforced” his existing worldview. He portrayed it as a “temporary aberration on the path of human progress.”<sup>139</sup> For Harrison, however, like so many young men who enlisted as teenagers, the war shaped how he would come to understand his world. This difference in experience is why the study of men’s ages is so critical to understanding how the war generation made sense of the event. Rather than using collective concepts of representativeness to paint either Gordon or Harrison as a poor reflection of how Canadians’ thought collectively about the war, studying generational reactions clarifies how opposing views of the war need not be mutually exclusive.

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137 For the deaths of Brown, Karl’s brother, and Cleary see Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed*, 65, 110, 125.

138 Webb, “Occupants of Memory,” 2-4.

139 Webb, “Occupants of Memory,” 3.

Until recently, however, few histories recognized age or generation as a category of analysis. The first in Canada to employ either was Neil Sutherland, whose studies of childhood in English Canada established important foundations for inquiries into life stages.<sup>140</sup> Doug Owsram's *The Government Generation* (1986) also used the concept loosely to study a select group of Canadian intellectuals and their influence on the growth of the Canadian welfare state. Owsram defined the government generation as a "community" of "activist intellectuals," with a "shared outlook toward problem solving and analysis, common social values, and close personal connections." For men like Frank Underhill, Harold Innis, Lester Pearson, and Brooke Claxton, Owsram recognized that the war was their "most important common experience." They were disillusioned by the conflict and disturbed by Canada's "martial enthusiasm and militarism."<sup>141</sup> The book hints at both the importance and influence of the war, but its focus does not consider how the conflict was understood or why it shaped a generation.

Owsram's *Born at the Right Time* (1996) devotes more consideration to why and how groups identified generationally. It examines the baby boomers, their ability to shape their surrounding culture and society, and the

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140 See Neil Sutherland, *Children in English-Canadian Society: Framing the Twentieth-Century Consensus* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), and *Growing Up: Childhood in English Canada from the Great War to the Age of Television* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997).

141 Doug Owsram, *The Government Generation: Canadian Intellectuals and the State, 1900-1945* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), x-xii, 141-142.

group's tendency to think in generational terms.<sup>142</sup> Cynthia Comacchio, whose *The Dominion of Youth* (2006) examines adolescence and coming of age in Canada, also emphasizes the importance of age as a critical part of our understanding of generational history. Both see generation as a life stage. Comacchio's work studies adolescence over a thirty-year period. Owram is concerned with a specific group—the boomers—and studies them by examining their “life cycle,” starting first with childhood and then moving on to adolescence and early adulthood.<sup>143</sup> Comacchio does not follow one group as they age, exploring instead the process of aging by considering the maturation of youth and their role in shaping a young nation. She situates her study within a broader literature on generation that engages with sociological and historiographical debates over its definition. In recognizing the problems posed by generation's multiple meanings, Comacchio observes that it is “a decidedly loose category.” Hers is not a study concerned with sociological predictions, preferring to ground its use of generation in historical context. She argues that generation emphasizes “historical location more than specific cohort dates.” Comacchio believes that generation remains an effective tool to study “changes and continuities” in adolescence, especially as they pertain to “broader socio-cultural change over a fairly limited period.”<sup>144</sup>

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142 See Owram, *The Government Generation and Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996; 2007), xi. Granatstein's *The Ottawa Men: The Civil Service Mandarins, 1935-1957* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1982) examines a similar group to Owram's Government Generation.

143 Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, xii.

144 Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 4, 5.

A critical aspect of this interpretation is the recognition that the war generation was “constituted by a traumatic event.” As June Edmonds and Bryan Turner note, having lived through the trauma of the war, men were seen to be different. The public accepted this difference, recognizing that the war experience forged a form of collective response. It did so by uniting “a particular cohort of individuals into a self-conscious age stratum” that cut the war generation off “from its past and [separated] it from the future.” In so doing, the war became “the basis of a collective ideology and a set of integrating rituals” that acted as a “conduit” for understanding the conflict.<sup>145</sup> For those who came of age at this time, the changes that accompanied 1914-18 were immense, so much so that their societies came to see the post-1918 world as a new era.<sup>146</sup> In the case of the war generation, the shifting social, economic, cultural, and political world also coincided with their maturation, making these changes a potent marker for their generational identity.<sup>147</sup>

Age was therefore a critical part of an emerging generational identity that was adopted by society and by men themselves. As young boys, this generation was “exposed to enthusiastic support for war and war culture.”<sup>148</sup> The dominant political ideology of their youth was imperialism and, as Mark Moss argues, it was complemented by period support for militarism,

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145 June Edmonds and Bryan Turner, *Generations, Culture and Society* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2002), 7.

146 J.O. Miller, ed., *The New Era in Canada: Essays Dealing with the Upbuilding of the Canadian Commonwealth* (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., 1917).

147 Wohl, *The Generation of 1914*.

148 Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2001), 6.

manliness, patriotism, and nationalism.<sup>149</sup> In the decades before the war, industrialization, urbanization and modernization were believed to be threatening men's role in society. At their most extreme, fears over the decline of physical labour risked making men "superfluous." In response, men took refuge in manly pursuits like sporting and camping in hopes of "reviving" their supposedly vulnerable position in society. The "ultimate form for the exercise of masculinity" was war.<sup>150</sup> With the brief exception of a few thousand who joined the South African War, however, Canadian men faced a martial problem: Canada was not at war. In place of actual warfare, therefore, they embraced "suitable substitutes" that would hopefully prepare them for combat when the time came. This was the atmosphere in which the war generation was raised. As boys, their entire society was built on the idea that the warrior "was the ultimate masculine ideal."<sup>151</sup> As men, they came of age with the most destructive war in living memory.

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149 Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 13-14.

150 Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 15.

151 Moss, *Manliness and Militarism*, 20.

## Chapter 2

### A silent generation?

*"I fear for them, these silent men"*<sup>1</sup>  
- Evadne Price

The men of the war generation rarely spoke about the war.<sup>2</sup> Despite their "conspiracy of silence," some did feel compelled to write the conflict "out of their system."<sup>3</sup> This need to record their experience indicated an attempt to "bear witness to the trauma of war" and make sense of its consequences.<sup>4</sup> Much of the resulting literature attests to the war's undermining of notions of progress. It was a disillusioning experience. In Canada, however, cultural nationalism checked expressions of literary discontent. Postwar fiction shied away from challenging the meaning of the conflict, even in its aftermath. As a

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1 Evadne Price quoted in Jonathan Atkin, *A War of Individuals: Bloomsbury Attitudes to the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), 143. An Australian-British journalist, actress, and writer, Price wrote a female response to Eric Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* entitled *Not So Quiet*.

2 George Parfitt, *Fiction of the First World War* (London: Faber and Faber, 1988), 4. For contemporary recognition of this silence, see R.H. Mottram, *Ten Years Ago*, in which W.E. Bates writes as preface that these men's silence has been "significant." Bates cited in Parfitt, 4.

3 Dagmar Novak, "The Canadian Novel and the Two World Wars: The English-Canadian Literary Sensibility," (PhD diss., Toronto, 1985), 67; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 6.

4 Trudi Tate, *Modernism, History and the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 1.



result, Canadian war fiction failed to portray the personal impact of the war. Despite this fact, historians use these novels to argue that Canada somehow escaped the same postwar disillusionment that haunted the U.S. and Europe.

Between 1914 and 1919, Canada's war authors embraced notions of romance and chivalry, much like their international counterparts.<sup>5</sup> After war's end, however, authors outside Canada began questioning the conflict and its ultimate meaning. They struggled to understand such killing on an industrial scale; prewar notions of romantic and chivalric warfare were shattered.<sup>6</sup> Debates raged, which critics now define as a "conflict between generations over the war's significance."<sup>7</sup> For the first time, combatants in a war also became its literary authors.<sup>8</sup> Their need to record experience, to bear witness to the slaughter, and to highlight their own role in the narrative reflects Clifford Geertz's belief that refashioning one's past helps give it meaning. By making "sense out of experience," the war stamped a deep imprint on this

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5 See Crawford Killian, "The Great War and the Canadian Novel, 1915-1926," (MA Thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1972) and Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship*.

6 L. Moore Cosgrave, *Afterthoughts of Armageddon: The Gamut of Emotions Produced by the War, Pointing a Moral that is Not Too Obvious* (Toronto: Hunter Rose, 1919), 13-14.

7 David Kennedy, *Over Here: The First World War and American Society* (New York: Oxford, 2004), 221; see too, for example, Holger Klein, ed., *The First World War in Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays* (London: Macmillan, 1976) and Partick Quinn and Steven Trout, eds., *The Literature of the Great War Reconsidered: Beyond Modern Memory* (London: Palgrave 2001). In his study of French soldiers' use of literature as a way to testify to their war experience Leonard Smith argues that it is "unsurprising that the novel should have the final say on the experience of the combatant of the Great War." See Smith, *Embattled Self*, 149.

8 Parfitt argues that "no earlier war ... gave rise to an equivalent body of writing and, for the first time, ... there was the possibility of a substantial literature produced by combatants, for the armies of the Great War were the first literate ... armies." See Parfitt, *Fiction of the First World War*, 135.

generation in a heightened version of their otherwise “normal individual development.”<sup>9</sup> This “generational imprinting,” as Howard Schumann and Jacqueline Scott argue, was dependent upon the war as an unprecedented historical event occurring at a particularly influential time in their lives.

For the youths of the war generation, the conflict was not just a major world event; it was their introduction to the world.<sup>10</sup> According to historian Eric Leed, there was “no debate over whether [the war caused] a deep and profound alteration of identity.” Belief in the conflict’s transformational power led to hopes that peace would bring about a new age, an era dominated by youth.<sup>11</sup> After 1918, there was a sense that the old order had been swept away and replaced by a new, modern society, represented by youth and youth culture. Works such as *The Revolt of Modern Youth* by Ben Lindsey and *The New Generation* by V.F. Calverton and S.D. Schmalhausen focused attention on the “new form” that generational identity (and conflict) was taking.<sup>12</sup> Academics, particularly in the emerging social sciences, joined

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9 Clifford Geertz, “Ethos, World View, and the Analysis of Sacred Symbols,” in Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic, 1973), 140. See too Robert Fulford, *The Triumph of Narrative: Storytelling in the Age of Mass Culture* (Toronto: Anansi, 1999), 15 for a discussion of the relationship between Geertz’s work and the importance of narrative.

10 Howard Schumann and Jacqueline Scott, “Generations and Collective Memories,” *American Sociological Review* 53:3 (Jun., 1989): 378.

11 Eric Leed, *No Man’s Land: Combat & Identity in World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 1.

12 V.F. Calverton and Samuel D. Schmalhausen, eds., *The New Generation: The Intimate Problems of Modern Parents and Children* (London: George Allen Unwin Ltd., 1930), 8. See too Ben B. Lindsey and Wainwright Evans, *The Revolt of Modern Youth* (New York: Boni & Liverlight, 1925).

the chorus of theorists, such as Karl Manheim and José Ortega y Gasset, who devoted considerable study to this new interest. Their work helped to popularize generation as a concept and Manheim's combining of generation with class (to demonstrate that generational groups were framed by more than birth years) proved particularly influential, leading to widespread acceptance that such groupings were formed by common life-stages as well as historical events.<sup>13</sup>

It was in literature, however, that the war's generational impact was most evident. Many of the most enduring of this generation's voices came from the ranks of men born in the decade and a half before 1900.<sup>14</sup> Having come of age with the conflict, these writers looked for new ways to understand it. They rejected notions of a 'good war' and the literary conventions that accompanied it. In their place, these authors embraced new narrative tools, such as realistic descriptions of combat that tried to lend structure to "otherwise inchoate fragments of experience." In Europe, Britain, and the United States, authors subjected the war and its aftermath to serious critical analysis. France's postwar writing, for example, framed the conflict as

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<sup>13</sup> See especially "The Problem of Generations," in Karl Manheim, *Essays in the Sociology of Knowledge* (London Routledge, 1952), 276-322.

<sup>14</sup> Ernest Hemingway, for instance, was born in 1899. Charles Yale Harrison was a year earlier, in 1898. John Dos Passos was born in 1896, the same year as Edmund Blunden. Robert Graves was born in 1895, as was Gabriel Chevalier. Canadians James Pedley, Will Bird, and George Godwin were born respectively in 1892, 1891 and 1889. Ernest Raymond and Siegfried Sassoon were slightly older, being born respectively in 1888 and 1886, but both were more than two decades younger than men such as Rudyard Kipling. There were exceptions, such as Henri Barbusse and Ford Maddox Ford (both born in 1873), but the postwar literary landscape was largely filled with young men.

a tragedy.<sup>15</sup> Many British writers, by contrast, were more concerned by irony and ideas of futility.<sup>16</sup> While the war inevitably consisted of “several hundred thousand individually experienced wars,” the generation’s writing also had much in common.<sup>17</sup> It was trying to make sense of the experience, to define it, and to find closure.<sup>18</sup>

This broad body of work is described as disillusioned. Although rarely defined, postwar disillusionment generally refers to the “loss of illusions in the norms and values of the pre-war world.”<sup>19</sup> While the extent of this disenchantment is contested, by the 1920s doubts were creeping into Western societies as to “the status and authority of Western civilization.” These

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15 Smith, *Embattled Self*, 185, 196.

16 Jay Winter and Antoine Prost, *The Great War in History: Debates and Controversies, 1914 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 196. For a comparison of French and British writing see Frank Field, *British and French Writers of the First World War: Comparative Studies in Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

17 Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 5.

18 According to Marlene Briggs, neither the Armistice nor its commemoration “imposed closure on the war” and, in Britain, efforts at postwar reconstruction left much of the conflict’s impact unresolved. See Marlene Briggs, “Haunted Armistice: The Great War, Modern British Literature and the Mourning of Historical Trauma,” (PhD diss., University of Ottawa, 2000), xii. The French had similar difficulty finding meaning amidst the failed postwar “utopia” so many had hoped for. Like their wartime allies, therefore, France’s authors were also searching for closure. Their literature evolved from a postwar “rejection of the war” to a reconstruction of the conflict as a traumatic experience. See Smith, *Embattled Self*, especially chapter 4, “The Novel and the Search for Closure,” 148-194.

19 Furedi, *First World War*, 16. John Keegan makes a similar observation. See Keegan, *The First World War* (London: Hutchinson, 1998), 321, where he states “The Somme marked the end of an age of vital optimism in British life that has never been recovered.”

sentiments were felt “most forcefully ... by artists and imaginative writers.”<sup>20</sup> American writers, such as John Dos Passos, claimed that the war “brought death ... to everything that mattered.”<sup>21</sup> Richard Aldington, author of the British war novel *Death of a Hero*, asked why the war happened and demanded to know who was responsible for its atrocities.<sup>22</sup> Arnold Bennett added to postwar critiques, writing of younger men who returned home from war as “old, damaged, [and] disillusioned.”<sup>23</sup> These works framed the war as a harbinger of individual transformation. Men such as Aldridge believed that few lives “remained unaffected by the war” and that most “[adult] lives were cut sharply into three sections – pre-war, war, and post-war.”<sup>24</sup>

Examples of the war’s negative impact cut across literary genres. While the Lost Generation writers produced the most famous expression of disillusionment, popular, middlebrow authors, such as Britain’s Gilbert Frankau, also wrote of damaged men. Frankau’s character Francis Gordon, for example, went to war a “smooth-faced boy.” Once invalided, however, he became a “middle-aged man.” Gordon’s hair greyed and “his eyes had lost

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20 Furedi, *First World War*, 16, 18, 25. Canadians had similar doubts. After the war, for instance, science and technology no longer equated to progress and it was “no longer possible to have an implicit faith that technology would always be used to create a better, more peaceful world.” See R. Douglas Francis, *The Technological Imperative in Canada: An Intellectual History* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), 91.

21 Dos Passos, cited in Claudia Matherly Stolz, “Dos Passos’ Three Soldiers: A Case Study,” *West Virginia University Philological Papers* 50 (Fall 2004), 77.

22 Richard Aldington, *Death of a Hero* (Dundurn, 1998), 157.

23 Bennett, cited in George Parfitt, *Fiction of the First World War: A Study* (London: Faber & Faber, 1988), 73.

24 Aldington, *Death of a Hero*, 157-58.

their laughter." Now, he "no longer held himself upright, his shoulders drooped as though he carried a burden on them."<sup>25</sup> According to James Powell, American writers shared this postwar disillusionment. The war "was not only psychologically transforming," it altered how these writers "looked at both life and literature."<sup>26</sup> Sarah Trott makes a similar case that "hardboiled" detective fiction, such as that of Raymond Chandler, should also be read as part of this "literature of traumatic experience."<sup>27</sup>

Despite similarities to American and British fiction before and during the war, Canadians did not follow the disillusioned path laid out by writers such as Hemingway, Dos Passos, or others in the Lost Generation. Instead, Canadian novelists produced staid, middlebrow fiction because "that is what sold."<sup>28</sup> Their novels rarely questioned the conflict or its impact. They relied heavily on romantic styles buttressed by strong morals and inspirational

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25 Gilbert Frankau, *Peter Jackson, Cigar Merchant: A Romance of Married Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1920), 322. For additional discussion of British literary reactions to the war, including critiques of its postwar aftermath, see Parfitt, *Fiction of the First World War* and James Powell, "A Humble Protest: A Literary Generation's Quest for the Heroic Self, 1917-1930" (PhD diss., Ohio State, 2008).

26 Powell, "A Humble Protest," 27.

27 Sarah Trott, "The Detective as Veteran: Re-casting American Hard-Boiled Writing as a Literature of Traumatic War Experience," in Stephen McVeigh and Nicola Cooper, eds., *Men After War* (London: Routledge, 2013), 130.

28 Amy Tector, "Wounded Warriors: Representations of disabled soldiers in Canadian Fiction of the First World War," (PhD diss., Université Libre de Bruxelles 2000), 14. Dr. Tector was kind enough to send me proofs of her dissertation. This material is broken up by chapter and the pagination provided reflects only the pages per chapter, not the dissertation in total.

endings.<sup>29</sup> As Gilbert Parker, one of the era's leading authors, explained: "I make my characters a little better, a little more adventurous, a little more superlative in all their qualities than they would be possibly in real life."<sup>30</sup> As a result, Canadian war fiction was recognized for its mediocrity and it escaped critical attention for much of the twentieth century.<sup>31</sup> Indeed, until the 1980s, literary critics and historians agreed that this body of work was "conventional and undistinguished."<sup>32</sup> Historian W.L. Morton claimed that these books lacked "a single memorable character" and that their only virtue was that they could be read without the reader "ever being disturbed."<sup>33</sup> Others described Canada's literature as filled with "clichéd romances by authors more interested in jingoistic patriotism than honest portrayal of life at the front."<sup>34</sup> It is not surprising, then, that in the wake of such criticism, many of Canada's war novels were ignored and that the idea of a canon of Canadian war fiction rarely merited an afterthought.<sup>35</sup>

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29 Amy Tector, "Wounded Warriors," 14, 16.

30 Parker cited in Tector, "Wounded Warriors," 16.

31 Colin Hill, "Generic Experiment and Confusion in Early Canadian Novels of the Great War," *Studies in Canadian Literature* 34:2 (2009), 2. Hill writes that "Canada's literary histories almost univocally consider war fiction of the period to be insignificant."

32 Frank K. Stanzel, "'In Flanders Fields the Poppies Blow': Canada and the Great War," in Peter Easingwood, Konrad Gross and Lynette Hunter, eds., *Difference and Community: Canadian and European Cultural Perspectives* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1996), 213–14.

33 See Morton, "1920s," 225.

34 Eric Thompson, "Canadian Fiction of the Great War," *Canadian Literature* 91 (Winter 1981): 84.

35 Donna Coates describes the novels from the early 1920s as "light reading." See Coates, "War," in William New, ed., *Encyclopedia of Literature in Canada* (Toronto: University

Since the 1980s, however, the reputation of Canada's war writing has been rehabilitated. In his 1981 article "Canadian Fiction of the Great War," Eric Thompson argued that although many of the period's novels were forgettable, there were also notable exceptions, including Peregrine Acland's *All Else is Folly*, Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed*, and Philip Child's *God's Sparrows*. These texts were sufficiently noteworthy to form a "significant genre of Canadian fiction." With themes that mirrored the disillusionment of writers in the U.S. and overseas, Thompson praised these novels for their accuracy. Because the authors were veterans, he privileged their views. They knew about the war "first hand."<sup>36</sup>

Scholars such as Dagmar Novak, Dominique Dumontet, and Amy Tector have also attempted to recuperate the canon.<sup>37</sup> Canada's middlebrow fiction, they argue, tells as "valid side of the story of the war" as more avant-garde work.<sup>38</sup> Whereas Thompson rejected novels written before 1929 as overly romantic, Novak argues that all books published between 1915 and 1939 need to be considered. She concedes that "a younger school," led by Acland and Harrison, came to prominence in the late 1920s, but argues that the earlier fiction, as part of a "romance tradition," was equally legitimate.

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of Toronto Press, 2002), 1189. According to Tector, others who rejected the era's writing included E.K. Brown, Desmond Pacey, and Northrup Frye. See Tector, "Wounded Warriors," 13-21. She argues that scholarly "neglect" of Canada's war literature "cannot be entirely explained" by Canada's colonial status, because in Australia, an otherwise similar case to Canada, "war fiction ... has enjoyed sustained analysis and criticism for decades."

36 Eric Thompson, "Canadian Fiction of the Great War," 81, 83.

37 Tector, "Wounded Warriors;" Novak, *Dubious Glory*; Dumontet, "'Lest We Forget';" also important is Coates, "The Best Soldiers of All: Unsung Heroines in Canadian Women's Great War Fiction," *Canadian Literature*, 151 (1996).

38 Tector, "Wounded Warriors," 32.



Novels by Charles Gordon or J. Murray Gibbon may have been romantic but they nonetheless reflected “the beliefs and values” of Canadians at the time.<sup>39</sup> Tector agrees. She argues that Canada’s middlebrow war fiction has been “unjustly neglected” and remains a window onto what “Canadians thought of events shortly after having lived through them.”<sup>40</sup> Yet, unlike Thompson and Novak, Tector does not see a firm break between romantic and modernist literature. She argues that the most significant shift in Canada’s war writing was in tone, resulting from a “slow transformation” from romanticism to realism.<sup>41</sup> Dumontet, who also seeks to recuperate “under-valued texts,” supports the idea of a literary evolution. She argues that pigeonholing romantic and modernist war literature into set categories of “jingoistic romances and cynical anti-war texts” misses the “social inclusivity and balance” that many of Canada’s war writers attempted to convey.<sup>42</sup>

The major difference between these schools of thought is their position on the objective “truth” of Canadian war fiction. Thompson and Novak both claim that realist novels were more accurate, and thus more powerful, than romantic work.<sup>43</sup> But as Tector points out, equating “bad” romantic literature of early novels with a belief that it is a “false” version of the war “conflates the supposed realism of the soldier authors with their adoption of the realist

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39 Novak, *Dubious Glory*, 7.

40 Tector, “Wounded Warriors,” 444-445.

41 Tector, “Wounded Warriors,” 39.

42 Dumontet, ““Lest We Forget,”” ii.

43 See Thompson, “Canadian Fiction of the Great War,” and Novak, *Dubious Glory*.

style.”<sup>44</sup> More recent analysis rejects the privileging of realist fiction and argues that the belief of romantic authors in “the Honour of battle and the Glory of Patriotism” was an equally legitimate response to the war. In such cases, the conflict described by romantic authors was “not only steeped in horror and bogged down in mud, but also offered soldiers comradeship, a sense of purpose, and new experiences that were not always negative.”<sup>45</sup>

Those defending this literature argue that critics have misrepresented the importance of realist, anti-war books. Jonathan Vance and Maria Bracco reject notions of postwar disillusionment. Bracco’s study of middlebrow novels shifts focus away from the anti-war canon and on to authors whose postwar popularity demonstrates that a more conservative, traditional version of the war continued to appeal to readers after 1918.<sup>46</sup> Like Vance, Bracco dismisses the views of highbrow modernists as unrepresentative of public opinion.<sup>47</sup> Middlebrow fiction is interpreted as a conservative bulwark against the modernism of the anti-war writers and, in the context of war fiction, it helped “soften the [conflict’s] impact ... by reasserting links with the past” and reinforcing middle class standards and values.<sup>48</sup> In place of a stark break between the pre-war and post-war world, middlebrow authors offered readers a cushion to help fashion meaning out of the changes wrought by the

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44 Tector, “Wounded Warriors,” 28.

45 Tector, “Wounded Warriors,” 29.

46 Bracco, *Merchants of Hope* and *Between and Between*.

47 Bracco, *Merchants of Hope*, 200.

48 Bracco, *Merchants of Hope*, 10, 12-13.

war. Their values reaffirmed “the strength and importance of links with the past. Morality, religion, tradition: such words made up a litany of appeals for post-war regeneration.”<sup>49</sup> The pre- and postwar continuity of societal values is a central tenet of these positive readings, which argues that the “idea of rupture” has been “exaggerated.”<sup>50</sup>

Historians and literary critics point to middlebrow fiction as a “fairly accurate barometer of the Canadian perception of war.”<sup>51</sup> It is assumed that the work of Canada’s authors followed “the same structural patterns as their German and British counterparts.”<sup>52</sup> Nevertheless, while middlebrow novels were popular on both sides of the Atlantic, Canada’s literary market was sufficiently distinct to weaken direct comparison between its middlebrow authors and those in the U.S. or Britain. One major difference was the relative size of Canada’s book market. Bracco’s discussion of British novels considers books that sold in the hundreds of thousands. But Canadian authors and their readership never approached comparable figures, even relatively. Moreover, conclusions drawn from Canadian book sales are questionable due to a lack of sales figures, which, as Mary Vipond has revealed, are absent for much of the 1920s. While Vipond’s study says much about early twentieth century reading habits, it says little about the popularity of war books because she

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49 Bracco, *Merchants of Hope*, 197.

50 Richard Overly, *The Morbid Age: Britain Between the Wars* (London: Allen Lane, 2009), 13-14.

51 Linda Steward, “A Canadian Perspective: The Fictional and Historical Portrayal of World War One,” (MA Thesis, Waterloo, 1983), 104.

52 Dumontet, “‘Lest We Forget,’” 17.

ends her analysis in 1928, a year before the flood of war texts that included Peregrine Acland's *All Else is Folly*, Robert Graves' *Goodbye to All That*, and Remarque's *All Quiet*.<sup>53</sup>

Distinguishing between highbrow and middlebrow literature is also difficult in Canada because few authors broke out of the middlebrow mold, ensuring the absence of highbrow war literature. Canadian readers, as Tector points out, were suspicious of realism in general and their conservative reading habits had a direct impact on book sales: "the dispute between romantic versions of the war and realistic ones was not simply about how the conflict was portrayed." It was also at "the heart" of a literary argument "that had dominated Canadian criticism since the nineteenth century." Debates over the war fit into this romantic-realist struggle and middlebrow authors proved reluctant to criticize the conflict out of fear that "if it was found to be 'all for nothing' the resulting societal despair would be crippling." The middlebrow mindset had "good reason," therefore, "to avoid questioning the conflict's meaning too rigorously."<sup>54</sup>

The uncritical stance of much of Canadian war fiction divides historians and critics. While novels such as Ralph Connor's *The Major* and Charles Yale Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed* stand at either end of a romantic-

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<sup>53</sup> Mary Vipond, "Best Sellers in English Canada: 1919–1928," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 35-36 (1986): 73–105.

<sup>54</sup> Tector, "Wounded Warriors," 24, 33.

modernist spectrum, other works are less easily classified.<sup>55</sup> Both Eric Thompson and Jeff Keshen argue that Acland, Child, and Harrison wrote disillusioned “anti-war novels.”<sup>56</sup> Tim Cook makes a similar case, while adding the memoirists Will Bird, James Pedley, and Wilfrid Kerr to the list of “disillusionment writers.” Jonathan Vance, however, sees Bird and Child as examples of a more positive, balanced interpretation of the war. Vance also uses Kerr’s writing to dismiss anti-war novels such as that of Harrison. Amy Tector agrees with Vance about Child and argues that the author refused to portray his war experience as “entirely negative.”<sup>57</sup> Dumontet’s reading of Child is similarly focused on the author’s balanced writing, while Colin Hill and Peter Webb see Acland’s *All Else is Folly* as a work in tension between romanticism and realism.<sup>58</sup>

These conflicting interpretations are a result of middlebrow sensibilities. Several novels, including *All Else is Folly* and *Show Me Death!*, cannot be described as anti-war fiction because they combine wartime disillusionment with “sentimentality” and “hackneyed” love-plots.<sup>59</sup> Dent’s *Show Me Death!* contains harsh descriptions of combat, death, and loss of

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55 According to Hill, the “standard definitions” of Canada’s various genres of literature: realism, romanticisms, naturalism, and modernism, “do not easily apply in the Canadian context.” See Hill, “Early Novels of the Great War,” 60.

56 Keshen, “The Great War Soldiers as Nation Builder,” 14.

57 Tector, “Wounded Warriors,” 77.

58 Hill, “Early Novels of the Great War,” 67; Webb, “Occupants of Memory,” 114.

59 Thompson, “Canadian Fiction of the Great War,” 86.

faith; its characters emerge from combat “broken, sobbing wrecks of men.”<sup>60</sup> Yet, while the book continues in similar fashion until its conclusion, it shifts its tone to a romantic ending. In place of the novel’s earlier critiques of the war, Dent’s protagonist falls—literally—into the arms of his beloved: “The door reopened. ‘Oh, thank God, Luella! Luella!’ I tried to run toward her, but you see I had only one leg. I had forgotten that. I fell—fell into her arms. Her lips brushed my cheeks.”<sup>61</sup> These final romantic pages contrast oddly with the novel’s earlier bitterness and disillusionment. But they are symptomatic of how Canadian war fiction included criticism of the war within a broader romantic structure, concessions to the middlebrow format that reflect these authors’ embrace of “inspirational endings.”<sup>62</sup> Indeed, with the notable exception of *Generals Die in Bed*, almost every example of Canadian war fiction ends on a positive note.<sup>63</sup>

Canadian fiction about the war’s aftermath also favours happy endings. Douglas Durkin’s *The Magpie* (1923), Hubert Evans’ *The New Front Line* (1927), and Harwood Steele’s *I Shall Arise* (1926) all deal with the postwar problems of returned veterans. Each book offers a stinging critique of interwar Canada and its failure to live up to wartime ideals. Unlike war fiction outside of

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60 Dent, *Show Me Death!* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1930), 91.

61 Dent, *Show Me Death!*, 375.

62 Leslie Roberts’ *When the Gods Laughed*, a novel set during rather than after the war, has a similar ending. Its main character, despite serious wounds, finds purpose in his romantic love for his beloved “Molly-girl.” See Roberts, *When the Gods Laughed* (London: Sampson Low, Marston & Co., 1930).

63 Candida Rifkind, “Too Close to Home: Middlebrow Anti-Modernism and the Sentimental Poetry of Edna Jacques” *Journal of Canadian Studies/Revue d’Etudes Canadiennes* 39:1 (Winter 2005): 103.

Canada, however, they too end happily. In *The Magpie* a returned man bitterly explains that veterans wasted “the best part of their lives fighting for the big fellows.”<sup>64</sup> Hugh Henderson in *The New Front Line* is similarly disillusioned by postwar life. He proves unable to find meaning in postwar capitalism and is bothered by how it “seemed that the less useful work a person did the more money he made.”<sup>65</sup> Chris Maynard, whose spirit is nearly strangled in *I Shall Arise* by his “incessant disillusionment,” shares these postwar struggles.<sup>66</sup> Yet, despite such themes, none of these novels carries its discussion of discontent through to the conclusion. In contrast to disillusioned texts published outside of Canada, each ends with its characters finding love and meaning after the war.<sup>67</sup> It is not surprising, therefore, that W.L. Morton concluded that Canada’s postwar fiction escaped the “smoldering disillusionment” of the Lost Generation.<sup>68</sup>

Morton was correct about Canada’s war fiction but for the wrong reasons. Age mattered to how this generation understood the conflict. Their books, while limited in number, presented the conflict differently than those of older Canadians. The romantic-realist spectrum so often identified by literary critics was also a generational spectrum. The focus on middlebrow literature, combined with an incessant preoccupation with studying

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64 Durkin, *The Magpie* (Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton, 1923), 12.

65 Evans, *The New Front Line* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1927), 110.

66 H.E.R. Steele, *I Shall Arise* (London: Hodder and Stoughton), 107.

67 In Remarque’s *All Quiet on the Western Front*, for instance, a sniper kills the main character. No Canadian war novel has its protagonist killed.

68 W.L. Morton, “1920s,” 226.

representative books, marginalized the generation's voices. Canadian middlebrow fiction shied away from critical interpretations of the war's aftermath. But this did not mean that the war generation did as well. Nor did it mean that this group failed to identify generationally. Rather, Canada's war fiction demonstrated that middlebrow fiction did not address the trials faced by returned men. The conflict's economic impact is almost uniformly ignored, as is postwar hardship, battles for promised medical and social assistance, and difficulties re-integrating into civilian life. Even texts that do attempt discussion of the war's economic aftermath, such as Durkin's *The Magpie* and Steele's *I Shall Arise*, never resolve the issues their characters face. Instead, these novels fall back on the twin middlebrow tropes of romantic love and the agrarian myth as an answer for men's postwar problems.<sup>69</sup> Historians have added to the critical silencing of this generation's views by ignoring what returned men thought about these novels. In the process, they overlook how age and generation influences interpretations of Canadian war fiction. When both are examined, it is clear that the so-called representative literature is a poor gauge to the thinking of returned men which historians mistakenly use to measure the war's aftermath and generational impact.

The youth of the war generation is rarely considered a factor when analyzing interwar fiction. Novak, for example, describes a "new generation"

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<sup>69</sup> James Doyle describes the imagined place of the Canadian farm as an "agrarian ideal." See Doyle, *Progressive Heritage: The Evolution of a Politically Radical Literary Tradition in Canada* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2002), 77. Stephen Cullen, whose dissertation examines masculinity and Great War fiction in Britain, echoes this analysis, describing idealized farm life as utopian postwar, rural Eden. See Cullen, "Gender and the Great War," especially Chapter 8, "'There's a long, long trail a-winding / Into the land of my dreams'; after the war – combatant dreams and disenchantment," 309-349.



of authors who emerged onto Canada's literary scene in the late 1920s, but her analysis of age goes no further.<sup>70</sup> Peter Buitenhuis also notes the importance of generational context in Canadian war literature, however he is concerned with authors born decades before.<sup>71</sup> In place of age, critics focus on war. While they have helped craft a canon of Canadian war fiction, they have masked how younger men wrote about the conflict. Tector defends Ralph Connor and Basil King's war fiction, for example, on the basis that their choice "to write in the romantic style rather than adopting a realist tone or a cynical attitude" should not disqualify their books from Canadian war fiction. Both men were highly successful middlebrow authors, but however important their work is to the genre, there is little evidence to suggest the war generation shared Connor or King's understanding of the conflict. Indeed, no member of the younger generation authored a war novel comparable to the positive, romantic vision embraced by Connor and King. Moreover, younger critics, such as Bill Deacon, were not fans of their work. Deacon, perhaps the most influential and important book reviewer in the 1920s and 1930s, dismissed Connor's novels as "weak," "pious tales," filled with little more than "half-truths." His Canada "presented a ... radically false view of Canadian life" and, in Deacon's opinion, the author's "evangelical zeal" never equaled his "artistic conscience."<sup>72</sup> Such generational divisions are masked,

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<sup>70</sup> Novak, *Dubious Glory*.

<sup>71</sup> Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words: British, American and Canadian Propaganda and Fiction, 1914-1933* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1987), 151.

<sup>72</sup> William Arthur Deacon, *Poteen: A Pot-Pourri of Canadian Essays* (Ottawa: Graphic, 1926), 168-169. Deacon was similarly dismissive of L.M. Montgomery, arguing that her work

however, by claims that younger men like Deacon were elites and that the fiction most representative of Canadian opinion was the canon's balanced and inclusive war texts.

Unlike disillusioned anti-war novels, such as Harrison's *Generals Die in Bed*, "balanced" war books were more "inclusive."<sup>73</sup> These novels were middlebrow fiction at best and, while they did not deny the war's "more negative aspects," they championed the belief that the war "was necessary."<sup>74</sup> According to Vance, Canadians continued to believe in the war and, although few denied its toll, accounts too critical of the conflict risked being rejected as unbalanced. The "right way" to tell the story of the war was to infuse it with beauty, sentiment, and "noble ideas."<sup>75</sup> Any other approach, including that of disillusioned anti-war fiction, was "invalid," because it cast Canadian soldiers "in a bad light." As a result, postwar accounts seeking legitimacy with Canada's readers had to portray "both the positive and the negative" sides of the war.<sup>76</sup>

John Murray Gibbon's books are considered representative of these balanced texts. Gibbon, born in 1875, was a Scottish-Canadian who served as the first president and founding member of the Canadian Authors Association (CAA). He was also an historian of the Canadian Pacific Railway

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was about little more than "sugary stories" and said more about the "dearth of mature novels" than the quality of Canada's fiction.

<sup>73</sup> Dumontet, "Lest We Forget," 18.

<sup>74</sup> Tector, "Wounded Warriors," 52.

<sup>75</sup> Vance, *Death So Noble*, 175.

<sup>76</sup> Vance, *Death So Noble*, 187-188.

(CPR) and author of two novels inspired by the Great War: *Drums Afar: An International Romance* (1918) and *The Conquering Hero* (1920). The latter was set during the immediate post-war era. Keshen describes the novel as “typical” of those in the immediate postwar era.<sup>77</sup> Tector agrees and praises Gibbon as a popular writer. She uses his book as an example of Canadian writers who failed to adopt realism out of “pure” economic reasons and cites his stories as “typical” of Canadian postwar bestsellers, which featured “a courageous and morally upstanding hero, a virtuous, if victimized heroine, sentimentalized deaths and happy endings.”<sup>78</sup>

*The Conquering Hero* is a melodramatic romance-adventure story. The plot shifts from New Brunswick to New York to British Columbia. It begins in 1918 in a New Brunswick hunting camp, where Donald Macdonald, a returned man, works with his uncle as a guide. During the war Donald served with the 42<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Highlanders. He distinguished himself in battle, winning the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM) for raiding a machine gun nest, after which he was “wounded, gassed and honourably discharged.”<sup>79</sup> In addition to his status as a war hero, Donald is an outdoorsman and a farmer, making him the embodiment of at least three stereotypes of Canadian manliness.

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<sup>77</sup> Jeff Keshen, “The Great War Soldier as Nation Builder,” 13. It is unclear where Keshen’s citations come from. He cites page 22 from Novak’s PhD dissertation, however this citation is not in the chapter of that work (which incidentally was published in 1985, not 1988), nor in her monograph from 2000. Indeed, Novak’s dissertation never addresses *The Conquering Hero* and the phrases cited by Keshen do not relate to those used in Novak’s *Dubious Glory*.

<sup>78</sup> Tector, “Wounded Warriors,” 18.

<sup>79</sup> John Murray Gibbon, *The Conquering Hero* (Toronto: S.B. Gundy, 1920), 27.

Like most Canadian novels of this type, *The Conquering Hero* is not a war story and the conflict exists only in the background.<sup>80</sup> Gibbon does not deny that Donald was affected by the conflict and the veteran finds that after returning home his “morbid imagination” runs “riot.” Gibbon blames Donald’s bad dreams on his nerves. He can control himself by day but once asleep, he returns to the war:

now on parade, now doing fatigue duty, now creeping out at night on a wire-cutting expedition, now shivering in the trenches with fierce excitement at the minute before zero, now in a wild swirl of hand to hand bayonet fighting or choking with the fumes of gas.”<sup>81</sup>

Such passages are reminders that the war is not easily forgotten. These moments are fleeting, however, and do not affect the rest of the story. In fact, the novel unfolds as though Donald is mentally and physically fit, despite his wounds. These injuries never trouble him and he reintegrates into civilian life with relative ease. In Gibbon’s fictional world, it is Donald’s pride in his battalion that dominates his feeling about the war, not its consequences.

While authors such as Gibbon may have hesitated criticizing the war, the emphasis placed on these more balanced books marginalizes the fiction of Canada’s war generation. Their accounts were the most critical of all of Canada’s war fiction. Yet, because they published so little, their opinions are often drowned out by the emphasis on middlebrow books. In their place, the novels of Ralph Connor are cited as the best example of the Canadian

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<sup>80</sup> Novak, *Dubious Glory*, 19.

<sup>81</sup> Gibbon, *The Conquering Hero*, 65.

rejection of disillusionment. Connor's works, along with those of L.M. Montgomery, F.G. Scott, Stephen Leacock, Theodore Roberts, and J. Murray Gibbon, are used as examples of how Canadians thought about the war. The focus on their views is justified because they reflected "the average Canadian reader"<sup>82</sup> and the "persistence of conventional habits and attitudes" in Canada's nascent postwar publishing industry.<sup>83</sup> A select group of best-selling authors thus dominated Canada's literary landscape, ensuring that the literary market was a place where the "new generation" failed to "take the lead."<sup>84</sup> After the war ended, the literary preferences of Canadians "remained consistently traditional" and readers held to their "prewar favourites." As the critic Leo Kennedy lamented, "the Canadian literary scene is dominated by the Frank L. Packards, the Howard Angus Kennedys, the Ralph Connors; the Robertses and the Campbells."<sup>85</sup>

Despite their popularity, however, novels by authors such as Ralph Connor differed from those of younger writers.<sup>86</sup> Connor, like Hemingway, Dos Passos, and Charles Yale Harrison, served in the war, in his case as a chaplain. But unlike these younger writers, Connor was fifty-four years old when war broke out. His age shaped his experience, just as the war

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82 Vance, *A History of Canadian Culture* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2009), 263.

83 Mary Vipond, "Best Sellers in English Canada: 1919-1928," *Journal of Canadian Fiction* 36/37 (1986): 85.

84 Vance, *History of Canadian Culture*, 247.

85 Kennedy quoted in Vance, *History of Canadian Culture*, 262.

86 Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, 152.

generation's youth shaped theirs. The younger generation generally rejected traditional, romanticized portrayals of conflict in ways that older men, such as Connor, did not. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway declared that the war was "a calamity for civilization and perhaps would have been better avoided."<sup>87</sup> Connor's fictional response to the war was the exact opposite. In place of disillusioned rejection, his books re-affirmed the war's purpose in prose and style "reminiscent" of writers such as Rudyard Kipling.<sup>88</sup> No Canadian authors rejected the war to the extent of Hemingway. But this does not mean that the war generation disagreed with his approach. Their books could also be critical of the conflict, despite ending positively, which reflected more than a search for a silver lining in their war experience. Connor's generation viewed the war as a redemptive force for good, a theme that he continued to support as late as 1925.<sup>89</sup> The fiction of younger men was different. It found meaning in the war (and its aftermath) despite the calamity, not because war was a redeeming force.

The differences in the generational version of the postwar world are evident in Harwood Steele's *I Shall Arise* (1926).<sup>90</sup> Steele's book (now largely forgotten) tells the story of a returned man. It begins with Chris Maynard

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87 Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, 24-25.

88 Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, 154.

89 In *Treading the Winepress* Connor continues to describe the war as a "Great Adventure." See Connor, *Treading the Winepress* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1925), 285.

90 H.E.R. Steele, born in 1897 (almost forty years after Connor), was the son of Sir Sam Steele. He attested in May 1915, survived the war, and worked as a journalist and for the Canadian Pacific Railway. In addition to a handful of articles about the conflict, Steele authored a series of novels and short stories about the RCMP. See Tennyson, *The Canadian Experience of the Great War*, 376-77.

returning home from France. In place of a fiancée, job, and life that he expected, Chris finds a changed Canada that shatters his wartime ideals. After a failed suicide attempt, Maynard recuperates, falls in love, and builds a new life on a soldier farm in British Columbia. The novel's structure is similar to other postwar fiction about veterans, such as Durkin's *The Magpie* and Evans' *The New Front Line*. It combines sharp criticisms of Canada's postwar economy with a veteran's struggles to reintegrate into society. As with other middlebrow fiction from this period, it ends on a positive note and, like Craig Forrester in *The Magpie* and Hugh Henderson in *The New Front Line*, Maynard finds solace moving out of the city and onto the land.

What sets Steele's book apart from other novels about the difficulties faced by returned soldiers in postwar Canada is that the main character is the most deeply affected. In Durkin's book, Craig Forrester does not face serious personal hurdles. He has a job waiting for him and his health is not an issue. Rather, it is his friend, the secondary character Jimmy Dyer, who embodies the struggles of returned soldiers. In *I Shall Arise*, however, Chris Maynard experiences extreme hardship. Indeed, within the first few pages of the novel his life spirals out of control. His prewar love marries another man, he loses his job, and his former comrades abandon him. Everywhere he turns, Maynard is let down. The government will not help him with his health, veterans' associations do not want him as a member (because he was an officer), and even the Church proves unable to provide the necessary support. Maynard finds himself completely alone. Canada has failed him and he is consumed with disillusionment. His "bitterness" swells up "like a rising flood, dark and deep and awful." As the flood rises, "it quenched the

gleaming fire that once had burnt there — Faith. His faith in himself was gone; his faith in mankind going; his faith in God going too.” Maynard’s trust is fundamentally shaken, “trust in the women he knew, his trust in his friends, his confidence in the sincerity of those who promised Justice to the ex-soldier, his confidence in the future.” The veteran is despondent and the arrival of Armistice Day proves the final straw. Having witnessed how poorly veterans are being treated, Maynard cannot stand that Canadians are celebrating their ‘glorious dead’ while forgetting the plight of the living. The postwar world ushered in a “second war,” a “War of Peace.” Unlike 1914-18, this new war would have “no victory.” Without a family or a job, and with his health failing, Maynard decides his only solution is suicide. He retrieves his service revolver and attempts to shoot himself at the base of Winnipeg’s cenotaph. In a final act of irony, the cold proves too much for his damaged body and he is overtaken by sleep before he can pull the trigger.<sup>91</sup>

Had Steele’s book been written later in the decade, or outside of Canada, the novel would likely have ended with Maynard’s suicide, a damning indictment of the plight of the returned man.<sup>92</sup> But it did not and the book quickly returns to its middlebrow sensibilities when a Winnipeg nurse, Daphne Hargraves, saves Chris from hypothermia. The two eventually fall in love and settle on Vancouver Island at the fictional soldier farm of

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<sup>91</sup> Steele, *I Shall Arise*, 122, 174.

<sup>92</sup> Virginia Woolf’s character, Septimus Warren Smith, for example, famously commits suicide in her novel *Mrs. Dalloway*. In addition to that text, see too Karen Levenback, *Virginia Woolf and the Great War* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1999).



Pinehurst.<sup>93</sup> There, Chris meets Toby, another veteran, whose life motto — “I Shall Arise” — inspires Maynard to reconsider his sense of disillusion. Chris’ postwar renewal becomes complete in November while listening to Colonel Kent’s Armistice Day address. The speech addresses the postwar trials of returned men: “We see the world rolling along ... as before. And we ask ourselves, was it worth it?” His answer is a resounding yes, because of the ‘gifts’ the war gave the soldiers. Even though veterans had to do without “riches and prosperity,” the war gave them something much more valuable: “happiness and self-respect.” In the end, these were the qualities that mattered, along with their memories. Kent calls on the crowd to forget the “rough side” of the war by remembering only its “good side.”<sup>94</sup>

Steele’s defense of the war’s memory is typical of Canada’s middlebrow war fiction. What is surprising, however, is his scathing portrait of both life overseas and in postwar Canada. Chris Maynard’s experience on the battlefields is described in gruesome detail and Steele’s willingness to discuss the horrors and its postwar traumatic aftermath is what sets his generation’s accounts of the conflict apart from earlier fiction by older authors such as Connor and Gibbon. The destruction of Flanders that Steele recounts, with its “corpses, stiff, mud-covered, blood-stained, gazing with glassy eyes,” is anything but romantic. Descriptions of Maynard’s return to

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93 Steele likely based Pinehurst on the Merville Soldier Settlement plan, which bears similarities to Pinehurst, notably a forest fire that destroys much of the community in 1922. See Paul M. Koroscil, “Soldiers, Settlement and Development in British Columbia, 1915-1930,” *BC Studies* 54 (Summer 1982) and James Murton, *Creating a Modern Countryside: Liberalism and Land Settlement in British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2008), especially Chapter Three, “Stump Farms: Soldier Settlement at Merville,” 73-108.

94 Steele, *I Shall Arise*, 271-274.

Canada are equally critical and Steele states explicitly that the disappointments Chris experiences crush his spirit, draining him of “every ounce of strength he had.” Although he eventually comes to embrace his war memories, Steele makes it clear that they will haunt him for the rest of his life and Chris realizes “what the War had cost him.” The conflict “could not be thrown aside, like a closed book, as soon as peace was signed,” because “its consequences ... were to meet him and those of his generation everywhere, as long as they lived.”<sup>95</sup>

The most revealing difference between the war generation’s version of the war and that of older Canadians is in their descriptions of the dead. In *The Sky Pilot in No Man’s Land*, Connor ends his novel with the death of his main character, Barry Dunbar. It is a death of redemption and it plays a critical part in the novel’s plot. Having proved himself in battle, his last words recall the glory of God and war, reaffirming the reason for fighting and the importance of faith:

“Now—that’s—all—major,” he whispered. “Tell—her—I—thank—God—for—her—and—for—the—other. Major—tell—the—boys—that—God—is good—. Never—to be—afraid—but to—carry on—”

It was his last word, and there could be no better. “God is good. Never be afraid but carry on.”<sup>96</sup>

By comparison, Will Bird, who authored several books about the war, stripped battlefield death of all sentimentality. He opened his memoir, *And*

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<sup>95</sup> Steele, *I Shall Arise*, 36. 74.

<sup>96</sup> Connor, *The Sky Pilot in No Man’s Land* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1919), 343.

*We Go On*, with the killing of a young recruit. The man, new to the trenches, asks a veteran sergeant, "Where is the war—what is it?" A chance bullet kills the recruit midway through his sentence: "Ping! We buried him before it was light." The young man's death is devoid of meaning, glory, or romance. It is a sad, brutal fact that merits no further description. What is war? Bird's answer is simple and straightforward: dead men, reduced to little more than a "shriveled corpse," so "rotted" that no one could say whether he was "friend or foe."<sup>97</sup>

Charles Yale Harrison's descriptions of death in *Generals Die in Bed* are just as jarring. Wounded men are described as running with "gushing stumps." In a scene describing the bayoneting of a German soldier, Harrison details just how awkward and unclean the act of killing actually was:

My tugging and pulling works the blade in his insides.  
Again those horrible shrieks!

I place the butt of the rifle under my arm and turn  
away, trying to drag the blade out. It will not come.

I think: I can get it out if I unfasten the bayonet from  
the rifle. But I cannot go through with the plan, for the blade  
is in up to the hilt and the wound which I have been clumsily  
mauling is now a gaping hole. I cannot put my hand there.

Suddenly I remember what I must do.

I turn around and pull my breech-lock back. The click  
sounds sharp and clear.

He stops his screaming. He looks at me, silently now.

He knows what I am going to do.

A white Very light soars over our heads. His helmet  
has fallen from his head. I see his boyish face. He looks like a  
Saxon; he is fair and under the light I see white down against

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<sup>97</sup> Bird, *And We Go On*, 4-5.

green cheeks.

I pull my trigger. There is a loud report. The blade at the end of my rifle snaps in two. He falls into the corner of the bay and rolls over. He lies still.

I am free.<sup>98</sup>

Ralph Connor was capable of writing critically of the war's impact, but, like other older authors, he chose not to.<sup>99</sup> In *To Him That Hath*, his novel about the postwar era, Connor produces as sympathetic and nuanced a critique of veterans' issues as any war generation writer. The war, he wrote, was a "soul-devastating experience," which forced men to return home to a life "desolate and maimed in all that gave it value." Yet, in spite of such prose, what sets Connor apart from younger writers is that he tempered the harsh realities his characters faced. In place of disillusionment, his veterans find meaning and purpose in their postwar lives. After meeting the future love of his life, Captain Jack feels his sense of purpose return and he is thankful that the "dreary weeks" that followed his return home are finally ended.<sup>100</sup>

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98 Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed*, 112-113.

99 Stephen Leacock, for example, produced a brilliant satire of the younger generation's war writing in his collected *My Remarkable Uncle*. In an essay, "War and Humour," he lampooned the realistic staccato of much of the war generation's writing: "As the first roar of grape shot zoomed past us, my stomach suddenly sank. I walked to the edge of the mound and vomited. My stomach turned. I was sick. I threw up. 'Did you vomit?' asked Lord Kitchener. I said I had. 'Well, I'm going to,' he said. He went and vomited. He was sick. 'Did you vomit, Kitchener,' said Roberts. 'Yes.' 'Well, move aside and let me.' Such prose set 'newer,' 'realist writers' apart from an earlier literary tradition, including the works of Ralph Connor. See Leacock, "War and Humour," in *My Remarkable Uncle* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2010 [1942]), 129.

100 Ralph Connor, *To Him That Hath* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1921), 27.

The war generation writers rebelled against these tame, romantic descriptions. They did not praise war. They rejected it and some did so by explicitly taking aim at romanticized accounts. In *Generals Die in Bed*, a moralizing, “middle-aged” lay preacher symbolizes the older generation. He does not fit in with the younger men and has trouble relating to them. The recruits reject the preacher’s attempts to sermonize, telling him bluntly (in a thinly veiled reference to Ralph Connor), “Shut up, sky pilot.”<sup>101</sup> Steele’s *I Shall Arise* is similarly critical of the war and it frames its critiques generationally by criticizing how men younger and older than the war generation were profiting at their expense: “The War has played hell with the careers of our generation.” The conflict was not “catching” the “youngsters” or the “senior chaps,” but rather “the fellows in between like you and me, who were just old enough to be starting but too young to have got fairly going. We’re the birds that have to pay. We’ve had to sacrifice our dreams, our life-work.”<sup>102</sup>

Steele’s book demonstrates that these authors did not just write differently about the war, they also framed their work generationally. Hubert Evans’ *The New Front Line* and Douglas Durkin’s *The Magpie*, for instance, were very much about the postwar era. Neither sees anything positive about the war’s outcome. Generational conflict is central to each. In Evans’ case, division exists between the novel’s main character, a returned soldier, and his father, a middle-class businessman. In Durkin’s book, the main character

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101 Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed*, 16.

102 Steele, *I Shall Arise*, 156.

clashes with the established interests in Winnipeg, all men older than himself. Both novels are highly critical of postwar Canada and they blame the older generation for not understanding the overwhelming expectation of postwar change or their resulting disillusionment. Gibbon's postwar novel, by comparison, ignores Donald's age. There is no inter-generational conflict in the story and Donald gets along with those older than himself, particularly his uncle Hector. Moreover, none of the challenges Donald faces relate to the war. Instead, they are rooted in traditional points of middlebrow interest: romance.

Beaumont Cornell's realist novel, *Lantern Marsh* (1923), about a young historian in Toronto, is another novel that explored generational division and its roots in the war. In Cornell's book, those men older than the war generation simply do not understand the conflict. In a key passage two university students ridicule a new history of the war by an older, established member of the department: "He's got the whole war so definitely sized up that you don't feel any surprise at anything that happened." The historian tries to make the war feel "as natural as taking your coffee into the drawing room after dinner."

You feel that the strategic movements in the battles cost nobody a moment's thought. The soldiers just emerge from the west salient and the east flank like so many automatic chess-pieces headed for their preordained positions. There's no smoke or explosions or blood in his battles at all. Just 3,000 casualties, 500 prisoners, and a dent in the Allied line or the German line.<sup>103</sup>

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103 Beaumont Cornell, *Lantern Marsh* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1923), 219-220. Bill Deacon made a similar complaint in the late 1920s during an address to the St. Catharines Women's Canadian Club. "Histories," he told his audience, "... specialized in wars and

Cornell was critical of more than the official histories of the Great War. It was generational. For the war generation, the conflict did not need to be explained. It was felt.

The importance of getting the feeling of the war right may explain why so few members of the war generation wrote novels about the conflict. Regardless of the reason, however, there was no boom in Canadian war fiction and this fact was noticed. In 1933, the historian and veteran Wilfrid Kerr was bothered by the absence of his generation's writing about the war, a fact he lamented because the Canadian Corps had a particularly "high standard of literacy and intelligence."<sup>104</sup> Four years later Frederick Noyes, another veteran and author of a battalion history, also remarked on how few novels his generation had produced. "Let us hope," he wrote in 1937, "that before it is too late a Zola or a Hugo may appear and place the case for [our story] before the general public in a manner befitting the terribly tragic subject."<sup>105</sup> Such a book was never written. The literary silence is even more surprising given the publishing frenzy that accompanied the conflict. No full account by scholars of the number of Canadian war books exists. That said, at

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generals and kings. Little was heard of the common people; and even in telling of the armies we did not hear how many meals the soldier had, nor what he ate." See Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library [hereafter TFRBL], Ms. Col. 160 [hereafter Deacon papers], Box 48, folder 12, "Casual Observations of a Bookman," address to St. Catharines Women's Canadian Club, 9 May 1928.

<sup>104</sup> Wilfrid Kerr, "Historical Literature on Canada's War Participation in the Great War," *Canadian Historical Review* 14:4 (1933), 427.

<sup>105</sup> Frederick W. Noyes, *Stretcher-Bearers ... at the Double!: History of the Fifth Canadian Field Ambulance which Served Overseas during the Great War of 1914-1918* (Toronto: Hunter-Rose, 1937), 277.

least fifty novels set during the war were published between 1914 and 1939.<sup>106</sup> Despite the desire for a postwar canon, however, critics fail to acknowledge how few of these books were written by the war generation. Indeed, when compared to the output in Britain, Canada's output was meager. According to Stephen Cullen, British ex-combatants published 146 novels between 1919 and 1939.<sup>107</sup> During the same period fewer than ten were produced in Canada,<sup>108</sup> a discrepancy that cannot be explained by relative differences in population size.<sup>109</sup>

This low literary output in Canada should give historians pause, especially when judging the historical representativeness of these texts. Nonetheless, many of the books by the war generation are dismissed for being unrepresentative, often in favour of works by older, more established authors; this despite the fact that younger authors published more war books than older authors (see Figures 2 and 3).

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106 See Tector, "Wounded Warriors," 40 and the appendix to Novak, *Dubious Glory*.

107 Cullen, "Gender and the Great War," 77-85.

108 See Appendix II for more detailed listing of Canadian war books and the war fiction published during this period.

109 Based on 1931 populations, in Canada the ratio of war books published compared to the population was 1:314,545. In Britain, it was 1:255,890. The divide is even starker when only war novels are considered. Britain's ratio is 1:549,397, while Canada's is nearly three times greater at 1:1,482,857. These comparisons compare Canadian war books, including memoirs, to British literary fiction alone. No comprehensive tally of these memoirs has been conducted, but if they are included in the total, then the discrepancy between Canada and Britain is even greater.



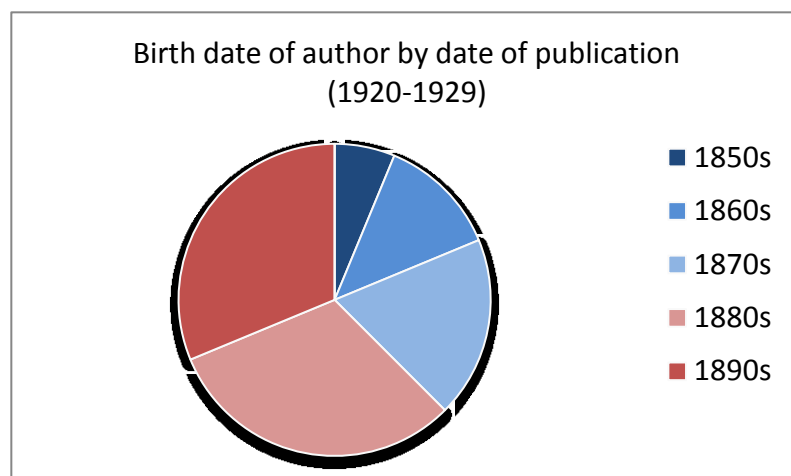


Figure 2. Visual representation of data in Appendix II

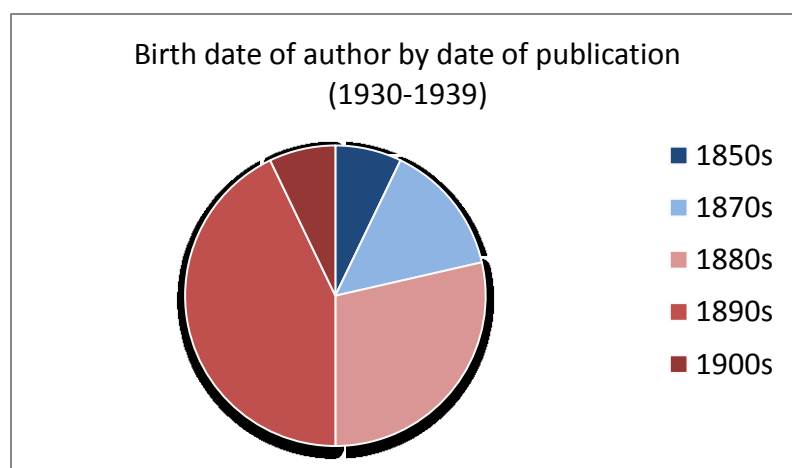


Figure 3. Visual representation of data in Appendix II

Critiques of *Generals Die in Bed* are a case in point. The book is dismissed as an inaccurate gauge of Canadians' view of the war, despite the fact that Harrison was one of the war generation. Neta Gordon, for instance, argues that the book did not appeal to interwar Canadians.<sup>110</sup> Jeff Keshen is similarly dismissive. Canadians, he argues, disliked Harrison's portrayal of the "dehumanizing nature of war" and instead continued to believe the

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<sup>110</sup> Neta Gordon, *Catching the Torch: Contemporary Canadian Literary Responses to World War I* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2014), 36.

conflict had been fought for “noble causes ... and that the stupendous performance in combat had created a new, strong, and internationally respected nation.”<sup>111</sup> Tim Cook also concludes that disillusioned writing “did not resonate with most readers.” Harrison’s book may have been the “most aggressive” of Canada’s war writing, but it was also “vigorously attacked” for being “unrepresentative.”<sup>112</sup>

Jonathan Vance makes the strongest case for dismissing Harrison’s novel. He cites its critical reception in the press, parliament, and amongst military commanders as evidence for its widespread rejection. According to Vance, the book left Generals Arthur Currie and Archibald Macdonell fuming. Currie considered it “a mass of filth, lies and appeals to everything base and mean and nasty.” The former commander of the Canadian Corps continued his tirade, telling Macdonell that Harrison’s book “is full of vile and misrepresentation, and cannot have any lasting influence.” Macdonell agreed. He consoled Currie, telling him that he wanted nothing more than “to live long enough to have the opportunity of shoving my fist into that s— of a b— Harrison’s tummy until his guts hang out of his mouth!!!”<sup>113</sup> Critics, according to Vance, were equally offended. *Saturday Night’s* Nathaniel Benson believed that “fully half the incidents described in the book never occurred.”<sup>114</sup> It was “a book of very dubious literary merit” and made “very

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111 Keshen, “The Great War As Nation Builder,” 11, 14.

112 Cook, *Shock Troops*, 634, 635.

113 Currie and Macdonell cited in Vance, “Soldier as Novelist,” 30-31.

114 Vance, *Death So Noble*, 193.

ugly reading indeed.”<sup>115</sup> The *Ottawa Citizen* also ran stories criticizing what it interpreted as slandering of Canadians and the federal MP Tommy Church called for its ban in parliament.

Aside from not critically examining the nationalist response to a critical description of the war and the military, historians such as Vance, Keshen, and Cook have only told part of the story. A closer look at reaction to the book reveals a more complicated picture. It is not surprising that Canadian officers (and generals in particular) reacted so negatively to the critical portrayal.<sup>116</sup> The reaction of enlisted men, however, was more positive and many reviewers were also generous in their praise. Far from dismissing the book as slanderous, they were grateful that somebody was finally describing the war in a way that resonated with the experiences of those who actually fought it in the trenches.

The book was intended to be controversial. But historians have ignored how this controversy was largely the product of a skillful advertising campaign by Harrison’s publisher. During the novel’s British and North American tours, this publicity campaign fuelled critical fires by distributing

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115 Benson, cited in Vance, *Death So Noble*, 193.

116 The same is true of Will Bird’s war memoir, *And We Go On*. It was praised by enlisted men, but officers were critical of the text, as a review in *Canadian Defence Quarterly* illustrates. In July 1931, the journal panned Bird’s book, describing it as “flatly obnoxious,” and admonished its accuracy, stating “Established facts—a matter of historical record—seem to have little appeal for Mr. Bird.” Ironically, given recent use of Bird as an antidote to the supposed unrepresentativeness of disillusioned authors, this review stated that Bird’s book would have been improved if he “had been content to tell us what he did and thought sixteen years ago instead of attributing current sophistry, inspired, one guesses, from a night with Remarque or Zweig, to his Great War experiences.” See W.W.M.’s review of *And We Go On* in *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 8:4 (July 1931): 582-583.

sensational extracts from the book. These excerpts were presented out of context and highlighted only the most controversial parts of the novel. While this material undoubtedly drummed up publicity and headlines, it obscured the larger narrative and message.<sup>117</sup>

Once past the initial controversy, reviewers gained more appreciation for the novel.<sup>118</sup> The *Montreal Gazette* lamented that many recent war books were so negative, but its reviewer noted that veterans, like Harrison, had every right to produce their own accounts, even if they caused “annoyance in high quarters.” In stark contrast to early reviews, the *Gazette* praised Harrison’s style for its “compelling narrative,” and admitted that the book spoke to “the feelings of a private in the various trials of war.”<sup>119</sup> The *Ottawa Citizen* was even more praiseworthy. Its review claimed that talk of banning the novel was “simply childish.” The book was a “realistic and outspoken story of one man’s experiences and reactions to the war.” It was a modernist novel, written in the “prevailing fashion” which emphasized the “brutality, stupidity, dirt and degradation of war.” The resulting picture was “revolting.”

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117 Columbia Rare Book and Manuscript Library [Hereafter CRBML], MS 0560 C.Y. Harrison [hereafter Harrison papers], CMI 13, Scrapbook 2, n.d.

118 Many of the most critical Canadian reviews simply parroted criticism leveled in the British press, particularly in the *Daily Mail*. Despite sensational headlines, however, these Canadian reviews preceded the release of the novel in Canada and they were clearly little more than pieces strung together from wire services.

119 “The Private Talks Again,” *Montreal Gazette*, 21 June 1930.

But this was Harrison's intent. Efforts "to uphold war and object to its literal description," the paper argued, were "a species of hypocrisy."<sup>120</sup>

There was no appeasing some critics, usually because they disliked the new modernist style or disagreed with assaults on the romanticized versions of the war. Nathaniel Benson was one of Harrison's most vociferous detractors. He hated anything that smacked of modernism. Not long after panning the book, Benson told reviewer Bill Deacon that he was deeply skeptical of literary modernism. "What do [these works] bring to us," he asked. "Just a little less cheer than the gloomy horrors of Dostoievski. I think that the world is a bit sick of the modern debunking intellectual and his poor creations. What we really need is some force or movement to restore our old belief in things heroic and perhaps incredible."<sup>121</sup>

Many veterans felt differently. They did not object to Harrison's style or its message. On the contrary, they embraced it and the author received "many letters from Canadian veterans who expressed pleasure at the publication of the book."<sup>122</sup> James Lott was ecstatic about the novel. He had

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120 "Generals Die in Bed," *Ottawa Citizen*, 14 June 1930. This is an important review because the *Citizen's* reporting has been cited as critical of Harrison.

121 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Box 2, folder 23, Benson to Deacon, 27 June 1933. Deacon complained to his colleague Betram Brooker about such thinking during the preparation of his book, *Open House*. "I see both Bridle and Hammond are at the same game again with Acland's 'All Else is Folly'; and this is so general a habit with Canadian 'critics' that the point must be made" that their views are largely irrelevant to the younger generation. See University of Manitoba Archives [Hereafter UMA], Mss 16 [hereafter Brooker papers], Box 1, folder 2, Deacon to Brooker, 5 October 1929.

122 "Generals Die in Bed, The Author Replies to Criticism," *London Times*, 13 July 1930.

served with the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion—as did Harrison—and wrote the author to tell him that his book brought back “the old days, names, and places.” Lott was especially keen to relive moments of his old unit and he pointed out that it was the “first time I have had an opportunity of reading anything about the 14<sup>th</sup> R.M.R!” He certainly had his own personal reasons to begrudge Harrison. As Lott reminded him, Harrison had put a pick through Lott’s hand when they both served on a working party during the war.<sup>123</sup> Laban Hill also served in the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion and he was even more laudatory of Harrison’s novel, which he considered “wonderful.” Hill was not an avid reader but picked up the book because of its title. “At once,” he wrote Harrison, he “became interested.” The veteran was impressed with Harrison’s realistic portrayal of the war and thankful that somebody had finally written a war story who “knows what he is writing about.” In Hill’s opinion, most war books and war films were a “joke,” which anyone who saw “active service in France” realized. Harrison’s book, by contrast, was “vivid and real.”<sup>124</sup> Reviewers and ex-combatants gave Harrison’s book a warmer reception than previously acknowledged.

Disillusioned war writers in Canada were joined by intellectuals in criticizing the war. Yet Canadian historians deem their voices as

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123 CRBML, Harrison papers, Box 1a, Correspondence – Generals Die in Bed, 20 June, 1930. There is no enlisted man named James Lott in the CEF database, however, Lott did sign his letter to Harrison as Cpl. James J. Lott and there is an attestation paper listed for John James Lott (note inverted primary names) who served as a corporal. This service file was removed from circulation for digitization and has not yet been posted on-line. Nonetheless, the familiarity with which Lott writes to Harrison and Harrison’s lack of comment about this suggests the men are in all likelihood the same person.

124 CRBML, Harrison Papers, Box 1a, Correspondence – Generals Die in Bed, Laban Hill to Harrison, 29 August 1930.

unrepresentative. Critics such as Frank Underhill and F.R. Scott were highly skeptical of the war's value. But for every Underhill, it is argued, there were "countless Canadians who aired conflicting views."<sup>125</sup> The case of F.R. Scott and his father, Canon F.G. Scott, is particularly illustrative of this sentiment in Canada and the importance of age in shaping understanding of the war. Frederick George Scott was a leading Confederation-era poet, who later served as archdeacon of Quebec. His son, Frank, was also a poet, as well as a constitutional and political scholar. During the 1920s, the two generations of this family represented very different understandings of the war.<sup>126</sup> F.R. Scott was critical and therefore has been dismissed by historians. Canon's Scott's work, on the other hand, remains "one of the most cited war testimonies among Canadian scholars of the Great War."<sup>127</sup>

The elder Scott was a contemporary of Ralph Connor and his war memoir, *The Great War As I Saw It*, typified how many of his generation wanted the war remembered: as a tragic but heroic struggle. Scott witnessed many of the war's worst horrors. Yet even the loss of a son did not alter his overall perspective: "Nothing overseas ... prompted [Scott] to question the settled conviction that the war had been a crusade that offered Canadians a providential opportunity to realize a higher level of national

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<sup>125</sup> Vance, *Death So Noble*, 6.

<sup>126</sup> Bowker, *A Time Such as There Never Was Before*, 348.

<sup>127</sup> Marc McGowan, "Introduction" to Frederick George Scott, *The Great War As I Saw It* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014) viii.

righteousness.”<sup>128</sup> The younger Scott did not serve in the war but his views reflected his generation’s sense of disillusioned skepticism. His criticisms were based on a reading of modernism that led him to reconsider the war’s effect on his generation, their ideas about masculinity, and a sense of hopelessness with the state of the postwar world. This morass seeped into Frank Scott’s re-evaluation of postwar literature, religion, nationalism, and science. By Armistice Day in 1926, he summed up the effects of his changing worldview, revealing in his diary that his beliefs were now “all topsy-turvy.”<sup>129</sup>

When the war first broke out, Frank tried to enlist five times before a fireworks accident nearly blinded him. At the time he held similar views about the conflict to his father and he was frustrated by his inability to serve. In 1919 he confided in his diary that he would have given “10 years of my life to have been able to get to the front.”<sup>130</sup> A trip to the Western Front, in 1922, to visit his brother’s grave changed his mind: “Scott lost much of his enthusiasm for war” and he wrote in his diary that he would spend his life “fighting those things that make war possible.”<sup>131</sup> Frank learned that his brother was suffering a nervous breakdown before he was killed. This revelation coincided with increased questioning of the “causes and conduct” of the war

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128 Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man’s Land*, 213.

129 Sandra Djwa, *The Politics of Imagination: A Life of F.R. Scott* (Toronto: Douglas & McIntyre, 1989), 112.

130 F.R. Scott, cited in Djwa, *The Politics of Imagination*, 42.

131 Sherrill Grace, “Canadian Poets on War,” in Sherrill Grace, Patrick Imbert, Tiffan Johnstone, eds., *Bearing Witness: Perspectives on War and Peace from the Arts and Humanities* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2012), 45.



and how it was framed in its aftermath.<sup>132</sup> Scott read widely about the conflict, steeping himself in the war literature emerging out of Britain and the United States. By the end of the 1920s, the younger Scott developed a decidedly different understanding of the war than his father.

The works of Robert Graves and Erich Maria Remarque, both leading voices of disillusionment, had a profound impact on Frank Scott.<sup>133</sup> He found them more relevant than traditional interpretations articulated by poets such as Rupert Brooke, who was killed in 1915. As a pre-war poet, Brooke may well have “typified the willing self-sacrifice of youth on the altar of patriotism,” but he died before the end of the war. Those who had seen the conflict to its conclusion, however, dismissed Brooke’s patriotic and romantic ideals as naïve. Scott concluded that society had learned its lesson from the war and that poets who had lived to the end saw its “truth.” Frank compared Brooke’s chivalric “galahadism” to the writing of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen. Sassoon wrote of “martyred youth” and “manhood overthrown.” Owen described the war’s dead as “cattle” that had been slaughtered by the “monstrous anger of the guns.”<sup>134</sup> In addition to illustrating the lasting impact this literature had on Scott’s understanding of

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132 Djwa, *The Politics of Imagination*, 113.

133 Djwa, *The Politics of Imagination*, 113. He was not alone in doing so. Other Canadians his age, including Harry Cassidy, also made an effort to engage with British and American war writing. During the 1920s, for example, Cassidy made a serious effort to read Ford Madox Ford’s *No More Parades* (1925), the second novel in his series *Parade’s End*. See University of Toronto Archives (UTA), B72-0022 [Hereafter Cassidy Papers], Vol. 8, folder 1, Cassidy to Bea, 10 July 1927. Cassidy described the novel as “ununderstandable.” For Cassidy’s war experience, see too Keith Walden, ed., *The Papers of Harry Cassidy and Beatrice Pearce: The Courtship Years, 1917-1925* (Toronto: Champlain Society, 2009).

134 Djwa, *The Politics of Imagination*, 114.

the Great War, such comparisons also demonstrate that Canada was by no means an island isolated from the currents of criticism emerging in the U.S. and Britain.<sup>135</sup>

The realist writing of the war generation did not sit well with “average Canadians.” Indeed, it was not meant to. They found its modernism coarse and vulgar. While this may have been the case with modernist literature like *Generals Die in Bed*, it was not necessarily true of more middlebrow fiction, such as *Lantern Marsh* or *I Shall Arise*. Although these novels were more traditional in style, they also criticized romantic depictions of warfare. In terms of postwar representations, therefore, elite and middlebrow authors who counted themselves part of the war generation did not have radically different understandings of the conflict and they agreed that the war could not be treated as it was by Ralph Connor, Canon Scott, or other older and established authors. This position was more critical in message and tone than the work of many of Canada’s most popular authors.

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135 According to Colin Hill, “Canada’s early Great War novels ... indicate the degree to which Canada’s post-war realism was both modern and international: the affinity of Canada’s Great War novels with works by writers such as Ford Madox Ford, Rebecca West, Henri Barbusse, Ernest Hemingway, Edith Wharton, and Erich Maria Remarque, among many others, suggests that Canada’s war realism, and modern realism more generally, are necessarily considered in an international context, rather than within a cultural-nationalistic paradigm that sees realism as a conservative, mimetic, reflective, and often regionalist literary form.” See Hill, “Early Novels of the Great War,” 61.

## Chapter 3

### The postwar disillusioning of Canada's war generation

*"What we did for them never was enough. We cross-questioned them, we checked them narrowly as to their disabilities, as to what happened to their characters, 'why don't you get a job' [they were asked]. How could he get a job when the poor fellow was mentally crippled as the result of living in a monstrous atmosphere and under conditions that did something to his spirit."<sup>1</sup>*

- Greg Clark, interview with the CBC

At the outbreak of the Great War, Canadian youth were optimistic about the future. Their fight would end war, put a stop to German tyranny, and save European civilization. As the war progressed they also became increasingly nationalistic in their desire for postwar change. Although naïve in retrospect, during the war's darkest hours, such hopes helped the war generation find meaning in the conflict. Peacetime challenges, however, including economic hardship and international instability, undermined their certainty in the war's purpose. The future these men fought for did not materialize, leaving many

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1. LAC, RG41, Vol. 17, 4th C.M.R., *Flanders' Fields*: Greg Clark, tape 2/3, n.d.

angry and disillusioned with the direction of peacetime Canada. For these veterans, their disenchantment remained a personal affair, in part because it did not fit with how the war was commemorated in public.

Few Canadians objected to the importance of remembering the nation's sacrifices. The war generation knew first-hand what the conflict cost and, while uncomfortable discussing its personal experiences, it agreed with the public's desire to commemorate the conflict.<sup>2</sup> This commemorative impulse, combined with period literature and other "cultural products," remains a popular way to study the war and its aftermath. In Canada, many of these sources focused on what the war achieved, not what was lost, and the resulting narratives explaining the conflict's meaning argue that unlike Europe "disillusion was successfully marginalized."<sup>3</sup>

An idealized history of the Canadian Corps and its achievements in Europe helped buttress this public memory of the war. After 1918, most of the combatant nations began to compile official histories. Canada did so as well but the official historian failed to produce a volume until 1938. Several veterans, including Will Bird and the historian Wilfrid Kerr, hoped to fill the gap with detailed memoirs. Their initial efforts were stymied, however, because they were denied access to critical records until the official project was completed.<sup>4</sup> American war stories faced no such hurdle. These flooded

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<sup>2</sup> Vance, *Death So Noble*, 213.

<sup>3</sup> Sheftall, *Altered Memories*, 2.

<sup>4</sup> See "Preface" to Bird, *The Communication Trench*, where Bird decries that the official records were "more closely guarded than the gold of the Mint." Bird was not the only to

across the border throughout the 1920s, much to the concern of nationalists, such as George Drew, who worried Canadians would be unduly influenced by an Americanized version of the war.

When a series of American articles belittled the British Empire's war effort, Drew led the charge to correct the historical record. His article, "The Truth About the War," which appeared in the Dominion Day issue of *Maclean's* magazine, attacked American claims that the Empire had "shirked its duty."<sup>5</sup> By calling on documents held by the Historical Section of the Department of National Defence, Drew laid out a statistical defence of the British Empire's achievements between 1914 and 1918. "The Truth About the War" struck a chord and a series of additional articles soon followed, including profiles of Canadian Airmen.

Drew's writing preserved one version of the war's history and, according to Jonathan Vance, any account that strayed from the accepted narrative was rejected as "a dangerous falsehood."<sup>6</sup> While this mythical history enshrined a particular memory of the conflict, the war generation was not bound by the myth's limited scope. In addition to the conflict's public memory, it judged the war's history in light of personal experience. To these

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notice this. So did Wilfrid Kerr, as well as Bird's own readers. See DUA, Bird Papers, Vol. 9, Scrapbook 5, Ed to Bird, 9 January 1934. As Jonathan Vance argues, the gap was filled by popular histories, including Unit Histories, pulp magazines, and other sources that adhered to the war myth. See Vance, *Death So Noble*, 163.

5 George A. Drew, "The Truth About the War," *Maclean's* (1 July, 1928): 2. Later, Drew expanded his argument by focusing specifically on Canada's contributions to the war effort. The most successful of these articles were a series of profiles of Canadian airmen, which proved so popular that they were re-published as a book, *Canada's Fighting Airmen* (1930). See too Vance, *Death So Noble*, 178.

6 Vance, *Death So Noble*, 179, 187

men, the memory of the conflict was complex. It could be used to defend Canada's military record but it was also cited as justification for strong critiques of the war and its aftermath. Such criticisms were rooted in the generation's hopes for an improved postwar future and when this world failed to materialize young men began to question the meaning of the war.

Record of this disillusionment is sparse. While few veterans were comfortable discussing their war experiences, it was rarer still to discuss the war's impact. Even the most candid of memoirs, such as Will Bird's *And We Go On*, omitted life after coming home. Fred Bagnall's *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, another candid account of the war experience, did offer some critiques of postwar life, but such discussion was limited to asides. In fact, Bagnall apologized to his readers each time his narrative veered towards postwar Canada: "I am trying to keep [this] from being a problem story," he wrote.<sup>7</sup> As a result of this collective silence, vocal critics of the war, including the historian Frank Underhill, have been dismissed as unrepresentative. But Underhill should not be pushed aside so easily. While his politics differed from Drew's (the former was closely aligned with the CCF, the latter a Conservative) both men were equally critical of the Great War's wider legacy, a similarity often overlooked when equating the war's meaning with an idealized history of the Canadian Corps.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Bagnall, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 132.

<sup>8</sup> See for example Sheftall, *Altered Memories*, 2, 88. See too Vance, *Death So Noble*, 6. Both Drew and Underhill were veterans who were wounded during the conflict. Underhill was wounded twice in the leg. Drew suffered a serious wound to his forearm that required nearly two years of recuperation, including bone grafts from his shin to repair missing sections of his left arm. See Drew's CEF Service File, LAC, RG 150, Vol 2556.

Both Drew and Underhill were young educated elites when war broke out. Their understanding of its meaning was shared by other members of their generation, including Edward Binns, Will Bird, F.P. Day, Bill Deacon, and Robert Manion. During the 1920s and 1930s, these men began to question the meaning of the Great War. Some doubted the legitimacy of public commemoration, while others reflected on why they reconsidered the conflict's purpose. Their positions contrasted with those of older Canadians, such as William Creighton, father of historian Donald Creighton and editor of the *Christian Guardian*, who "hated the physical facts of war," but nonetheless maintained that its "great moral purpose ... would redeem its crimes."<sup>9</sup> The

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<sup>9</sup> Peter Buitenhuis argued that while older men accepted that war was horrible, their generation reacted to the horrors of the front with renewed idealism rather than outright criticism. According to Donald Creighton, his father believed this so passionately that "the war ... became a family affair" and "hope of a better post-war world dominated" their household both during and after the conflict. Donald Creighton "My Father and the United Church," in Creighton, *The Passionate Observer: Selected Writings* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1980), 97. I would be remiss if I did not thank Donald Wright for sending me early chapters from his biography on Donald Creighton to help better understand Creighton's relationship with his father. Creighton's essay was originally intended for the United Church's *Observer*, but was not published until its inclusion in *The Passionate Observer*. See too Buitenhuis, *The Great War of Words*, 153.

L.M. Montgomery, often so perceptive of the nuances of the Canadian character, was another who had difficulty critiquing the war, in part because she professed to be unable to make sense of the conflict. After asking what would come of its end, decided she could "never know." But she hoped, maybe the next generation could. See Mary Rubio and Elizabeth Waterston, eds., *The Selected Journals of L.M. Montgomery*, Vol. II: 1910-1921 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), 274. Similarly, those who were too young for the war understood that they were different. As a boy, Harry Boyle reminisced that he recognized little in the "quiet men" who had come back from the war. "Something happened during the Great War," he recalled, which made them different and those who had returned forever remained a "mystery." Harry J. Boyle, *With a Pinch of Sin: Fond Recollection of a Rural Background Some Forty Years Ago* (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 82. British writer and critic George Orwell made a similar observation: "As the war fell back into the past, my particular generation, those who had been 'just too young', became conscious of the vastness of the

war generation never accepted this position. Together, these men produced a disparate body of work that included articles, books, and unpublished writing. It does not form a canon, but it represents some of the only instances in which the war generation discussed why it re-interpreted the war's meaning, particularly in light of the conflict's aftermath. This writing demonstrates that not only did the war remain a matter of great personal concern, but that its meaning was also continually re-evaluated in response to the postwar present.

After the success of his early articles in *Macleans*, Drew branched out in his writing beyond the British Empire's war record. These later pieces examined the contemporary world and offered a much wider interpretation of the war's impact than his articles about Canadians overseas. Drew was worried that the Great Depression and the rise of totalitarianism were destabilizing the fragile international order. One piece from 1932, "Salesman of Death," about the League of Nations disarmament conferences in Geneva, was particularly critical of war and the risks re-armament posed for international security. It tapped into concerns about the West's economic and diplomatic stability during the late 1920s and early 1930s. If European leaders did not stop the apparent slide towards another conflict, Drew warned, then world's youth risked being killed in "meaningless slaughter." Leaders had a clear choice. They could reduce arms and enter in a "wave of prosperity,"

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experience they had missed. You felt yourself a little less than a man, because you had missed it." See George Orwell, "My Country Right or Left," in Sonia Orwell and Ian Angus, eds., *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol. 1 (London: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 538.



followed by swift “economic rejuvenation,” or they would face the “ghastly spectre of a war of machines and chemicals which would carry death and destruction to the civilian populations even more than to the soldiers in the field.”<sup>10</sup>

Drew’s description of modern warfare was damning, particularly when contrasted with his defense of the Canadian and British actions during the Great War. These historical arguments did not portray the conflict as a ‘meaningless slaughter’, yet that is exactly how he described warfare in the 1930s. Another article, “The Truth About War Debts,” expanded this critique of modern warfare describing the Great War as “fruitless.”<sup>11</sup> Despite this apparent contradiction, Drew based his conclusions on his reading of the war’s history. Any “study of the last war,” he wrote, clearly indicated that militarism was “largely to blame” for the July Crisis of 1914. Avoiding another arms race would reduce the risk of another conflict.<sup>12</sup> Drew did not know if the disarmament conference would succeed. Nonetheless, he hoped that the talks in Geneva would prove at least a “substantial beginning” on the road to peace. If not, Drew feared that Canada would be engulfed in another slaughter.<sup>13</sup>

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10 Drew, “Salesmen of Death,” *Maclean’s* (1 August 1931): 3.

11 Drew, “The Truth About War Debts,” *Maclean’s* (15 April 1931), 82.

12 Drew, “Salesmen of Death,” 34.

13 Drew, “Salesmen of Death,” 3. Drew’s critique of war in this issue of *Maclean’s* (as well as his April article, “The Truth About War Debts”), is further noteworthy for criticism of *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, the military’s scholarly review, which argued for the need to prepare for another war.

Given their political differences, Drew's characterization of the war was remarkably similar to one of the conflict's harshest critics, Frank Underhill. During the interwar years, Underhill was known as a strong supporter of isolationism, but his position was different in 1914. When war broke out, he supported it wholeheartedly and, in 1915, he enlisted with the CEF before transferring to a British unit as a machine gun officer. Underhill was wounded twice and, at war's end, was hired by the University of Alberta as part of the Khaki University (the education system organized by the military to help convalescent soldiers continue their education). According to his biographer, Underhill had "mixed feelings" about discussing the war, though this did not stop him from contributing a Canadian section to Charles Lucas' multi-volume history *The Empire at War* (1923). Underhill's "Canadian Forces in the War" was a dry study about the country's military overseas.<sup>14</sup> It praised Canada's achievements, while downplaying its failures.<sup>15</sup> Underhill applauded the Canadian Corps for its "striking force," "resourcefulness," the "energetic spirit" of its soldiers, and its "business-like" staff who planned the Corps' assaults.<sup>16</sup> This history of the CEF overseas also reflected a nascent version of the colony-to-nation thesis. The "Canadian Corp," Underhill wrote,

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14 Underhill later described his work as "dull." See Francis, *Frank H. Underhill*, 49.

15 In a chapter on the Second Division's failed attack on the St. Eloi craters, he declared reassuringly that the Canadians might have been "beaten," but "certainly not disgraced." Frank Underhill, "The Canadian Forces in the War," in Charles Lucas ed., *The Empire at War*, Vol II (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 114.

16 Underhill, "The Canadian Forces in the War," 130.

was “the greatest national achievement of the Canadian people,” which stood as “real testimony to Canada’s entrance into nationhood.”<sup>17</sup>

Over the following decades, however, Underhill’s view changed. He reversed his opinion of the value of the war, a transformation he believed common to his generation. “We did not really achieve maturity in the years 1914-1918,” he argued, “though that is what we used to claim for ourselves in the 1920’s.”<sup>18</sup> The reason for his reversal was a complex and deeply rooted disappointment in the postwar world. The conflict, he concluded, undermined nineteenth-century notions of progress. With the war’s end, the “old sense of established values” disappeared. By the 1930s, the Depression “completed the work of destruction that the war had begun.”<sup>19</sup> Underhill admitted that the war was a “leap forward” for Canada but argued that such successes were outweighed by the failures at home.

By the end of the 1930s, Underhill rejected any thought of Canada joining another European war. He was upset at the failure of the League of Nations and skeptical of the justifications for another conflict, no matter the rhetoric of peace, freedom, or democracy.<sup>20</sup> “All that we can help to assure by such action is the burying of 60,000 more Canadians somewhere across the ocean.” His skepticism was grounded in this history of war and postwar failures. “Our experience during and since the last war,” Underhill argued,

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17 Underhill, “The Canadian Forces in the War,” 286.

18 Frank Underhill, “The Aftermath,” *Flanders’ Fields*, 14.

19. Underhill, “The Aftermath,” 15.

20. Francis, *Frank H. Underhill*, 107.

“should have made us skeptical about such claims. And we should be especially suspicious of all those elderly statesmen and publicists who so nobly dedicated one generation of Canadian youth to these high causes of 1914, and who can now think of no more fitting way of sanctifying that sacrifice than to dedicate another generation to a similar sacrifice.”<sup>21</sup>

Frank Underhill’s support for isolationism was informed by a sense that Canada failed to make its wartime sacrifices worthwhile. While victories at Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, and the gains during the Last Hundred Days helped secure Canada’s place as an international player, the country’s actions in the 1920s and 1930s forced him to question if Canada was capable of acting as an independent country. He was not optimistic and believed the country was too tied to Britain (a connection he called an emotional complex) to act independently. This was a pessimistic reading of what the country had achieved since 1918. If Canada had fought for a seat at the international table, if that is why it had sacrificed so heavily, why was it unable to wield its independence? In Underhill’s opinion, it might have been possible for prewar politicians such as Robert Borden to believe that the war was worthwhile, provided it resulted in an equal partnership between Britain and Canada. But, Underhill was not convinced that Canadians had actually achieved that goal. Instead, he believed Canadians were merely “flattering” themselves about membership in the Commonwealth. If it came to war again, Canada

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21. Underhill, “Keep Canada out of War,” in *In Search of Canadian Liberalism* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960), 184.

would never have any “real” control of the British Foreign Office.<sup>22</sup> Without such control, Underhill could not say that the war was worth it.

Like many of his generation, Frank Underhill remained proud of the achievements of the Canadian Corps. He remained troubled, however, that these sacrifices were being squandered. He summed up his position in 1941 by describing what he considered to be the contradictory nature of Canada’s wartime and postwar history. It was defined by a “strange dualism” between a capable—even “brilliant”—ability to handle the concrete tasks of waging war and a “persistent political incapacity” to address the challenges of governing during peace. Underhill lamented that the initiative Canadians displayed during the war was not carried into the postwar era:

What became of all those young Canadian soldiers who showed such indomitable courage, such individual initiative, such capacity for discipline and organization; what became of all those young captains and lieutenants and sergeants who led their men across no man’s land, who cleared out trenches and captured pill-boxes; what became of them all in the post-war Canada to which they returned? How was it that their splendid qualities seemed to have no purpose but to be dissipated in the sorry futilities of the 1920’s and 1930’s?<sup>23</sup>

Peace, more so than war, proved a disillusioning experience.

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22. Frank Underhill, “The Outline of a National Foreign Policy,” in Violet Anderson, ed., *World Currents and Canada’s Course: Lectures Given at the Canadian Institute on Economics and Politics, August 7th to 20th, 1937* (Toronto: Nelson, 1937), 133-138.

23. Frank Underhill, “Canada and the Last War,” in Chester Martin, ed., *Canada in War and Peace: Eight Studies in National Trends Since 1914* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1941), 148.

Neither Underhill nor Drew discussed the extent to which their disenchantment was personal. Such disclosure was particularly rare among veterans. One man who bucked this trend, however, was Will Bird. During a career that spanned fifty years, he published a plethora of memoirs, novels, and articles about the conflict. Many were serialized in newspapers and magazines in Britain and the United States. By the 1970s, Bird had published six books on the war. But it was in the 1930s that he published his most reflective work, including a series of articles that explored veterans' psychological disenchantment in the postwar era.<sup>24</sup>

William Richard Bird was born 11 May 1891 at East Mapleton, Cumberland County, Nova Scotia. In 1904, the family moved to Amherst. Six years later, Bird headed west on a harvest excursion to Alberta. In 1915, he moved to Saskatchewan. After the war broke out, he tried several times to enlist, but was turned down. Only later did Bird learn that his brother, Steve, who had enlisted before him, had asked recruiters to keep him in Canada. By 1916, Bird finally secured his enlistment and served the majority of the war with the 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, CEF. He witnessed some of the Canadian Corps' worst fighting, including its engagements at Passchendaele and the Last Hundred Days. In 1918, during the final days of the war, Bird was awarded the Military Medal for his service at Mons.

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24. These were *Private Timothy Fergus Clancy*, *And We Go On*, *The Communication Trench*, *Thirteen Years After*, *The Shy Yorkshireman*, and *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*. Bird's articles appeared in, among others, *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, *The Canadian Veteran*, *Canadian War Stories*, *Collier's*, *The Legionary*, *Macleans*, *The Maritime Advocate and Busy East*, *Reveille*, *Whirligig*, and *The Ypres Times*. He also wrote for multiple newspapers, especially those based in Nova Scotia, though his work appeared in national publications, including the *Toronto Star*, as well.

After the war, Bird returned to Nova Scotia where he worked as a writer, historian, and novelist. All told, Bird sold five hundred and fifty two short stories and won numerous awards, including the Ryerson Press All-Canada Fiction Award, which he was awarded twice. He served two terms as the president of the Canadian Authors Association, the first from the Maritimes. During the 1930s, when he produced the most war-related work, Bird was hired by *Maclean's* to tour the battlefields and write a retrospective that tapped into the increasingly popular trend of battlefield tourism. The contract resulted in seventeen articles, which were later collected into a book, *Thirteen Years After*. Bird parlayed his travels into a successful lecture circuit and delivered over a hundred lectures across the country.<sup>25</sup>

It was the war that turned Bird into a writer.<sup>26</sup> While overseas, he was involved in a gas attack, during which he gave his mask to a young soldier in his unit. As a result, Bird inhaled gas and, two years after the war ended, he began experiencing symptoms of gas poisoning. His right arm was painfully swollen and needed to be treated by sitting with the arm in a solution for a week.<sup>27</sup> Unable to do anything else, Bird read widely. He came upon a writing

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25. Dalhousie University Archives [hereafter DUA], MS-2-367 [hereafter Bird papers], Scrapbooks, Biographical note, n.d., typed on Bird's stationary. Bird uses the same figures (552) in a letter to Miss May Martyn, 2 April 1969. See Bird papers, Vol. 1, folder 1. N.B. McKay and Bates also cite this letter, but note it in Bird's Scrapbooks.

26. He elaborated on the chance that set him on his career in 1973, telling Rev. A.E. Kewley that if it were not for that gas attack "I would never have written about the war or those who I came to know so well." See Bird papers, Vol. 1, folder 3, Bird to Kewley, 4 May 1973.

27. Bird's ailment is another example the lack of documentation of the war's physical toll. His service record does not list any mention of this experience and notes that the only time he spent in hospital during the war was for a case of mumps. He deals with this

contest for the best fish story in the *Halifax Sunday Leader*. As he recounted later, the outcome of the contest proved a surprise: “it was spring and trout fishing was about to start. I had never written anything or thought of writing but I scribbled out a story and to my utter amazement won the prize.” Bird was soon on staff with the paper writing children’s adventure stories. What started as a whim turned into a viable career that produced over twenty-five books.<sup>28</sup> While he may not have been a trained writer, Bird mastered his craft and by the end of the 1920s, he was writing short stories, articles, humour pieces, and a memoir. The latter, *And We Go On*, was published in 1930. Its descriptions of the war’s psychological impact, the realities of the battlefield, and the trials faced by common soldiers were based on Bird’s diary.

Bird’s work was praised widely during his lifetime.<sup>29</sup> As with so many of Canada’s interwar authors, however, he is now largely forgotten. Yet, among Canada’s historians he is used as the voice of the country’s war generation. Jonathan Vance cites Bird widely in his work, describing him as

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experience and the gas attack in his memoirs. With regards to the mumps, he notes: “I was just sixteen days at St. Pol, then coolly walked away from the place and got on board a train. ... I never had seen a doctor again.” See *And We Go On*, 68. The gas attack and Bird’s gassing are not recorded on his record and he was demobilized with “no disability” in 1919. See Bird’s medical examination form in his service file, LAC, RG 150, vol. 748.

28. DUA, Bird papers, Vol. 1, folder 1, Bird to Martyn, 2 April 1969.

29. After Bird’s tenure as president of the Canadian Authors Association Bill Deacon wrote to Bird telling him that he considered him “the greatest president we have ever had.” DUA, Bird papers, Scrapbook 18, Deacon to Bird, 3 October 1948. Hugh MacLennan was equally praiseworthy of Bird’s accomplishments and skill as a writer; so too was Watson Kirkconnell. See DUA, Bird papers, Bird Scrapbooks, MacLennan to Bird, 13 July 1949 and Kirkconnell to Bird, 5 July 1956.



the “quintessential articulator of Canada’s war.”<sup>30</sup> Ian McKay and Robin Bates, despite holding contrasting views of the war to Vance, are similarly praiseworthy of Bird, calling him “Mr Great War.”<sup>31</sup> Norm Christie, whose publishing company CEF Books republished several of Bird’s works, describes Bird as “a one man remembrance program.”<sup>32</sup>

The praise for Bird’s work is testament to the insight and nuance of his war writing. His body of work does not shy away from describing men’s complex reactions to warfare. Books such as *And We Go On* are filled with haunting observations and humorous asides. Bird’s short stories and poetry about the postwar years are equally revealing, making him one of the few postwar writers who wrote about the war while also considering its aftermath. This material is often overlooked in favour of Bird’s more lengthy and self-reflective memoirs, despite the fact that returned men were captivated by Bird’s writing about the postwar era and his short stories more generally.<sup>33</sup> This material did not shy away from addressing the disappointments of peacetime or the disillusioning of Canada’s war generation.

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30. Vance, *Death So Noble*, 196. Bird plays a critical part in both this text and Vance’s article on war books, “The Soldiers As Novelist.”

31. Ian McKay and Robin Bates, *In the Province of History*, 133.

32. Norm Christie, “Introduction,” Will R. Bird, *Private Timothy Fergus Clancy* (CEF Books: Ottawa, 2005), n.p.

33. Both 1930’s *And We Go On* and the more accessible *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, which was republished in 1968. For the widespread popularity of all of his war writing see Bird’s scrapbooks at DUA, which contain pages upon pages of pasted letters from veterans discussing and responding to his war writing.

Bird wrote several poems and short stories that examined the postwar era, particularly about veterans and their memories of the war. Most of these are not examples of critical commentary, but their use of postwar disenchantment as a literary device illustrates how readily readers accepted the war generation's disillusionment. One poem, "The Veteran's Thoughts," from *Maclean's* in 1936, is an example of Bird's concern for men's private thoughts about the war and their disappointment in postwar Canada.<sup>34</sup> In his memoir, *And We Go On*, Bird emphasizes the "psychic" effects of the conflict. This later piece uses a veteran's thoughts on Remembrance Day to cover similar ground.

The poem describes a man haunted by his war experience. He is unhappy and embittered that Canadians devoted only two minutes a year to commemoration and he rages at Canadian society, which he believed did not properly remember his or his comrades' sacrifices. Like the author himself, Bird's fictional veteran went to war as a young man, but he is now older, "tired, time-lined, and gray." His memories of the war include disheartening descriptions of no man's land, a "pock-marked ridge where Death was king." Looking back, he concludes the war amounted to "a "devil's game" in which he was merely a "human pawn."

The veteran in Bird's piece does not see war as glorious. In place of skill, honour, or other prized qualities of men in battle, he believes they died futile deaths and that their names filled monuments because of a mere "freak

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34. Bird, "The Veteran's Thoughts," Bird papers, Scrapbooks, n.d., signed Will R. Bird; same page as the continuation of the clipping for "What Price Vimy," *Maclean's* (1 April 1936).

of Fate.” Such passages are reminders that veterans often held contradictory views on the war. According to the war myth, veterans rejected such pessimistic portrayals of the conflict. To them, the conflict was supposed to remain a defensible, even noble, endeavour in which Canadians continued to perform gallant acts. While veterans wanted the war remembered, Bird’s story challenged notions of glorious warfare and even contradicted an earlier assertion in his memoir that men were not dehumanized by the war.<sup>35</sup> Canadians had to do more than just remember the war, they had to do so correctly. As Bird’s critique demonstrates, in the aftermath of 1918, veterans were not above questioning the war’s meaning in light of its public commemoration.

Disenchantment with Remembrance Day is a subject Bird returned to in other short stories, including “Jimmy Benton, War Vet, Views Militia Parade On An Armistice Day.” This piece also evokes the symbolism of 11 November, again by describing a veteran’s disillusionment in postwar Canada. Originally published in the Saint John *Evening Times*, the piece chronicles the story of veteran James, ‘Jimmy’, Benton the day he dies. Benton attends the city’s Armistice Day, watching a militia company on parade. The sight of the young men marching before him brings back memories of his own time at war, but he is disappointed these new soldiers fail to live up to the standards set by he and his comrades. “They lost step, jostled, were out of lines; they crowed, elbowed,” and, he lamented, these young troops seemed to take “an endless time getting correct.” Angered, Benton can only look away in disgrace.

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35 In *And We Go On*, he maintains that soldiers maintained a “strength of soul.” 5.

When eleven o'clock arrives, Jimmy is overcome by memories. "Burning" they flood back, "choking him, scalding him, shaking him." He wishes his comrades could have witnessed the service too, to share his shock at how poorly the new militia compared to their example. Jimmy returns to the Legion hall "disgusted." After settling into his chair, he is startled to meet "a stirring group" of fellow veterans. They decide to show the young militia how to march properly and together they head out on parade, with Jimmy proudly in the lead. Soon their old Colonel appears and Jimmy feels amazing, as though he could "march forever" and the music carries the whole unit off, "all in step." Benton is finally happy. Unfortunately, however, Bird informs the reader that none of this had taken place. Jimmy died in his chair, his death and subsequent march reminiscent of Abel Gance's film *J'Accuse*, in which the war dead arise and march on screen. By transporting Jimmy amongst his comrades as he dies, Bird contrasts the glory of the past with the perceived failures of the present. Postwar life, this piece suggests, was nothing like war and Jimmy is forced to suffer in silence, only finding solace in death, when he rejoins his wartime comrades.<sup>36</sup>

Men like Bird may have been embittered by their "dashed hopes," however, according to histories of the war myth, they never dared blame their disillusion on the war.<sup>37</sup> As Bird's own memoir makes clear, veterans remained proud of their war service. Yet, this does not mean that the war's meaning was static, enshrined upon a mythical pedestal, never to be debated.

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36. Will R. Bird, "Jimmy Benton, War Vet, Views Militia Parade On An Armistice Day." *The Evening Times*, n.d, n.p. DUA, Bird papers, Vol. 16, Scrapbook 55-1.

37 Vance, *Death So Noble*, 222.

Rather, the critiques that men such as Bird, Underhill, and Drew produced in the conflict's aftermath did not shy from challenging its commemorative symbols; symbols that they used to re-evaluate the meaning of the war.

After the Armistice of 11 November 1918, the date became invested with special symbolism and was soon the accepted way to remember Canada's sacrifices. For the war generation, critiquing the public manifestation of the conflict's memory was an expression of its postwar disillusionment and changing understanding of the war's meaning. Although rarely discussed in public, veterans, such as Edward Binns, were even more critical in private.

Binns was a doctor from Welland, Ontario. During the war, he and his three brothers all served. They survived, except for Percy, who was killed by a shell near Arras in 1918.<sup>38</sup> In the early 1930s, Binns wrote a poem re-assessing the war's meaning that used Remembrance Day as a way to explain his shifting feelings about his brother's death. The piece, simply titled "November Eleventh, Nineteen Thirty-Three," was dedicated to Percy Binns, "my brother, Killed in Action, very shortly before the Armistice."<sup>39</sup> Its nine stanzas describe how Edward Binns began to reconsider the war and his beliefs about the meaning of his brother's death.

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38 See the CEF Service Files for the Binns brothers as well as the Commonwealth War Graves Commission entry for Percy Binns.

39 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 2, File 33, Edward Binns, "November Eleventh, Nineteen-Thirty-Three," n.d.

The poem opens with Binns explaining how each Remembrance Day would bring on a wave of war memories about his brother's death. By 1933, Edward decided he needed to address his feelings about the war. His solution was to subject his memories to a "frank appraisal."<sup>40</sup> As Binns explained in his poem, each 11 November he would ritually assume that Percy's death was worthwhile. Faced with the "cruel master of black despair," Binns admitted that he needed to "feel" his brother "had not died in vain." Such thoughts helped him deal with his grief, but he admitted that the need to 'feel' meaning in his brother's death did not last. Instead of comforting him, Binns found postwar life unsatisfying and, in spite of his brother's sacrifice, nothing about the postwar era justified Percy's loss. In response, Binns described that his understanding of the war began to shift. Instead of taking comfort in Percy's death, he began to "hope" that he had not died in vain. In the end, this hope also fails. It no longer comforted Edward and he admitted that the passage of time undermined his family's certainty in the war's purpose.<sup>41</sup>

Edward did not want to doubt the meaning of his brother's death. But he had little choice. He realized that during the 1920s he engaged in a "sordid quest" to convince himself that Percy had died in a "war-to-end-war." Yet, the war's aftermath gave no reason to support his earlier view and he began to fear that his belief in the war's meaning was misplaced. In time, he and his

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40 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 2, folder 33, n.d., but likely 1933.

41 Author's emphasis. See TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 2, folder 33, n.d.

family found themselves doubting their hopes, wondering: "Could it be, ye died in vain?"<sup>42</sup>

The poem culminates in a damning realization that the war was a "monstrous Fraud." At last, Edward concludes, "we know the bitter truth." It was clear that Percy's sacrifice had achieved nothing. More than a decade after war's end, Binns concludes that Percy and his comrades were "futile heroes" who had indeed "died in vain." In the final stanza, he summed up his sense of the futility of his brother's death:

Wherefore I hail you as the goodliest band  
Of myth-deluded Knights did ever deign  
To tilt at windmill or defy the wand

Of warlock-ogre ... All hail, who  
died in vain!<sup>43</sup>

These concluding lines are rich with metaphor and demonstrate that Binns rejected popular ideas of the war's 'goodness' as well as its mythic status. The poem is a clear statement of post-war disillusion that evokes and parodies many of the postwar tropes used to assure Canadians that their wartime losses were not in vain. The Canadian Corps may well have been a 'band of brothers', but against the 'warlock-ogre' of modern industrial warfare, the cause proved futile.

Binns never published his poem. But he did send it to his friend Bill Deacon, describing it as a "bitter little poem." The two conversed for several

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42 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 2, folder 33, n.d., but likely 1933.

43 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Bins, "November Eleventh, Nineteen-Thirty-Three."

years. As Binns explained in his letter, his poem summed up his sentiments about the war's legacy. "[I]t expresses what I feel," he told Deacon, who thought the piece "very fine," and he debated whether he should publish it.<sup>44</sup> The poem's message motivated the two men. They recognized that it challenged notions of a good war because, unlike histories that only described the war itself, it judged the conflict in light of its aftermath. Binns figured his piece was likely to "disturb a few complacent people" and thought it "so much the better" if it aroused some "protest." Deacon agreed wholeheartedly, telling him that "we need it now" and that he hoped it could be published "at once."

Binns and Deacon were critics of the war because they feared another was on the horizon. Deacon, in particular, was horrified at what he considered the looming prospect of another European conflict. The poem echoed Deacon's concern. It bothered him that the world seemed to be lurching to war, which confirmed that the previous conflict had not been "to-end-war." What then was the point of the Great War? Binns and his brothers enlisted and did their part. Immediately after 1918, Edward was sure that his brother's death—and by extension the entire war—stood for something important. A decade later, however, this was not the case. By 1933, he reassessed what the war and his brother's death meant. The conflict had lost its purpose and the loss was no longer a sacrifice, but a waste. While Binns may have used 11 November as a forum to express his discontent, his poem was about more than just the failure to properly remember the war. It was a

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44 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 2, File 33, Binns to Deacon, 12 November 1933 and Deacon to Binns, 14 November 1933.



private exploration of how his understanding of the conflict shifted in the 1920s and 1930s.

Although a poem about his personal re-consideration of the war's meaning, Binn's willingness to consider publishing the piece suggests that he was open to discussing his transformed views. Certainly Robert Manion (future leader of the federal Conservative Party) welcomed the chance to publicly discuss why he reconsidered the conflict. In 1936, Manion published his autobiography, *Life is an Adventure*, which completely revised his earlier writing on the war. Manion was another member of the war generation disillusioned by peacetime Canada and, like fellow Conservative George Drew, Manion was also a veteran. During the war, he served as a surgeon with the Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC) and was awarded the Military Cross for action at Vimy Ridge. When he returned home, Manion was elected as an MP for Borden's Union Government in 1917. After Arthur Meighen replaced Borden as Prime Minister, Manion served briefly as Minister of the Department of Soldiers Civil Re-establishment. His wartime memoir, *A Surgeon in Arms*, was published in 1918.

Manion's first book sought to explain the conflict to those on the home front. It divided the war into different themes and categories, interspersed with personal anecdotes. Manion also described the war experience. His account of a gas attack, for example, was harrowing. "Never elsewhere had we experienced anything akin to it," he wrote. "The inflamed eyes; the suffocation in our lungs; the knowledge that inhalation of sufficient gas

would put us into Kingdom Come.”<sup>45</sup> He was also praiseworthy of Canada’s part overseas and his chapter “Over the Top,” lauded the spirit of the Canadian Corps. As the men waited for the moment of attack, Manion recounted how

Something which struck me then, and which still impresses me as extraordinary in looking back at it, was the buoyant, cheerful, optimistic spirit in which our army of citizen-soldiers looked forward to the day when were to take part in one of the greatest battles in history. We knew it was to be a fearful and magnificent trial of strength out of which many of us would never return to the people and the lands we loved. And yet all awaited it with a gay, hopeful, undaunted optimism, asking naught but the opportunity, anticipating nothing but victory.<sup>46</sup>

The bulk of *A Surgeon in Arms* echoed this passage’s optimistic tone. When he re-examined his war experience for his 1936 memoir, *Life is an Adventure*, however, he described a very different view of the war.

This later book covered similar ground to his earlier memoir but did so in hindsight. As a result, Manion admitted that the war failed to live up to its purpose, a failure that forced him to revisit his earlier position. He now believed that the war was futile. This reconsideration of the war’s meaning began with a rejection of the reasons for his enlistment. At the outbreak of war, Manion wanted to enlist, but his wife opposed it. He convinced her otherwise and joined up in 1915. Looking back at this decision, he conceded that he was irresponsible, especially leaving his wife with three young

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<sup>45</sup> Robert Manion, *A Surgeon in Arms* (Toronto: D. Appleton, 1918), 72-73.

<sup>46</sup> Manion, *A Surgeon in Arms*, 20.

children. "My wife was right in opposing my going," he wrote, "for it is not fair to leave a wife and three boys, the oldest less than seven, and take a chance on not coming back."<sup>47</sup>

Manion railed at length against the stupidity of the war:

What a brutal and barbarous custom it is, to send our loved ones to face the love ones of other people ... to encourage them madly, insanely, to shoot or stab each other, or poison each other with horrible gasses, because of some silly dispute regarding a piece of land or trade policy!

Surely, he continued, "we are a lot of madmen that we cannot settle our differences internationally as we settle them individually — in the courts!" Manion recognized that it was impolitic to take strong positions on the war. He wrote candidly, however, because he had seen the war's horrors first hand and he feared for the future. The "mutilations and the killings, the brutality and the butchery of war in the trenches" needed to be remembered in their entirety because it seemed as though the world was "once more preparing for another slaughter of innocents!"<sup>48</sup>

Manion's criticisms stopped at the men themselves. He knew the war experience remained an integral part of men's lives and he was proud of his own service. As with so many returned men, living through the conflict left "a memory which surpass[e]d" all others. Manion was unwilling to criticize men's actions in war, nor was he willing to besmirch the "undying

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<sup>47</sup> Manion, *Life is an Adventure* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1936), 150.

<sup>48</sup> Manion, *Life is an Adventure*, 177.

recollections” veterans had of friends killed overseas.<sup>49</sup> It was because of their memories, he explained, that veterans were so unhappy with the prospect of another conflict. They had had their share of “horrors” and “filth” already, and knew well that man’s “inhumanity to man” was never clearer than when nations sent their “sons to the mass slaughter of modern warfare.”<sup>50</sup>

The prospect of another war was too much. Manion and his comrades had gone to war believing it could still be a noble affair. Men’s stoicism and optimism on the Western Front impressed him. But nothing had come of it. Now, they knew better. In a lengthy denunciation written to dissuade anyone considering taking up arms in the future, Manion explained why he had come to reject the monstrous nature of total war:

To-day war means the clashing of whole nations; it means the wholesale slaughter of men on both sides by high-powered explosives, or the wholesale poisoning of combatants by deadly gasses. The machine-gun, the long range gun, and other scientific and mechanistic instruments ... have turned war into the most horrible type of slaughter, in which not only are huge armies necessary in the fighting zone, but in which as well (due to the aeroplane, the airship and the submarine and their ability to spread death far and near) civilian populations are visibly running the same risks as those on the immediate battle-front. ... What an outlook for our so-called Christian civilization!”<sup>51</sup>

Modern war was slaughter. It could achieve nothing but destruction. And so, Manion concluded his description with a sad lament that exemplified

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<sup>49</sup> Manion, *Life is an Adventure*, 201.

<sup>50</sup> Manion, *Life is an Adventure*, 214-15.

<sup>51</sup> Manion, *Life is an Adventure*, 216.

why the failure to live up to wartime ideals left so many of his generation disenchanted with peace:

When one looks about to-day at the chaotic condition that exists throughout Christendom, and the failure of our ideals of peace to be realized, one feels all the more pity that these boys of all nations should have been asked to give up their lives for a cause unrealized and apparently unrealizable.<sup>52</sup>

Such disappointment with peacetime Canada was a common cause for disenchantment. Some men proved able to discuss their changing views of the conflict and its meaning in public. But others, including others writers—such as Edward Binns or F.P. Day—never did so. Their experience reveals how the war continued to be re-conceptualized in private as the generation’s personal understanding of the conflict transformed after 1918.

Frank Parker Day published several novels and short stories, most famously *Rockbound* in 1928. But, with the exception of “The Iroquois” (1925), the veteran never published anything about the war, despite serving with the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the 185<sup>th</sup> Cape Breton Highlanders, and the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion. His memoir of his youth, *The Autobiography of a Fisherman* (1927), was similarly vague about his war experience. It summed up his time overseas as “four years of restless worried life in which I had no time to think of fishing.”<sup>53</sup> Not surprisingly, therefore, Day has been omitted from Canada’s war book canon. Yet, he did write about the war, though he made no effort to publish it.

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<sup>52</sup> Manion, *Life is an Adventure*, 217.

<sup>53</sup> Frank Parker Day, *The Autobiography of a Fisherman* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 133.

Day was born in 1881, in Shubenacadie, Nova Scotia. He was a Rhodes Scholar and an impressive boxer, winning the heavyweight championship at Oxford. In 1912, he joined the English Department at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He returned to this position after the war and, in 1926, became the head of the English Department at Swarthmore College. Between 1928 and 1933, Day served as president of Union College. While at Oxford, Day joined a yeomanry regiment, the King's Colonials. Three years later, he was made a Second Lieutenant and, when he returned home, he was promoted major in the 28<sup>th</sup> New Brunswick Dragoons, a prewar militia regiment. He served through much of the war in various units before taking command of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion during its assault on Amiens, in 1918. He led the battalion during some of its worst fighting, until early October 1918 when he was hospitalized. He spent the remainder of the war in and out of convalescence recovering from surgery for a variety of bowel related issues.<sup>54</sup>

In the years that followed, Day worked on a collection of poetry titled "War and Peace." It was never published but it demonstrated the complex and contradictory responses of returned men to the war. The collection was likely intended to contain fourteen poems written between 1919 and 1936: "Old Alumnus," "House-Painter Hitler," "The Regular," "War," "The Civilian Soldier," "Through the Sleeping Village," "The Trench Cat," "Pacifist," "Think Well," "The Soldier," and "Peace."<sup>55</sup> The poems describe

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<sup>54</sup> LAC, RG 150, Vol. 2377-45, Lt.-Col. F.P. Day Service File; War Diaries for 25<sup>th</sup>, 85<sup>th</sup>, and 185<sup>th</sup> Battlions, CEF.

<sup>55</sup> DUA, F.P. Day papers, Vol. 1, folder 3.

aspects of military life, post-war commemoration, and re-evaluations of the conflict and ensuing peace. At times, Day wrote positively about the war, particularly when it concerned the roles of individual Canadians assisting local inhabitants of war torn Europe. When it came to the war's aftermath, however, he was highly critical of what the conflict achieved.

Poems such as "Through the Sleeping Village" and "The Trench Cat" are generally positive. The latter offers fond memories of a small cat that is nursed back to health in the trenches. It highlights the very human and every day experiences of men seeking hope in a world of war. Day describes how the cat could have "scorned the war and all mankind" but instead found affection in the most unlikely of places. After giving birth, the cat becomes the battalion's mascot, "stalking along the parapet."<sup>56</sup> The poem "War," contains only twelve lines. It paints a vivid picture of the unglamorous, day-to-day life of the soldier. "Most of war is just humdrum," Day wrote, including chores such as feeding men, providing water provisions, delousing, repairing bridges and roads, and emphasizing the importance of clean feet.<sup>57</sup> The poems "Last Long Hill" and "Through the Sleeping Village" also offer positive recollections, again focusing on the daily grind of soldiering. Day sympathizes with soldiers' "[w]eary marching feet and deep-lined faces." Though their bodies may have failed, these men persevered "by nerves and will" and Day praised the Canadian Corps for its willingness to see beyond rank:

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56 DUA, F.P. Day papers, Vol. 1, folder 3, "The Trench Cat," n.d.

57 DUA, F.P. Day papers, Vol. 1, folder 3, "War," n.d.

Worn men stagger to the ditches at the side,  
 Mount them on the Colonel's horse, let the sick men ride;  
 Pile them on the limbers, on the doctor's car,  
 Canadians leave no stragglers, who have played their part.<sup>58</sup>

Day was relatively old for the war generation and his writing was often sentimental, verging on the romantic. Parts of "War and Peace" conclude with portrayals of men lifting their heads high, "alight with hope."<sup>59</sup> What is surprising, however, is the inclusion of poems such as "The Civilian Soldier," "Soldier," and "Peace," which challenge this sentimentality.

Day's most bitter poems focus on the peace. In "The Civilian Soldier," "The Soldier," and "Peace," he was especially critical of postwar life. "The Civilian Soldier" tells the story of a returned man. It is undated but portrays the psychological turmoil that veterans suffered. Day begins by describing a "bland and kind" veteran's outward appearance: "He does not limp, he wears no medals / Old soldiers' tales he seldom peddles." Yet, despite appearing as an ordinary citizen, the poem emphasizes how veterans without obvious injuries lived in a private world of isolation and suffering: "You'd scarcely guess what's [sic] in his mind / Or how his memory backwards ran." The poem recalls the horror of facing another human being in a trench, knowing that one would have to bayonet the other:

In a trench I killed a man,  
 Breathless gasping, in the dark,  
 Left him there without a mark.

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58 DUA, F.P. Day papers, Vol. 1, folder 3, "The Last Long Hill," n.d.

59 DUA, F.P. Day papers, Vol. 1, folder 3, "The Last Long Hill," n.d.



That was the worst, that was the worst,  
But for a slip, he'd had me first.<sup>60</sup>

These otherwise shocking experiences were made normal by the war. They left "[s]ome peasant mother miss[ing] her son," but this butchery "was how the war was won." Such blunt, even emotionless, discussions leave the reader with clear questions about the justification of such brutality.

"The Soldier" was written between 1933 and 1936 and references Arthur Currie's death as well as the opening of the Vimy memorial in 1936. The veteran in the poem suffers in the uncertainties of the postwar world and ironically longs to return to the certainties of war. Unable to attend either Currie's funeral or the opening of the Vimy memorial, the veteran loses his sense of belonging. Now alone and isolated, he practices old drills, surrounded only by his haunting memories.<sup>61</sup>

In "Peace," Day allowed his disillusionment to manifest fully. The poem opens by presenting an idealized version of peacetime Canada. The landscape "smiles," the young country is full of hope and optimism. Later stanzas bring the reader back to reality. The dream ends and the reader faces a world bordering on nightmare. Instead of factories "full of work," Canadians face an economy where the unemployed are left wandering "up and down the earth." But the search will fail and nothing of value will be found. Those that find wealth and prosperity learn that their nightmare only

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<sup>60</sup> DUA, F.P. Day papers, Vol. 1, folder 3

<sup>61</sup> Eric Brown and Tim Cook, "The 1936 Vimy Pilgrimage," *Canadian Military History*, 20:2 (Spring 2011): 37-54; DUA, F.P. Day papers, Vol. 1, folder 3, "The Soldier," n.d.

worsens because they have profited on the backs of those who continue to suffer. It is the greedy capitalists who have profited:

Hardworking poverty paying through the nose  
While idlers live at their repose;  
Fat-jowled fellows with piglike eyes  
Full of treachery, full of stealthy lies;  
Grasping selfishness and stupid greed,  
Still are in the vanguard, still are in the lead.

This is the postwar world; this is the world for which the veterans sacrificed. "War may kill your body," Day mourns, "but peace your soul." Despite his deep disillusionment, F.P. Day never expressed his disenchantment in public. Like so many veterans, he left discussion of the transformation of his personal understanding of the war's meaning to others, including Will Bird, Robert Manion, and Bill Deacon.<sup>62</sup>

If Robert Manion, George Drew, Frank Underhill, and other prominent Canadians were critical of the war's legacy, Bill Deacon went further still. In similar fashion to many of his generation, Deacon was an ardent Canadian nationalist. He differed from some, however, when it came to Canada's place in the British Empire. Drew believed that Canada was best served by furthering its interests alongside Britain. Deacon could not have disagreed more. By the early 1930s he embraced isolationism and wanted the country to divorce itself from the Empire and to disavow engagement in foreign wars.

Two events led Deacon to this conclusion: the fighting of the Great War and his strong belief that there would soon be another. He thought often

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<sup>62</sup> DUA, F.P. Day papers, Vol. 1, folder 3, "Peace," n.d

about the war and its consequences, and his beliefs changed in response to his deeply held conviction that the postwar era had failed to live up to expectations. Unlike Drew, however, Deacon blamed Canada's failures on entanglements in European wars; events which Canada would never have become ensnared had it not been for its commitments to the Empire. "Our connection with the Empire has led us into two foreign wars, for causes and interests not our own," he explained during a meeting of the Native Sons of Canada, before telling those who had gathered why he so despised the war:

I look on the Boer War as a disgrace to Canada, and on the Great War as a futile tragedy. It is a terrible thing to say to those who have suffered, as some of you have; but we poured out our blood and our treasure in vain.

We did not end war with our victory; we did not preserve democracy, since most countries are now under dictatorships. What was accomplished? NOTHING. I mean nothing good. The fruits were wholesale slaughter, debts that crush nations under taxation, the debauchery of women and many other things we should like to forget.<sup>63</sup>

The Empire had done nothing to serve Canada's interests. Any further participation in it risked the possibility of becoming embroiled in yet another European conflict.

During the first half of the 1920s, however, Deacon was not nearly as bitter about the war. He still blamed Canada's involvement on Britain but he was noticeably less critical of the conflict compared to his later views. "Do you know why Canada entered the war?" he asked his friend Laura

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63. TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 48, folder 21, "'Canadian Nationalism and War', address to Hamilton Assembly of Native Sons of Canada," 16 November 1933.

Davidson: "Out of impuls[e] to England." Other causes included "Liberty" as well as a series of "inner economic factors." By 1918 it did not matter why the country had gone to war. The only thing that mattered was the conflict's human costs, which for Deacon, included both friends and family. The war was no longer about ideals and he freely admitted that he hated it: "I think we should all have been pacifists."<sup>64</sup> To some degree, however, Deacon remained sentimental. His sense that the war had been fought for something as "precious" as liberty stopped him from rejecting the conflict outright. "I cannot say it was wrong," he concluded, but the war's aftermath continued to weigh heavy regardless.<sup>65</sup> By the time he published his nationalist call to action, *My Vision of Canada* (1933), his beliefs had changed.

In the late 1920s, Deacon was certain there was going to be another European war and that it could break out soon. Although he proved wrong on the conflict's timing, the fear of being drawn into another conflict pushed him further away from the Empire and strengthened his calls for Canadian isolationism. "War threatens Europe," he wrote, and "Canada must stay out this time." This flagrant rejection of war notwithstanding, Deacon was not a pacifist. Indeed, were Canada asked to help "prevent a war in Europe," then he believed the country should risk "all in the attempt" to maintain peace. Joining in total war was a different matter, however. It amounted to "mass-insanity and mass-murder."<sup>66</sup> Deacon would do almost anything to keep the

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64. As Deacon told Davidson, "[t]wo of my cousins came home wrecks; the rest are dead." See TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 6, folder 7, Deacon to Davidson, 14 March 1924.

65. TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 6, folder 7, Deacon to Davidson, 14 March 1924.

66. TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 4, folder 1, "Canada and War," n.d.

country out of such a conflict: "I have told my son that, if I am to die in the next war, it will be right here in Toronto, resisting war, where he can see me being a hero, and where my death may possibly do him some good."<sup>67</sup>

Although he came to believe the war had been futile, Canada's soldiers remained a subject of considerable pride. "[M]an-for-man," Deacon declared during a promotional talk for *My Vision of Canada*, "our soldiers in the Great War were rated the best fighters in Europe. I am proud of those men: but I am glad Canada is not one of those nations now disturbing the peace of the world by possession of heavy armaments."<sup>68</sup> Such praise for the Canadian Corps reflected his generation's reluctance to criticize its achievements overseas. His support did not waiver but the achievements now lacked meaning. The sacrifices were wasted, especially if there was another war. As Deacon explained on the eve of the Second World War, the real possibility that men might again find themselves engulfed in European conflict was more than "terribly depressing," it was further proof that "every idealistic impulse" in the world had "gone awry."<sup>69</sup>

Veterans such as Will Bird, F.P. Day, George Drew, Robert Manion, and Frank Underhill were all, to some extent, elites. So too were Bill Deacon and Edward Binns. These men had little in common, either in profession or politics, yet they were all disenchanted with the outcome of the Great War.

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67. TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 3, folder 45, "Canada Won't Fight," n.d.

68. TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 48, folder 21, "'Canadian Nationalism and War', address to Hamilton Assembly of Native Sons of Canada," 16 November 1933.

69. TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 3, folder 34, Deacon to Burriss, 17 January 1939.

There was no single cause for this discontent. International instability was one factor. General disappointment with the direction of peacetime Canada was another. For the veterans, their changing postwar views were also linked to their war experience. The memories of that conflict continued to inform their understanding of the peace. While public commemorative ceremonies called on all Canadians to remember the war, these men and their postwar disenchantment lacked a similar unifying purpose, often because their views were a reaction to the present. Although a disparate record, these changed interpretations of the war's meaning were no less valid a reaction to the challenges and failures endured in the war's aftermath.

## Chapter 4

### Unemployment and the Problem of the Returned Man

*"[The unemployment problem] ... is no occasion for faintheartedness but in the name of those who have fallen in the defence of the liberties of the country and in obligation to those who have returned from that struggle, the Canadian people have before them the task of presenting to the world, a nation morally and materially great, a monument worthy of the men living and dead who have made this possible."<sup>1</sup>*

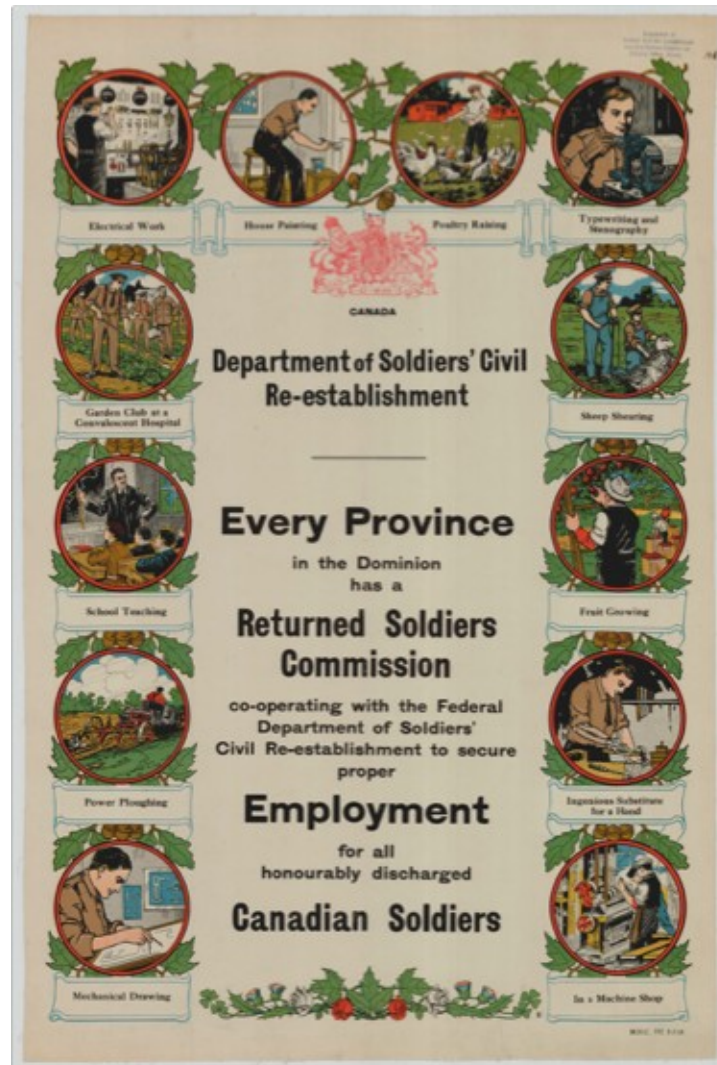
- Harold Innis, "The Returned Soldier"

In 1919, Canada celebrated its "Victory Year." The war was finally over. For those who came of age with the conflict, however, postwar life proved a poor reflection of the nationalist myths already being constructed. They may have won the war but now veterans struggled amidst a pessimistic and troubling reality: demobilization did not go smoothly and their resulting list of grievances was long and often contradictory. Dashed hopes soon led to frustration and even despair as postwar Canada endured widespread and prolonged unemployment. These setbacks fuelled a sense among veterans, including writers such as F.P. Day, that not enough was being done to recognize and address the problems they faced after coming home.

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<sup>1</sup> Innis, "The Returned Soldier," 20.

Veterans did not initially expect to have trouble finding jobs. The war was waged for a better world and propaganda encouraged the belief that soldiers would return to a prosperous Canada. Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment (DSCR) publicity material assured veterans that Returned



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www.collectionscanada.gc.ca

Figure 4. DSCR Poster advertising employment in “every province” of Canada.



Soldiers Commissions existed in “every province” to “secure proper Employment for all honourably discharged Canadian Soldiers.”<sup>2</sup> Such advertisements touted all forms of work, from house painting to poultry farming to typewriting to teaching, mechanical farming, mechanical drawing, and work in machine shops. The wounded were not forgotten either. They would be employed using “ingenious” substitutes for missing limbs. Veterans in need of recovery would recuperate for civilian life at garden clubs in convalescent hospitals. Whether rural or urban, industrial or agricultural, in the trades or the classroom, Canada was committed to putting its returned men back to work. Yet, when the country slid back into recession, returned men were particularly hard hit.

Historians acknowledge that some veterans struggled after the war, but few evaluations study how the postwar economic decline affected these men or their understanding of the war’s meaning. Histories of major labour unrest, including the Winnipeg General Strike and the On-to-Ottawa Trek, say little about how the war generation reacted to these struggles. More general considerations of how the war changed Canadian society are equally silent on the war’s economic legacy, focusing instead on the war’s impact on social reform, such as the temperance question, or shifting beliefs about the power of the state.<sup>3</sup> In the case of Winnipeg in 1919, debate continues about the position of veterans during the strike, in part because returned men lined

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2 See for example the DSCR, no. M.H.C. VII 5-2-18.

3 John H. Thompson, “‘The Beginning of Our Regeneration.’ The Great War and Western Canadian Reform Movements,” in R. Douglas Francis and Howard Palmer, eds., *The Prairie West: Historical Readings* (Edmonton: Pica Pica Press, 1985).

up both for and against the strikers.<sup>4</sup> Their role during the On-to-Ottawa-Trek and the Regina Riots is even more ambiguous because most of the relief workers who protested were much younger than the war generation. As Bill Waiser argues, when the men in federal relief camps protested their employment and living conditions, the march on Ottawa was led not by veterans but by “hundreds of young men, many still in their teens.”<sup>5</sup>

Conventional wisdom dictates that Canada’s veterans “were re-absorbed into civil pursuits without much unemployment or industrial disturbance.”<sup>6</sup> While true, to an extent, for veterans who returned *during* the war, this was not the case for the postwar era. The notion that veterans reintegrated relatively easily into the postwar economy endures, a misconception which helps explain why their struggles have not been considered relevant to the discussion of the war’s wider meaning. Despite this misunderstanding, however, returned men were particularly affected by the 1920 downturn and by subsequent unemployment throughout the interwar era. Admittedly, the picture of how badly these men struggled is

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4 See for example, David Bercuson, *Confrontation at Winnipeg: Labour, Industrial Relations, and the General Strike* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1974), Reinhold Kramer and Tom Mitchell, *When the State Trembled: How A.J. Andrews and the Citizens’ Committee Broke the Winnipeg General Strike* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2010), A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement, 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), D.C. Masters, *The Winnipeg General Strike* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1950).

5 Bill Waiser, *All Hell Can’t Stop Us: The On-to-Ottawa-Trek and Regina Riot* (Calgary: Fifth House, 2003), xi.

6 *Report of the Royal Commission on Dominion-Provincial Relations, Book I, Canada: 1867-1939* [Hereafter *Rowell-Sirois Commission*] (Ottawa, 1940), 100.

clouded by a lack of statistical information on unemployment generally but the records indicate that veterans faced serious hurdles after 1918.

Comprehensive employment figures were not kept during the interwar period and analysis of employment in the 1920s is limited by this lack of statistical data.<sup>7</sup> An exception was the Dominion Bureau of Statistics, which began to make forays into employment research as early as 1920, but even this data was limited. It was derived from small averages of selected trades unions and, as a result, there is no consensus on how many men were unemployed at the outbreak of war or at its close.<sup>8</sup> As the University of Toronto economist Gilbert Jackson complained, Canada could “scarcely claim to possess the data from which a calculation of the risks of unemployment could be made.”<sup>9</sup> The era’s policy makers were forced to rely on estimates and no national statistics were recorded until after the Second World War.<sup>10</sup>

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7. The most extensive considerations of Canadian employment in this era include James Struthers’ work in *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914-1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1983) and *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994). The development of social security is better studied. See for instance Dennis Guest, *The Emergence of Social Security in Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), Raymond Blake, *From Rights to Needs: A History of Family Allowances in Canada, 1929-1992* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2009), and Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work, and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

8. Struthers, *No Fault*, 13.

9. Jackson, quoted in Struthers, *No Fault*, 20.

10 Although important steps were taken to compile statistical portraits of unemployment in Canada after 1920, no regular measure existed before 1945. See Dave Gower, <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/studies-etudes/75-001/archive/e-pdf/87-eng.pdf> 4 June 2014.

In the 1920s and 1930s the unemployed were not “counted regularly”<sup>11</sup> and Ottawa “did not even know how many Canadians were unemployed.”<sup>12</sup> It is

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11 Bothwell, Drummond, and English, *Canada 1900-1945*, 219.

12 Thompson and Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939*, 26. Estimates for the 1920s suggest that the average unemployment rate for the decade was 3.5%. The figure is a poor reflection of the difficulties faced in the early 1920s because the percentage is artificially buoyed by the more prosperous period between 1926 and 1929. See Fortin, <http://www.csls.ca/rep/1/06-fortin.pdf>, 114. According to James Struthers, the real unemployment rate between 1920 and 1925 was nearly double the average for the decade. The years with the highest rates were 1921 (8.9), 1922, and 1924 (both at 7.1). See James Struthers, *No Fault*, 215. In 1921, nearly 250,000 men were unemployed, approximately twelve percent of the projected labour force. Such figures, while offering a more accurate picture of the overall unemployment situation, are more a reflection of the distribution of unemployment in the economy generally and they remain silent about the overall numbers of unemployed. See M.C. Maclean, et al., *Census Monograph No. 11, Unemployment: A Study Based on the Census of 1931 and Supplementary Data* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1938), 23. Other estimates indicate that the country's unemployment rate was considerably higher, especially during the fall and winter months. See “1,500 Returned Men Without Employment,” *Globe*, 13 June 1924, 12. In January 1920, Ottawa's department of labour concluded that Canada's unemployment rate was sixteen percent. The report did not expect the situation to improve soon. See “Unemployment on Increase in Canada,” *Globe*, 27 April 1921, 3.

Unemployment on the prairies is less well documented, but is estimated at equally high rates. Anecdotal figures from James Gray suggest it “may well have reached 20 or 25 per cent” in the region's urban centers. See James H. Gray, *The Roar of the Twenties* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1975), 71. The most dire years could well have been worse. Kenneth Buckley reported in 1955 that the unemployment figures for the interwar era were skewed by the failure to recognize that in times of economic difficulty excess farm work tended to stay on the farm. Moreover, there may even have been a “reverse movement from the cities to the farms.” See Kenneth Buckley, *Capital Formation in Canada, 1896-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1955), 46, 152 n. 22. Regardless of the rate, it should not be forgotten that the proportion of men of working age actually declined after the war. See O.J. Firestone, *Income and Wealth Series VII: Canada's Economic Development, 1867-1953: With Special Reference to Changes in the Country's National Product and National Wealth* (London: Bowes & Bowes, 1958), 55. Between 1870 and 1910 men aged 15-64 rose from fifty-four per cent to sixty-four percent. The losses incurred during the war forced these figures down and by 1920 the percentage of working age men had declined to 61½ percent. The percentage did not rise to 1910 levels until 1939 (when it reached 65½ percent).

unsurprising, therefore, that scholars consider it nearly “impossible” to document the scope of interwar unemployment.<sup>13</sup>

Social scientists began extensive study of the economy in the 1930s to address the lack of information on the labour market. This work contributed to policy debates about the role of government and business in the market, but it rarely focused on veterans.<sup>14</sup> Rather, it examined the causes of unemployment, studies of regional or municipal reactions to labour issues, and the role of private industry. L. Richter’s *Canada’s Unemployment Problem* (1939) was one of the major publications released during the era. It was the first study published by Dalhousie’s Institute of Public Affairs, which coordinated research between the governments of Newfoundland, the Maritime Provinces, and the region’s universities. Leading social scientists, including Harry Cassidy, Director of Social Welfare in B.C., Dorothy King, Director of the Montreal School of Social Work, and A. MacNamara, deputy minister of Public Works and Labour in Manitoba, contributed to the volume. The U of T economist, S.A. Saunders, acknowledged that returned soldiers received assistance for unemployment immediately after the war, but none of the remaining studies of the relief question considered veterans’ place in

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13. Gray, *The Roar of the Twenties*, 71. See too C.P. Gilman and H.M. Sinclair, *Unemployment: Canada’s Problem* (Ottawa: Army and Navy Veterans in Canada, 1935), 17, which also laments the “paucity” of data on unemployment.

14 See for example Norman Rogers’ Foreward to L. Richter’s edited collection, *Canada’s Unemployment Problem* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1939).

postwar society or how unemployment affected them.<sup>15</sup> Instead, these men were lumped into the wider pool of unemployed workers.

The tendency to overlook veterans was also true of other studies produced earlier in the 1930s. F.R. Scott and Harry Cassidy's *Labour Conditions in the Men's Clothing Industry* (1935) was an important report on urban labour but it said nothing about jobless veterans in the clothing industry.<sup>16</sup> The same is true of Leonard Marsh's research, which did not highlight the plight of unemployed veterans although it did acknowledge that postwar unemployment was a product of the war's aftermath caused in part by "commercial, monetary, and political dislocations which derive from the War."<sup>17</sup>

Despite a lack of concrete statistics, by 1921 it was estimated that 200,000 Canadians were unemployed, "many of them veterans."<sup>18</sup> According to Desmond Morton, "too many veterans had chosen overvalued or

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15 The omission is notable because the book contains work by leading experts, such as Harry Cassidy and Charlotte Whitton.

16 F.R. Scott and H.M. Cassidy, *Labour Conditions in the Men's Clothing Industry: A Report* (Toronto: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1935).

17 Leonard Marsh, *Employment Research: An Introduction to the McGill Programme of Research in the Social Sciences* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1935), 44. Marsh expands on this "dislocation" in a chapter on "Industrial Fluctuations." The conflict left a "legacy of overequipment and inflated capital values in its wake," he wrote. See *Employment Research*, 197.

18 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 153.

unproductive land in the Soldier Settlement plan.”<sup>19</sup> The promises of “full re-establishment” boiled down to a “brutally simple” reality: returned men would have the “renewed privilege of fending for themselves in a business-like, profit driven society.”<sup>20</sup> In the estimation of the Great War Veterans’ Association (GWVA), unemployment among veterans was “intolerable.” Instead of life getting better after 1919, it got worse. Unemployment increased between 1920 and 1921, and veterans were the group “most severely affected.”<sup>21</sup>

During the early 1920s, the GWVA produced the most statistical information on returned men. Yet its estimates were as varied as others, making it difficult to compare the figures with municipal, provincial, and federal records. In 1919 the association counted at least 1,500 members who were unemployed in Toronto and it estimated the provincial figure to be close to five thousand.<sup>22</sup> Provincial soldiers’ aid commissions, tasked with finding employment for veterans, reported that need for relief was so great that Ontario’s relief funds were “considerably” overdrawn.<sup>23</sup> Churches and

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19 Desmond Morton, “The Canadian Veterans’ Heritage from the Great War,” in J.L. Granatstein and Peter Neary, eds., *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1998), 27.

20 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 104.

21. “Unemployment on Increase in Canada,” *Globe*, 27 April 1921, 3.

22. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview with Gentlemen Representing the G.W.V.A. Introduced by Sergeant Conroy, District Secretary for Toronto District,” 19 February 1919 [hereafter “Notes of Interview”].

23. AO, RG29-165, Soldiers’ Aid Commission, Minutes of the Soldiers’ Aid Commission, 31 December 1919; AO, RG 8-5, B226501, Soldiers’ Aid Commission, “Notes of Interview.”

benevolent societies noted similar pressures as unemployment increased. Veterans living in urban centres were especially hard hit. In 1922, the Toronto Brotherhood Federation recognized that returned soldiers were badly affected by the economic downturn. In response, the federation put out an "S.O.S.," asking individuals to pledge for relief efforts for unemployed veterans. The appeal reminded the city's congregations of the debt they owed the country's returned soldiers:

The Christian Churches received much praise for helping to secure volunteers for the great conflict. Now that it is over and nobly won and the men are back with us, many of them in distress the Churches will not stand by and see them suffer for lack of the mere necessities of life.

The plan here proposed by the Toronto Brotherhood Federation, and endorsed by the authorities of the different Churches, is simple, direct and effective.

He who gives quickly gives twice.<sup>24</sup>

But community efforts could not solve unemployment, however well intentioned, and jobless veterans continued to face difficulty into the 1920s. By the winter of 1924, job prospects were so poor that returned soldiers had resorted to hoping for winter storms to make extra money removing snow.<sup>25</sup>

The economy improved halfway through the decade but unemployment problems continued. George Parker, for example, was an experienced pipe fitter. Despite his training, he was unemployed and

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24. "Churches Will Hear Appeal for Members to Come to Aid of Distressed Returned Men," *Globe*, 14 January 1922, 13.

25. "Snow Proves Boon to Many Soldiers and Workless Men," *Globe*, 21 February 1924, 8.



desperately seeking a job. In 1926, Parker wrote Ontario's premier, Howard Ferguson, asking for a letter of introduction. He hoped to secure a position with the Temiskaming and Northern Ontario Railroad, but was uncomfortable asking for such assistance. The precarious state of the economy forced him to put aside his "regret." As he explained, "things have come to such a pass, that I am almost desperate."<sup>26</sup> Ferguson was sympathetic but did little more than direct the veteran to an official at the northern railway. The premier regretted that Parker was in such a condition. He emphasized, however, that his hands were tied by the fact that others in the province were in similar circumstances. "The conditions all over the Province ... are very serious," he explained. He could do nothing more to help. According to estimates, the unemployment rate in 1926 had fallen to under five per cent. Yet, in spite of the increase in jobs, Ferguson's letter painted an especially dreary picture of veterans' employment prospects: "In a centre like Toronto particularly there are thousands of men walking the streets, and similar conditions prevail in every centre in the Province."<sup>27</sup>

Five years later, by the second year of the Great Depression, veterans in urban centres, such as Toronto, were even worse off. In 1931, the city's Central Bureau of Unemployment Relief produced one of the most detailed accounts of urban unemployment. It tracked age, physical condition, residence, economic status, family responsibilities, and nationality of the

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26. AO, RG3-6-0-961, Civil Service Applications for Positions #1, Parker to Ferguson, 1 January 1926.

27. AO, RG3-6-0-961, Civil Service Applications for Positions #1, Ferguson to Parker, 7 January 1926.

unemployed. The bureau calculated that between August and November there were 36,500 unemployed men. A large number — 7,310—were veterans. The bureau's figures do not specify how old these men were but by 1931 the vast majority of the war generation were aged 36 to 55, indicating that their ranks accounted for approximately 52% of unemployed men.<sup>28</sup> According to the Hyndman Report on unemployment of ex-service men, by the mid 1930s as many as twenty percent of non-pensionable veterans were unemployed.<sup>29</sup>

**Table 1. Age Distribution of Unemployed Men, Toronto  
(17 August to 30 November 1931)<sup>30</sup>**

<u>Age</u>	<u>Single</u>	<u>Married</u>	<u>Total</u>
20 and under	2,801	108	2,909
21 to 35	8,875	7,563	16,438
36 to 55	4,056	9,930	13,986
56 to 69	883	2,159	3,042
70 and over	49	126	175
<b>Total</b>	<b>16,664</b>	<b>19,886</b>	<b>36,550</b>

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28 Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario*, 38.

29. This figure was an approximation based on the exclusion of pensionable men and those estimated to be receiving municipal or federal departmental relief. With these men excluded from the total of CEF veterans, it means that of the roughly 189,000 men not eligible for some sort of assistance, at least 38,000 of these were unemployed. No explanation is provided in the report for how the committee reached these figures. See *Report of the Committee Appointed to Carry Out an Investigation into the Existing Facilities in Connection with Unemployment of Ex-Service Men and Care and Maintenance while Unemployed, and to Report Thereon with such Suggestions and Recommendations as may be Deemed Advisable* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1935), 5.

30 Data derived from Cassidy, *Unemployment and Relief in Ontario*, 37.

Amidst the Depression, veterans wrote impassioned letters to provincial premiers asking for jobs. But these desperate appeals did not commence with the 1929 downturn. Even during the so-called boom years of the late 1920s, returned men were pleading for aid for unemployment from all levels of government.<sup>31</sup> James Rowan Linton, for example, wrote the Ontario government seeking work. He enlisted in 1915 and was severely wounded overseas. In 1926 he was unemployed. Premier Ferguson assured him that it would have given him “great satisfaction” to help a returned man, especially an amputee (as Linton now was). But it was impossible. “I have made enquiries throughout the service,” he explained to the young man, “and I am unable to find that there is any opportunity presenting itself at the present time.”<sup>32</sup> The employment problem was both widespread and prolonged.

When the war ended, the expectation was that employers would accept healthy returned men back to work as part of their patriotic duty.<sup>33</sup>

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31. The correspondence from returned men to the province’s premiers from the 1920s demonstrates that their appeals pre-date the cases cited by Lara Campbell in her analysis of Ontario’s veterans during the Great Depression. See especially Chapters 2 and 5, respectively “‘If He is a Man He Becomes Desperate’: Unemployed Husbands, Fathers, and Workers,” and “Militant Mothers and Loving Fathers: Gender, Family, and Ethnicity in Protest,” in Lara Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario’s Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

32. AO, AO, RG3-6-0-961, Civil Service Applications for Positions #1, Ferguson to Linton, 14 January 1926. Ferguson did pass on Linton’s request to Col. Price, the Provincial Treasurer, however, in hopes that he could find the man a position with the Soldiers’ Aid Commission.

33. *Sessional Paper* No. 35a – 1916, Military Hospital Commission, The Provision of Employment for Members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on their return to Canada and the Re-education of those who are unable to follow their previous positions, 5.

This did not happen, either because jobs were scarce or because employers were reluctant to hire veterans because they feared employees with physical or psychological wounds. The difficulty these men had in finding work was noticed early on and newspapers, such as the Edmonton *Herald*, ran ads that called on employers to “find out what jobs are vacant in your community” and then make it a matter of pride “to give the first chance to a returned soldier.” Other ads argued that veterans needed to be encouraged to return to work. They preyed on period fears about idle men, declaring that “[loafing] is bad for them, as it is for any of us.” As Robert Rutherford points out, this type of advertising framed returned men’s difficulty finding work in terms of existing fears over male unemployment. Idle soldiers were no longer heroic volunteers; they were now malingering ‘loafers’.<sup>34</sup> It was not just employers that were at fault.

As the *Star* noted, returned men could also make difficult employees. The paper reported that “some of the [returned] men are hard to handle.”<sup>35</sup> They wanted employers to make concessions on their behalf. Veterans believed that fighting for the nation meant that the government and businesses had a responsibility to help them. This assumption did not sit well with potential employers. In their experience, veterans may well have wanted to work, but they seemed too selective when it came to what they were willing to do. Employers complained that returned men wanted

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34. Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons*, 238.

35. “Fifty Soldiers Register,” *Star*, 13 October 1915, 1.

"sinecures."<sup>36</sup> The hostility of the labour market put veterans in a doubly difficult position. They had sacrificed for the country on the expectation that, should it be necessary, their needs would be addressed after the war. The postwar market, however, was not sympathetic to men who returned home less capable than before the war and the re-establishment programs created to assist them proved equally inadequate. The harsh reality for many veterans was that they were left worse off because of their military service.

According to the GWVA, ex-soldiers were denied good jobs because they were being filled by unworthy men. During the war, much of this anger was directed at foreigners. The hostility of ex-soldiers towards those they perceived as un-British was both a reflection of men's desire "to fight the war at home" and a call for "better re-establishment efforts" that would ultimately result in an idealized "vision of Canada as a British country."<sup>37</sup> By war's end, however, veterans had come to the realization that they had little power to influence the hiring practices of private businesses.<sup>38</sup> Ideally, they wanted businesses to be "accommodating." If employers were willing to give them greater leniency, then these men would surely be back on their feet in no time. "We are asking the manufacturers ... to take men who are not 100%," explained Col. Hunter of the GWVA. The hope was that if such accommodation were made, men would be helped along "until they become

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36. "Fifty Soldiers Register," 1.

37. Smith, "Comrades and Citizens," 144.

38. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, "Notes of Interview."

efficient.”<sup>39</sup> This did not happen and returned men were increasingly turned down in favour of civilians.<sup>40</sup> In response, veterans’ associations refocused their advocacy. They stopped calling on private business and shifted attention to elected officials and government agencies, such as Ottawa’s DSCR and Ontario’s Soldiers’ Aid Commission (SAC). By concentrating on government, veterans’ associations ceded their ability to advocate for employment for all returned men—both able-bodied and disabled—in favour of securing better benefits for those deemed eligible for federal assistance. This change led to a nearly two-decade long struggle with the federal government over pensions. It revealed that veterans’ associations were as ill equipped as provincial and federal governments to offer solutions to the problem of postwar unemployment.

William Edward Turley was one of the GWVA’s leading spokesmen. While in uniform he was a sergeant. Out of uniform, he was an ex-boxer and former reporter for the Toronto *Telegram*.<sup>41</sup> Born in 1882, Turley was a well-known Orangeman who had enlisted in September 1914. After his return to Canada, he was actively involved in recruiting efforts in Toronto. Turley then served as secretary of the Ontario branch of the GWVA. It was in this capacity that he and the GWVA tried to draw the government’s attention to the plight of unemployed soldiers. The association opted to focus on government because the GWVA concluded that private businesses were not responding to

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39. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview.”

40. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview.”

41. See Turley’s biographical information on his Attestation Papers and in Smith, “Comrades and Citizens,” 82.

appeals to hire more veterans. As Turley explained, “one does not expect or get much sentiment from private business, [but] one does expect some ... sentiment and consideration in connection with government positions.”<sup>42</sup> If business would not hire ex-soldiers, then the government had to step in. Politicians had made well-publicized commitments to bring them into the public service. As one GWVA member explained to the Ontario SAC, asking for increased aid from the government may have seemed “selfish” in a time of difficult employment but

for reasons that are apparent we [returned men and the state] have a linking up with each other that you cannot get in any other way, and kindly consideration by the Government of this problem would go far to make us more quickly the power for good that we are going to be in the Province of Ontario and the Dominion of Canada. We are going to do this right and make this country a better place to live in.<sup>43</sup>

The GWVA devoted considerable energy to such advocacy, with many of its campaigns directed at ensuring government employed returned soldiers.

The Ontario SAC was aware that returned men faced difficulty securing jobs and that they lacked sufficient social and medical support as well. The commission was created in 1916 to facilitate the re-establishment of veterans. It had limited scope to provide work but it did act as an advisory body that documented soldiers’ efforts at re-integration. The group tracked the number of men returning to Ontario and also organized committees and branches to help men find work. By 1918, its efforts included organized

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42. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview”

43. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview”

appeals to secure the “good will” of employers. The Commission also worked with the federal and provincial governments to ensure returned men were considered when either government made appointments. Aside from some vocational training, however, the commission was limited to offering aid and assistance to men in need. As with the provincial efforts to address unemployment, generally, it had no powers to ensure veterans received jobs.

In a confidential memo, the commission identified some of the major obstructions facing returned soldiers. One of the most daunting challenges was the veteran assistance system itself. It was a confusing combination of organizations with overlapping jurisdictions. Men often had no way to use it “without the benefit of advice or counsel.”<sup>44</sup> A myriad of groups and organizations all purported to assist veterans. These included benevolent societies, municipal assistance, provincial organizations, and those operated by the federal government. Some, such as the CPF, were officially sanctioned but privately operated. Others, such as the provincial aid commissions were arm’s-length extensions of government. Others still were entirely unconnected to government and based on charity. This patchwork of programs left men bewildered. A.E. Lowery of the GWVA cautioned that Canada’s various levels of government had failed to approach the problem of returned men in any comprehensive manner. “The trouble,” he wrote, “is that if the problem grows to be very great and neither the Provincial nor the Dominion Government is primarily responsible for the solution there is

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44. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, Confidential Memo: Proposed Organization of the Ontario Soldiers’ Advisory Board, n.d.



danger of a good deal of falling through between the two.”<sup>45</sup> The result was a maze of programs and agencies that proved difficult to navigate.

Many assistance programs did little to assist veterans, which only added to men’s frustrations. Veterans were often confused about which organization was best suited to their needs and they faced a myriad of groups claiming to offer help. One such organization was Toronto’s Civic League (TLC). It was part of a laundry list of organizations and groups created to assist returned soldiers and, while well meaning, it offered little practical assistance. In fact, no veteran was sure of what the organization actually did. According to Edward Turley, the group had a “broad plan” to help returned men reintegrate into civil life. Despite its desire to help, the group’s mandate did not include provision for assistance of returned soldiers. Instead, it seemed that the league existed solely “for the purpose of giving [a man] a feed once a month.” Veterans did not discount this work, but “when it comes down to practical things,” they concluded, the organization was of little use.<sup>46</sup>

Veterans were angered that assistance programs lacked oversight. They felt that returned men who appeared before pension boards (not to mention the boards of benevolent associations, including those of the provincial canteen funds), were at the mercy of their decision, no matter whether “right or wrong.” If a veteran believed he had been turned down

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45 Proceedings of the Special Committee on Returned Soldiers, Parilamentary Session 1917, No. 8, 21 March 1917, 709.

46. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview”

unjustly, he had no recourse or appeal. This situation was ripe for abuse. As an Ontario report noted,

there is no check either, on behalf of the man, on the interpretations placed upon the regulations under which the various departments operate. Such interpretations are, in some cases, unnecessarily strict and narrow. Matters of policy directly affecting the veteran are at times decided more from a point of view of office management, administration, or economy, than from regard to the interest of the veteran himself. The system that some organizations adopt in dealing with the men is not satisfactory to the men.<sup>47</sup>

The federal and provincial governments may have been well intentioned in their desire to assist veterans, but the policies and procedures implemented to assist them proved naïve in their assessment, particularly of the employment problem. The resulting strain on the system proved unbearable and many of the programs established were over-burdened by the influx of men claiming assistance

In Ontario, veterans' organizations offered few solutions about how to address the unemployment of returned men. Beyond information campaigns explaining that returned soldiers faced perilous job prospects, groups like the GWVA did little more than advocate for special status for veterans. Indeed, the group spent much of its postwar energy fighting for positions in government agencies. In Ontario, the Labour Bureau came in for particular rebuke. It was the province's primary employment body and it employed a staff of eight, three of whom were veterans. The GWVA advocated strongly

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AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, Confidential Memo: Proposed Organization of the Ontario Soldiers' Advisory Board, n.d.

that this number needed to be higher. It also took issue with the fact that at least one of the civilian employees had been eligible for duty. According to the veterans' association, failure to don a uniform meant this man did not deserve his postwar position.

The GWVA also singled out a young woman who was placing men as farm labourers. According to the association, because so many returned men were heading to farms, "a returned soldier would be more efficient in placing returned soldiers on farms than a girl could possibly be."<sup>48</sup> The federal DSCR was similarly rebuked for not employing enough veterans. As the organization complained, "this Department is being administered, to a great extent by civilians, who are just as capable of serving overseas as any man who went." The GWVA believed these men were not worthy of employment, not least because they were profiting off of the hard won labour of Canada's soldiers. Instead of doing their part overseas, DSCR employees had "stayed behind" and secured "good positions," which "could [now be] filled by returned men." The GWVA believed that the DSCR employees received "good pay" at the expense of returned soldiers. This was not a "square deal."<sup>49</sup>

Returned men wanted recognition and fair consideration for work. But they were also critical of those who considered them for employment and the "majority of returned soldiers" chafed at receiving assistance from civilians. It

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48. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, "Notes of Interview"

49. "Report of Meeting of Commission of Government and Representatives of Guelph Brance of G.W.V.A," 25 November 1919, 5 in Rutherford, *Hometown Horizons*, 254.

was the GWVA's position that civilian employees were ill-equipped to deal with former soldiers, particularly when it came to cases of disabilities.<sup>50</sup> Not all returned men had issues with civilians, but they certainly did when it meant "rubbing shoulders" with them looking for employment.<sup>51</sup> By asking for recognition of their status as veterans, ex-combatants set themselves apart from the rest of society, a distinction that ran up against the fact that they were now demobilized. Once back in civilian clothes, they were treated as regular men. Many did not think it fair because their war service had set them back in comparison to their peers. As a result, "the returned soldier desire[d] to maintain [that title] by virtue of his having gone over and fought and earned [it]."<sup>52</sup>

Despite ongoing advocacy on behalf of their membership, the veterans' organizations did not secure meaningful change in hiring policies and, much like the case with private businesses, the lobbying of government proved ineffective. These efforts failed because with the exception of calling for new hiring, the alternative proposals put forward were impractical. Edward Turley, for instance, wanted to ensure that governments hired returned men. When pressed how the GWVA would achieve this goal, Turley admitted to the Ontario SAC that the only solution to employing returned soldiers was to fire civilians who had not served. Even then, however, Turley recognized that there were not enough jobs to meet the need. During an

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50. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, "Notes of Interview."

51. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, "Notes of Interview."

52. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, "Notes of Interview."

exchange, the veteran pointed out that London, Ontario, had at least 450 unemployed returned soldiers. Yet, Turley conceded that “even if all government employees were relieved of their duties that would not relieve the situation so far as soldier unemployment is concerned.”<sup>53</sup> Even if veterans did not want to admit it, the GWVA’s lobbying of government highlighted the point that the war had put these men at a disadvantage. While making his case for “releasing present employees,” Turley admitted that they would have a better chance at finding a new job than returned men. These male employees were “physically fit,” in part because they had not served. As such, they would “have less difficulty in securing employment from the ordinary private employer of labour than the returned man, [who was left] more or less disabled.”<sup>54</sup>

The GWVA also wanted Ontario’s employment offices to provide a separate employment bureau exclusively for veterans. As the province’s deputy minister of labour noted, what the association desired was a “Bureau that will be given up exclusively to returned soldier applications.”<sup>55</sup> The GWVA pushed for this option because it recognized its members were increasingly unhappy with their employment prospects. “We have many dissatisfied men coming to our offices with various grievances,” explained the association’s Col. Hunter. “We try to smooth these things out as we go

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53. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview.”

54. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview.”

55. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview.”

along, but the situation is becoming more acute all the time.”<sup>56</sup> The push for a separate veterans’ employment bureau was also the result of a tacit admission that returned men were not always as predictable as their civilian counterparts. With jobs scarce and men increasingly desperate, instances of abuse and assault increased.<sup>57</sup> Veterans were ‘fed up’ with having to deal with men who had “never been over” to Europe and were threatening to give civilian men “a punch in the jaw” for taking their jobs.<sup>58</sup>

Labour bureau staff worked to match prospective employees with prospective employers, a task that required considering both the needs of an employer and a potential employee. In Ontario, individuals who visited the provincial labour bureaus utilized the same space. Officials only considered a veteran’s status if a potential employer—generally the government—agreed to give preference to these men. The problem for veterans was that there were too few jobs in the public service, let alone in the private sector. Many veterans, such as Patrick G., were considered less desirable than ‘civilian’ men, for whom labour bureau employees could more easily find work. Patrick suffered from chest pain that prevented him “from engaging in any strenuous form of employment such as heavy labour.”<sup>59</sup> As a case officer from an employment bureau acknowledged, there was no employment for the

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56. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview.”

57. Col. Hunter estimated that the number of men dissatisfied with the assistance they received from the SAC and the Ontario Employment Bureau was as high as fifty-percent. See AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview.”

58. AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview.”

59 AO, RG 29-65, File No 1765 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act], 7 December 1929.

veteran, despite the fact that he was “a regular applicant for work, and ... always willing to take on anything he could do.”<sup>60</sup> Veterans like Patrick realized that they were disadvantaged and they were angry at being passed over for open positions. As tensions increased inside the employment bureaus, the GWVA warned that it could not control its ranks, many of who had “been brought up to fight.” To prevent a “battle royal” erupting at these offices, the association called for a divided space. In the GWVA’s view, securing an exclusive returned men’s office would alleviate tension caused by civilian men securing the majority of available positions. It would also ensure that veterans received some sort of *de facto* recognition of their status as returned men.

The GWVA did not succeed with its efforts to get the government to hire more returned men. Its proposals were impractical. Firing employed workers and setting up a separate employment service to deal with civilians could not address the major downturn in employment. The extreme nature of the association’s suggested solutions to the employment issue reflected the inadequate responses to postwar labour problems. Veterans may have called for unified employment schemes, but these calls aligned poorly with the commitments made by the state, or its jurisdictional responsibilities. While some men may have returned to Canada without having lost their “initiative or a desire to better [their] position,” this did not mean they had jobs waiting for them and the struggle and strain of the ensuing decade tested the generation’s resolve, making it difficult to argue that they were receiving a

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60 AO, RG 29-65, File No 1765 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act], 10 December 1929.

“square deal.”<sup>61</sup> Indeed, as Pierre van Paassen described, men became increasingly disenchanted with assistance programs:

Officials were assuring men that they would be properly looked after ... There was going to be a gratuity, a bonus; land was going to be made available for settlement; convalescent camps were to be established; even broken-up homes were going to be mended by martial relations boards.

“All of that sounded fine,” van Paassen remembered, except that he had “a feeling, nevertheless, that I had been the victim of an enormous nonsense.” By enlisting, men submitted to “an arbitrary fate” that “deprived” them “of everything that makes for human dignity.” The veterans now raged that men had thrown their lives away “on the supposition that they were helping to preserve something precious.” In reality, all they had done “was to clear the road for the same bourgeois democracy which had unleashed the storm just stilled, to start all over again.”<sup>62</sup>

During the Great Depression, difficulty finding work stressed many veterans to the breaking point. Returned men took particular exception to this state of affairs. The hardships their generation faced did not reflect the world for which they had sacrificed and their disenchantment, its relationship to the war, and their postwar economic prospects was made clear in a series of articles written by members of the Army and Navy Veterans of Canada, later

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61 The GWVA acknowledged as such with its statement: “We have a difficult position, those of us who are heads in any way of the G.W.V.A. organization. There are two necessities, one is to see that every returned man gets an absolutely square deal and the other, which is quite as difficult, is to convince hi that he has got a square deal.” See AO, RG 8-5, Soldiers Aid Commission, B226501, “Notes of Interview.”

62 Van Paassen, *Days of Our Years*, 90-91.



collected in the volume *Unemployment: Canada's Problem* (1935). The principle authors were Capt. Clement Percy Gilman, M.C., a decorated officer from the CEF, and Huntly McDonald Sinclair, professor of economics and author of *The Principles of Economic Trade* (1932). In perhaps the most detailed explanation of the economic complaints raised by veterans during the early 1920s, their text argued that returned men were particularly hard hit by the economic downturn. "Modern economic life," they argued, "victimized the returned man more than his contemporaries." Moreover, for the war generation,

the process of victimization started in 1914. The patriot, the idealist, the man of resource, the searcher for adventure – those who in the past history of mankind had made the greatest contribution in carrying back the frontier between civilization and the lack of it, progress and stagnation – these men went overseas in return for the munificent sum of \$1.10 with bad food, uncomfortable clothing, and primitive housing thrown in. While they were overseas the slackers, the materialists, the unimaginative enjoyed the high wages and fabulous profits associated with wartime industrial activity.<sup>63</sup>

In Gilman and Sinclair's analysis, returned men had good reason to be disenchanted with their postwar lives. They were Canada's best—its patriots, idealists, and adventurers—and they had given their all during the war. The war had cost them dearly and all for the benefit of slackers, materialists, and others who were not their equal.

The war's economic and human toll was self-evident. But it was not the rigors of conflict that sapped men's spirit. It was the disappointments of

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<sup>63</sup> Gilman and Sinclair, *Unemployment*, 29.

the peace. In a striking passage that highlighted the wasted youth of many men who had gone overseas, Gilman and Sinclair explained why the generation was disillusioned. No clearer example of postwar waste existed than the fate of a typical, relatively young returned man:

[He] is ... thirty-five, married and with a small family, with twenty per cent. paid upon the purchase price of a modest home, who finds himself suddenly out of a job that he thought secure for life. Startled but not discouraged, he goes out to search for work. Day after day, week after week, month after month, even year after year, he searches in vain, as thousands of others have searched. Optimism gives place to blind despair; courage gives place to fear; self-confidence to a withering sense of inferiority. In the end, without further hope, he sinks into the ranks of those whose spirits have been broken – whose souls have been wrinkled by too much stretching.<sup>64</sup>

Gilman and Sinclair's analysis was critical of the lack of work both for its economic and its moral and social effects. "The unemployment problem," they argued, reached "far beyond ... the ranks of the unemployed." Its economic shocks were incalculable and were already bringing about "tremendous" losses in production. Even more damning, however, was unemployment's wider repercussions, including its psychological, moral, and societal impact. Such costs were more difficult to measure than the unemployment rate, but they represented the most dangerous risks. The price paid in "loss of courage, in broken spirit, in the abandonment of hope, and even in the loss of self-respect has been appallingly high."<sup>65</sup>

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64 Gilman and Sinclair, *Unemployment*, 2-3.

65 Gilman and Sinclair, *Unemployment*, 16.

According to Gilman and Sinclair, returned men had a special part to play in the employment situation because of the relationship between the war and the economy. Or, as they put it, together these men had a “peculiar interest in the unemployment problem.”<sup>66</sup> Men willing to put their lives on the line for the betterment of Canada had a deep interest in the public affairs of their country. The generation was also considered more patriotic, more idealistic, with a “greater interest in the welfare and security of the State,” than older Canadians. Above all else, however, these men were interested in unemployment because in their view, the “war [was] the cause of ... modern unemployment.”<sup>67</sup> For them, the conflict remained a central reference point in their lives and anything that pertained to the war—its causes, conduct, or aftermath—remained important. Its memory was “acute” and anything associated with it was of “tremendous interest.” The critique did not shy away from linking the war with postwar unemployment. The men of the CEF had made sacrifices overseas and it was an “injustice” that they did so while others stayed home and profited. Even worse was the fact that this discrepancy continued after the war, especially with the difficulty returned men faced (re)-gaining employment. Their jobs had been surrendered to others; their skills were out of date or had been more ably performed by women; and in some cases, employers were reluctant to fire employees to allow a veteran to return to work.<sup>68</sup>

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66 Gilman and Sinclair, *Unemployment*, 25.

67 Gilman and Sinclair, *Unemployment*, 26-27.

68 Gilman and Sinclair, *Unemployment*, 31.

The collective experience of the war had become a reference point through which these men framed their postwar world. They used it to make sense of their disillusion and as a way to articulate why they felt isolated from the rest of society. As Gilman and Sinclair explained, “it [was] difficult to make people understand how great a contrast to civil life four years of war activity could be.” The conflict “wrenched” men from their civilian lives and exposed them to “the ghastly experience of life in the trenches with its appalling demands on physical endurance, mental placidity, and moral integrity.” It was not, as a result, “a small wonder that the lives of many were so revolutionized by the contrast” between their wartime and peacetime existence.<sup>69</sup>

Those who had seen the worst of the war were conditioned by the experience. Returning to their normal postwar lives—if that was even possible—required years and a myriad of “new adjustments.” Many found the return difficult, so much so that they rejected their peacetime lives by taking comfort in the challenges they faced during the war:

*In shot and shell  
I have been free,  
'Tis peace that's Hell,  
Oh God! Help me!*<sup>70</sup>

Given their troubles, it was not surprising that men were disillusioned. They had gone to war for a set of ideals and it was difficult to maintain such optimism in the face of continued failures.

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<sup>69</sup> Gilman and Sinclair, *Unemployment*, 32.

<sup>70</sup> Gilman and Sinclair, *Unemployment*, 32.

In *Unemployment*, Gilman and Sinclair outlined the direct relationship between men's postwar disenchantment and the memory of the war. "Much has happened in the past few years to disillusion the idealists," they wrote, and it could be excused if they readily parodied even the most cherished of the war's memories. If John McCrae had written, "They shall not die / Though poppies grow in Flanders fields," by the 1930s, Gilman and Sinclair dismissed such sentiments as the product of youthful idealism. During the war, men like McCrae had hoped their sacrifices would be remembered. Such hopes continued even in the Depression, but they were tempered by the realization that they were just that: hopes. To these disillusioned idealists, it was now all too clear that the realities of the war's aftermath were much darker than anything they had ever expected. They thus repurposed McCrae's hopeful lines to reflect the newfound realization:

*They had to die;  
They aimed too high.  
So poppies grow in Flanders fields.*<sup>71</sup>

This re-wording of *In Flanders Fields* says a great deal about the nature of these men's disenchantment. Canada had not failed overseas, but postwar failures to live up to wartime ideals proved that its youth had in fact 'aimed too high.' The world about which they dreamed had simply not materialized and this failure was never clearer than with the ongoing employment challenges faced by so many returned men.

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<sup>71</sup> Gilman and Sinclair, *Unemployment*, 25-26.

## Chapter 5

### In Search of a 'Square Deal'

*"Many men are returning from the war unfit for carrying on the ordinary vocations by which they earned their living. Experience in European countries has shown that much can be done by vocational training to improve the wage-earning conditions of such of these as are not completely incapacitated for work. Moreover many young fellows, whose vocations were not fixed before enlisting, will return after the war with no adequate preparation for earning a livelihood. The return of these two classes of soldiers provides a new problem in vocational education which must be solved."*

- F.W. Merchant, *Report of the Minister of Education, 1915*<sup>1</sup>

Canada was ill prepared to respond to the postwar economic downturn or its affect on veterans. The fact that men faced problems re-establishing themselves was recognized almost immediately.<sup>2</sup> Their struggles were widely reported in the press and soon became the subject of parliamentary hearings and royal commissions. Veterans associations, the media, and politicians all

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<sup>1</sup> Ontario, *Report of the Minister of Education, Province of Ontario for the Year 1915* (Toronto: King's Printer, 1916), 58.

<sup>2</sup> According to Roger Graham, "the problem of reabsorbing [returned] men into civilian life was just as new and unfamiliar as the waging of war had been in 1914." See Graham, *Arthur Meighen: A Biography, 1: The Door of Opportunity* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin & Co., Ltd., 1968), 245.

tried to curry favour with a group of men they perceived to be a rising and influential political force. As Peter Neary argues, it was against this “highly charged backdrop that Ottawa had to quickly invent and administer a program of veteran’s benefits.”<sup>3</sup> These programs failed and, while veterans remained proud of their wartime service, the intractability of postwar problems left many disenchanted with postwar Canada. In the war generation’s mind, the conflict’s meaning became linked with the realities of its aftermath, which were directly related to the economic problems faced by the returned man.

Postwar disillusionment was rooted both in the hopes men had when they enlisted and in what they learned about war while overseas. Some men ‘joined up’ as a means to return home to Europe. Others were enticed by the prospect of a dollar a day. Others still believed in Canada’s duty to the British Empire. Defense of democracy, civilization, and Christianity were common justifications. For most, the decision to enlist was shaped by a variety of factors.<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, Canadians rarely enlisted for the defence of Canada. England may have been threatened but the same was not true of North America.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of motive, enlistment was often driven by idealism, but

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3 Neary, “‘Without the Stigma of Pauperism,’” 32.

4 Harold Innis, for example, agonized over his decision to enlist. When he finally reconciled himself to join the artillery, he wrote his parents a lengthy letter explaining his decision. It mentions many of the common justifications for enlisting, including a sense of duty, a desire to assist his friends and peers, religion, and the need to address Germany’s wrongs. See UTA, B1973-0003 [Hereafter Innis Papers], B1973-0003/02, letter to Otterville, 4 April 1916. See too John Alexander Watson, *Marginal Man: The Dark Vision of Harold Innis* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2006), 71.

5 Rowell-Sirois *Commission*, 89.

idealism did not equate to naiveté. Daily casualty lists and the increasingly common sight of returning wounded reminded men of the risks they were taking. Their diaries, letters, and memoirs reveal that the generation had few illusions about the conflict.<sup>6</sup>

To the men in the Canadian Corps, the war was a business, not an adventure. They took their job seriously and over the course of the conflict their military developed a reputation for professionalism and success.<sup>7</sup> Canadians, along with their Australian counterparts, became the British military's "shock" troops.<sup>8</sup> The Corps' commanders, especially Julian Byng and Arthur Currie, were known for taking the time to learn from their mistakes. They respected their men and believed in the importance of training and innovation.

Such an environment fostered a sense of pride and commitment among officers and enlisted men, which contributed to their generational identity.<sup>9</sup> In countless cases, collective pride in the development and

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6 James Pedley, *Only This*, 16. See too Steele, *I Shall Arise*, 15.

7 Fred Bagnall remembered Currie fondly, describing him as a man of "supreme loyalty and integrity." See Bagnall, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 38.

8 Shane Schrieber, *Shock Army*.

9 Many channeled their pride into the construction of "a pan-Canadian 'corps identity'" that proved a "popular way for Canadian soldiers to self-identify during the war." See Maarten Gerritsen, "Corps Identity: The Letters, Diaries, and Memoirs of Canada's Great War Soldiers" (Ph.D. Diss. Memorial, 2008), 27. Vimy, Hill 70, and a string of successes during the Last Hundred Days were bloody testament to the skill and determination required to see the war through to completion. As A.Y. Jackson wrote home to J.E.H. MacDonald, "You would be proud of the Canucks if you could see them. They have developed a wonderful army, more Canadian and independent than it used to be, it does



achievements of the Canadian Corps mirrored a sense of individual, personal growth. Men who served argued that the war changed them and many believed their postwar lives were tied inextricably to the conflict. Some, like Will Bird, felt “prisoner” to their war memories, although he also found a silver lining in the war’s camaraderie.<sup>10</sup> Others, including Fred Bagnall, felt strongly that men who lived the war firsthand could never “dissociate” themselves from the experience.<sup>11</sup> The journalist Greg Clark was even more forthcoming about how the war shaped his postwar life. While Bagnall believed that no man could leave the war behind, Clark was adamant that the conflict also engendered significant personal change. He felt his service transformed his “mind,” “spirit,” and “personality.” Clark attributed his postwar maturity and self-confidence to the war and he continued to feel he had returned “greatly enlarged” by the conflict.<sup>12</sup>

A sense of personal growth was one of many explanations for why so many of Clark’s peers identified as a distinct generation. But unlike many veterans, Greg Clark’s experience of postwar re-establishment was uncharacteristically easy. Upon demobilization, he returned to a secure position as a reporter for the *Toronto Star*. Nonetheless, like many, Clark did not relish starting up at his old job and salary. As a junior officer during the war, he was forced to take command of eight hundred men when his

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most of its own thinking now, and does not have to find out how the old army did things or that before going ahead.” See LAC, MacDonald papers, Jackson to MacDonald, 6 April 1918.

<sup>10</sup> Bird, *And We Go On*, 342.

<sup>11</sup> Bagnall, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 39.

<sup>12</sup> LAC, *Flanders’ Fields*, Vol. 17, 4th C.M.R., Greg Clark, 2/3.

superiors were killed in battle. The experience taught Clark that he could lead while shouldering significant responsibility. Afterwards, and despite a secure position, Clark was not content to simply “run errands” as he had before enlisting. About to quit his job, Clark was offered a new post as a staff writer for the *Star Weekly*, making him one of the lucky few who successfully leveraged his war experience into better postwar employment. For countless returned men, the reality of finding postwar employment was very different. They had difficulty finding work and many felt they were being punished for giving the prime of their youth to their country.

Harold Turner’s postwar situation was more common. Originally from Seaforth, Ontario, Turner enlisted in 1916 and served overseas with the Canadian Engineers. After demobilization, he was restless and unable to remain employed. He failed at farming and carpentry, and it was not until 1925 that Turner settled down and re-integrated into civilian life.<sup>13</sup> The difficulty he faced re-establishing himself was a reality the veteran considered common to “most returned soldiers.” He “found it very difficult to settle down after the war and kicked around for several years, running threshing engines in the fall and doing a bit of everything” to make ends meet.<sup>14</sup> While his experience may have been little different from itinerant labourers before 1914, he believed he had common cause with other disgruntled veterans in the war’s immediate aftermath.

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<sup>13</sup> Queen’s University Archive [hereafter QUA], QU WWI Additions - 3691.1, Vol. 1, Turner to Clough, 14 January 1949.

<sup>14</sup> QUA, QU WWI Additions - 3691.1, Vol. 1, H.S. Turner to P.O. Churchill, 16 December 1937.

Another veteran, Harold Innis, described men's restlessness as that "'fed-up' feeling" that plagued them after the war. At the time, Innis was in recovery for wounds received near Arras. He wrote his Master's thesis on Canadian veterans and felt that "no man as a rule is physically better through life in the army." Innis' research surveyed hundreds of veterans. He concluded that the war destroyed men's initiative, leaving them "incapable of doing rough vigorous work such as they [had] been accustomed to in pre-war days."<sup>15</sup> The journalist Pierre van Paassen reached a similar conclusion. The war "implanted a restlessness in my spirit which filled me with an inexpressible contempt for the uneventful drudgery of everyday life."<sup>16</sup> George Pearson also believed that veterans were possessed by a "terrible restlessness." It was like an "evil spirit," he explained, an "indefinite expression of a vague discontent."<sup>17</sup> The restlessness described by these veterans was a physical and psychological reaction to the stresses endured during the war. Few received treatment, either during or after the conflict, however, because Canada's rehabilitative programs focused almost exclusively on physical disabilities.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Innis, "The Returned Man," 8.

<sup>16</sup> van Paassen, *Days of Our Years*, 91.

<sup>17</sup> "Fitting in the Returned Men," *Maclean's*, March 1919, 27-8.

<sup>18</sup> An exception was F. McKelvey Bell, Director of Medical Services, DSCR. During an address to the Alberta Medical Association, Bell argued veterans' war service had left them with "abnormal" "neurological or psychopathic conditions" that directly affected men's "individuality and desire for personal initiative." See Bell, "Medical Services of the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment," *The Canadian Medical Association Journal* 9:1 (1919): 34. Bell later resigned his position after a disagreement with Senator Loughheed over the direction of the DSCR's approach to medical assistance for veterans. See LAC, RG 26H [hereafter Borden papers], Vol. 142, 75489-75560.

When the war started, the country lacked a plan to deal with veterans, to say nothing of men suffering from physical and psychological trauma. The Department of Militia, headed by Sam Hughes, was largely unconcerned. Instead of planning for men's return, Hughes focused on the challenge of mobilizing soldiers for war. Yet, men began to be discharged (often because of medical conditions) as early as their arrival at Valcartier in 1914. No other government department stepped in to care for returned soldiers.<sup>19</sup> Instead, the gap was filled by private organizations, such as the St. John's Ambulance and the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire (IODE). While well intentioned, their offers to assist men and their families rarely extended to veterans and the leading wartime charity, the Canadian Patriotic Fund, specifically excluded caring for returned men. The Fund could not afford to care for returning men as well as help families of serving soldiers.<sup>20</sup>

The number of men injured during training in Canada was relatively minimal and haphazard efforts to deal with wounded and returning soldiers proved sufficient for a short time. Once the troops moved overseas, however, wounded veterans started returning in considerable number. The need for a more coherent plan was pressing.<sup>21</sup> In June, the federal government created

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19 In effect, Ottawa was simply continuing its position on the South African War. The federal government never took responsibility for their care. See Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 11.

20 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 4-6; Morton, "The Canadian Veterans' Heritage from the Great War," in J.L. Granatstein and Peter Neary, eds., *The Veterans Charter and Post-World War II Canada* (Montreal-Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998), 16

21 By summer 1915, discharge depots in Canada were dispatching one hundred invalided soldiers a week. See Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 9.

the Military Hospitals Commission (MHC). Senator James Lougheed, Prime Minister Robert Borden's leader in the Senate (and minister without portfolio) was appointed head of the commission. The commission's Secretary, Ernest Scammell, was appointed after the group's initial meeting in July. Scammell's first task was determining what the federal government could do for veterans. In 1915, Canada was in recession and the priority was to get veterans back to work. The MHC Secretary suggested dividing returned men into four categories: able-bodied veterans who could return to work immediately; fit men who could work but needed help re-establishing themselves; the wounded, who could be re-trained; and casualties with severe wounds needing permanent institutional care.<sup>22</sup> The immediate priority, however, was caring for casualties. Scammell and Lougheed secured hospitals and convalescent homes. By the autumn the commission oversaw 530 beds. Two years later, it controlled fourteen sanatoria, including institutions devoted to "incurables."<sup>23</sup> While the MHC was initially responsible for the "provision of hospital and convalescent homes in Canada," its mandate quickly expanded.<sup>24</sup> Soon it was also involved in the retraining and rehabilitation of returned men. The MHC could not act alone, however. Rehabilitation, hospital care, education, and employment—all areas where returned men needed assistance—fell under provincial jurisdiction. Yet, soldiers were the responsibility of the federal government. The prime minister recognized that the federal government could not implement the

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22 Morton, "The Canadian Veterans' Heritage from the Great War," 16.

23 Morton, "The Canadian Veterans' Heritage from the Great War," 17.

24 LAC, RG 38B, Finding Aid for Military Hospital Commission, n.d.

MHC without consulting the provinces. Borden called a dominion-provincial conference for October 1915.

The conference began 18 October at the Château Laurier. All the premiers, except British Columbia's Richard McBride (who already supported the MHC), attended. Canada's political leaders agreed to put dominion-provincial jurisdictions aside in favour of a heavily centralized, federal system. As Ontario's Premier William Hearst declared, the war was "a national undertaking" and the provinces had "no desire" to fight over new responsibilities. Co-operation was the order of the day and Ottawa agreed to shoulder the costs of rehabilitating disabled soldiers. In exchange, the provinces promised to establish employment committees and to cover "any expenditures necessary" to find work for discharged soldiers who were "fit to assume such employment."<sup>25</sup> The federal government gained the control it wanted and the provinces were pleased they did not have to pay for extra programs. Caring for veterans, however, proved to be just the beginning of Ottawa's commitments to returned men.

Pensions were also a major responsibility of the federal government. When it entered the war, Canada's system of military pensions was unchanged from the Militia Pension Act of 1901. The law proclaimed that a private rendered "totally incapable of earning a livelihood" was entitled to a \$150 annual pension. In 1915 two orders-in-council extended pension payments to men wounded in service of the CEF. The system, however, was

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25 Archives of Ontario [hereafter AO], Hearst Papers, RG 3-3-0-106, Memorandum from dominion-provincial conference, October 1915.

ill prepared for the approximately 70,000 casualties sustained by the end of 1916. To reform it, the federal government called a special committee of the House of Commons to investigate and report on changing pension requirements. It recommended appointing a Board of Pension Commissioners. They were responsible for overseeing Ottawa's new commitment to pay for all "pensions, expenses for appliances – such as artificial limbs – and for vocational training, or other advantages" awarded to members of the CEF or their dependents. This new system, which was retroactively applied to the first day of the war, introduced a scaled payment plan that considered a man's rank, his need, and his medical condition.<sup>26</sup>

Pension officials wanted veterans to be active members of the labour force. They did not consider the assistance veterans received to be welfare. Rather, it was payment acknowledging a man's debt for his service overseas. Whether veterans saw their pensions in the same way, however, constantly worried officials. They were concerned that the regular payments could undermine men's sense of initiative and to prevent this the program encouraged "industry and adaptability." Pensions could not be reduced if a man found new work "or perfected himself in some form of industry." The committee encouraged men to better themselves beyond what their pension afforded, reasoning that if a pension was clawed back because of additional

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26 Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Soldiers' Pensions: Proceedings of the Special Committee Appointed to Consider and Report Upon the Rates of Pensions to be Paid to Disabled Soldiers, and the Establishment of a Permanent Pensions Board* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1916), n.p. ("Appendix No. 4, Third and Final Report")

earned wages, then “a premium would be put on shiftlessness and indifference.”<sup>27</sup>

As the pension system expanded, so too did the responsibilities of the MHC. By 1918, its civilian and military functions were separated, leading to the creation of the Invalided Soldiers’ Commission.<sup>28</sup> This new commission was short lived and, in May 1918, it was folded into the newly created Department of Soldiers’ Civil Re-establishment (DSCR). Along with the increased duties of the Board of Pension Commissioners, this new ministry controlled “all matters relating to the re-establishment [of all soldiers who had served in the war] in civil life.”<sup>29</sup> It was responsible for administering hospitals, sanatoriums, and outpatient clinics, and the provision of free medical services and vocational training and re-training for eligible veterans.<sup>30</sup> By the Armistice, the federal government had presided over an unprecedented expansion of the state’s social welfare system that included administration of new programs for veterans’ health, education, and training, all of which was designed to get returned men back to work.

Ottawa’s vocational training programs targeted wounded veterans and minors who enlisted with the CEF. The DSCR’s approach “pioneered” a combined program of “occupational therapy, functional training and

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<sup>27</sup> Neary, *On to Civvy Street*, 10.

<sup>28</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Report of the Work of the Invalided Soldiers’ Commission* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1918).

<sup>29</sup> Canada, *Public General Acts* [hereafter *Acts*], 1918, c. 42, 137-8.

<sup>30</sup> Canada, Parliament, House of Commons, *Report of the Special Committee on Soldiers’ Civil Re-establishment* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1919), 8-16.



vocational training.”<sup>31</sup> The programs were designed to ensure veterans became “self-supporting and independent of Government aid as quickly as possible.” Approximately 53,953 men received training. The DSCR partnered with labour and employers in “industrial establishments,” as well as with universities and technical schools. According to a 1919 report by the Special Committee on Re-establishment, the program achieved 90 per cent employment, with nearly 68 per cent securing a job in their field.<sup>32</sup> While the achievements of these vocational courses were impressive, they were limited to wounded veterans. Able-bodied men, who numbered several hundred thousand, were not eligible for similar federal assistance. Apart from a one-time gratuity payment, the only federal program that created jobs for veterans was Ottawa’s land settlement scheme.<sup>33</sup>

Both Ontario and the federal government considered soldier settlement the only acceptable program to employ returned men.<sup>34</sup> These

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31 Robert England, *Discharged: A Commentary on Civil Re-establishment of Veterans in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1944), 164-67.

32 *Report of the Special Committee on Soldiers’ Civil Re-establishment*, 13. According to Neary, 52,603 men joined the department’s programs, 43,457 of which completed courses. His figures for employment also break down differently, including 64 per cent who found work in their field and 25 per cent in other occupations. See Neary, *On to Civity Street*, 15.

33. Repatriation Committee, *Returned Soldiers’ Handbook: Contains Valuable Information and Tells You Where to Get More* (Department of Public Information, n.d.), 5. See too Neary, “‘Without the Stigma of Pauperism,’” 32. While Ottawa did distribute relief grants in the early 1920s to address veteran unemployment, the federal government maintained throughout the interwar era that “the question of unemployment amongst ex-service men has not been assumed by legislation as a responsibility of the Federal Government.” See DPNH Deputy Minister J.A. Amyot quoted in Neary, “Without the Stigma of Pauperism,” 36.

34 The exception was a series of direct federal grants, administered by the CPF, to provide season relief from unemployment. As Peter Neary notes, by 1921 this assistance was

governments recognized that jobs for veterans were critical to the country's postwar success and soldier settlement combined support for rural farming with the need to find work for returned men. Canada's wartime leaders also hoped that settling the country's unpopulated regions would usher in a wave of postwar prosperity. What neither provincial nor federal government anticipated, however, was how a rapidly destabilizing economy would undermine returned men's faith in the future.

In Canada, the tradition of compensating soldiers with land began with the Régiment de Carignan-Salières, which was offered land in exchange for settling New France. It continued during the American Revolution with provision of land for Loyalists and again with the "vast tracts" of territory given to British militiamen in the 1870s and 1880s. After the South African War, the Volunteer Bounty Act of 1908 offered veterans a parcel of 2.3 million acres in Alberta and Saskatchewan.<sup>35</sup> Three years into the First World War, Ontario was the first jurisdiction in Canada to offer land to the conflict's veterans. The provincial soldier settlement scheme was established at Kapuskasing, west of Cochrane. It was championed by Howard Ferguson, Minister of Lands, Forests, and Mines, who considered the program the perfect way to colonize Ontario's north.

Prime Minister Borden was impressed with Ontario's initiative and requested additional information about the scheme. In January 1917, Borden called an inter-provincial land settlement conference to discuss the possibility

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reduced to helping "unemployed pensioners." Men who could work and who were not in receipt of a pension were not eligible. See Neary, "Without the Stigma of Pauperism," 33.

35 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 100.

of a dominion-wide program offering lands to returned soldiers. A federal cabinet committee began framing Ottawa's new legislation, which passed parliament as the Soldier Settlement Act of 1917. The Act also created the Soldier Settlement Board (SSB), which was empowered to grant twenty-year loans, up to \$2,500, at five per cent interest.<sup>36</sup> These loans could be used for the purchase of land, machinery, and livestock and could be applied either to property already owned or to new lands a veteran wished to purchase. Ottawa's legislation also opened up all "undisposed-of land" within fifteen miles of a railway, which was made available to returned men in tracts of 160 acre grants of free land.<sup>37</sup>

Initial participation in Ottawa's plan was a disappointment. Between 1917 and 1919, barely 2,000 veterans took part in the program, in part because it restricted participation to dominion lands in western Canada.<sup>38</sup> If potential settlers east of Saskatchewan wanted to take part in the program, they had to do so provincially, with only Ontario operating such a plan. "The remaining Dominion lands," a 1921 report concluded, "did not afford the necessary scope for a land settlement policy for returned soldiers."<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 63.

<sup>37</sup> Soldier Settlement Act (1919).

<sup>38</sup> Eayers, *In Defence of Canada*, 49-50; in his biography of Meighen, Graham describes the figures as "slightly over two thousand." See Graham, *Arthur Meighen*, Vol. I, 246.

<sup>39</sup> *Soldier Settlement on the Land: Report of the Soldier Settlement Board of Canada*, 31 March 1921 (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1921), 26.

In 1919, Arthur Meighen put forward a revised program in an effort to make the federal scheme “more attractive” to prospective settlers.<sup>40</sup> Ottawa agreed to an increased credit program to assist the “best of [Canada’s] manhood.”<sup>41</sup> To be eligible for the new scheme a veteran had to have served overseas (or be in receipt of a pension) and he could not have been discharged “on account of misconduct.” Widows of men who died overseas were also eligible, as were men who served in the Imperial forces, provided they appeared before additional committees to determine their suitability. Those in need of institutional instruction were provided a training allowance, ranging from ten to sixty dollars a month, depending on the size of a man’s family and marital status. The total number of men who undertook training was small, totaling approximately 2,300 by March 1921.<sup>42</sup>

Once approved, settlers were eligible for free grants of land of up to 160 acres. Financial assistance was provided for settlers who purchased land through the SSB, to those with lands in the Prairie Provinces, and to qualified settlers already in possession of agricultural land. In the West, Ottawa reserved all vacant dominion land within a fifteen-mile radius of the railway. The railway belt in B.C. was also reserved for settlement. Should speculators refuse to sell these lands, Meighen’s new Act empowered the SSB to purchase it “at a price set by the Exchequer Court.”<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Soldier Settlement on the Land*, 76.

<sup>41</sup> *Soldier Settlement on the Land*, 8.

<sup>42</sup> *Soldier Settlement on the Land*, 46.

<sup>43</sup> *Soldier Settlement on the Land*, 152, 154.

The new program proved more popular than Ottawa's initial foray into soldier settlement. According to surveys conducted in early 1918, nearly twenty-five per cent of the CEF overseas wanted to settle on the land. Meighen later revised these figures downward, reporting that of the 273,444 replies received from members of the CEF, 87,771 (approximately 20 per cent) were interested in "farming and stock raising."<sup>44</sup> Veterans had to prove that they would make suitable farmers. Men were evaluated on their physical fitness, military qualifications, general fitness, and agricultural experience. Applicants could be deemed qualified, unqualified, or qualified but in need of "further farming experience." This latter category was eligible for both agricultural training with another farmer and institutional training at provincial agricultural colleges.<sup>45</sup>

Initially, the settlement scheme appeared promising. When Canada's postwar economy began to decline, however, soldier settlers faced a series of setbacks. According to Morton and Wright, "soldier-settlers had arrived too late for wartime profits, but they had paid wartime prices for land and stock, and their debts must be paid off as farm incomes plummeted."<sup>46</sup> Subsequent downturns soon "ushered in a period of failure, foreclosure, abandonment

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<sup>44</sup> Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 79. It is unclear whether these latter men wanted to take part in the soldier settlement program, or whether they were simply interested in farming and stock raising more generally.

<sup>45</sup> *Soldier Settlement on the Land*, 33-34. The vast majority of men whose applications were turned down were disqualified because they were generally unfit. Seven per cent were disqualified because they did not meet the qualifications for military service, three per cent were disqualified for reasons and physical fitness, and ninety per cent were disqualified "on account of general fitness." See too *Soldier Settlement on the Land*, 46

<sup>46</sup> Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 151.

and indebtedness which haunted solidier settlers and politicians alike throughout the inter-war period."<sup>47</sup> The costs to operate the new farms continued to increase just as prices for agricultural products (particularly wheat) began to decline from artificial wartime highs. Walter Woods, who worked in the Calgary office of the federal Soldier Settlement Board, described the overall shortcomings of the settlement policies:

Our conclusion after some years' experience was that [the debt loads incurred by settlers meant that establishing themselves] simply could not be done. Not even if prices remained stable and the weather was kind to them. The settler's equity of \$500 could be wiped out by the loss of a couple of head of cattle, by a hailstorm in a matter of minutes, or a drop of a few cents per bushel in wheat prices, leaving him with an overhead debt for everything around him. He was bankrupt. So we concluded that the financial basis of our settlement plan was unsound.

Remedial measures such as revaluation of the land and writing off some of the debts, extending the term of payment, waiving of the interest, writing off the debt for stock and equipment were applied to restore the financially sick scheme. These acted as palliatives but had the effect of the veterans losing confidence.<sup>48</sup>

The federal government's leading policy to employ returned men was a failure. By 1924 more veterans left the scheme than were willing to take up homesteads and the program began a long, slow decline.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Fedorowich, *Unfit for Heroes*, 81.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Woods, *The Men Who Came Back* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1956), 86.

<sup>49</sup> Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 204.

Ontario's soldier settlement plan was as ambitious as that of the federal government. It set aside six townships of land off the National Transcontinental Railway west of Cochrane, Ontario. The scheme planned to employ veterans while also colonizing the province's northern region. In Howard Ferguson's opinion, this development would spearhead a major expansion into Ontario's vast hinterland. It was also designed to address growing wartime complaints that more "should be done for ... returned men." As the future premier explained during the inquiry into the colony's failure, "the agricultural feature was emphasized in view of the necessity of production, and that [returned men] should be given an opportunity on the land."<sup>50</sup> Ideally, Ontario's settlement program was designed to allow veterans who wanted to work the land to do so.<sup>51</sup> The province never laid out in clear policy for the colony's operation, however, and the settlement evolved without clear direction.

Despite a grand vision for its success, Ontario's soldier settlement scheme at Kapuskasing proved an even greater disappointment than Ottawa's. It operated between 1917 and 1921 and failed so spectacularly that Premier E.C. Drury cancelled the program outright. Participating veterans were frustrated by the scheme's inefficient administration and poor returns. Many were disillusioned by the program's failure to meet expectations and that the province was unwilling to do more to help them secure postwar employment. The failure of Ontario's soldier settlement scheme, like its

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<sup>50</sup> AO, RG3-5-0-63, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (1), Testimony of Rt. Hon. George Howard Ferguson, n.d., 33.

<sup>51</sup>AO, RG3-3-0-78, Soldier Settlement.

federal counterpart, affected returned men's views on employment and postwar Canada in general, foreshadowing the relationship between federal and provincial approaches to veterans' policies and their negative impact on returned men throughout the interwar era.

Many of the veterans who joined Ontario's program lacked either the capital or the experience to farm in the province's north. Nonetheless, Ferguson's plan discounted these shortcomings when it promoted the plan to serving soldiers and veterans.<sup>52</sup> In place of experience, the province assumed that a co-operative organization could sufficiently train and fund the new settlers. In order to help the new settlers establish themselves, the Ontario government agreed to provide a communal resource pool of instruments such as threshers and other "expensive" classes of equipment. Smaller investments, better suited to the budgets of individual farmers, including ploughs and horses, could be purchased through loans.<sup>53</sup> In addition to purchasing machinery, Ontario also centralized control of the Kapuskasing colony under the settlement's superintendent. He was responsible for the administration of the colony as well as directing its organization and training. The province believed it designed the Kapuskasing settlement to allow

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<sup>52</sup> In 1917 premier Hearst sent Colonel Cecil G. Williams, formerly in charge of recruitment in Canada, to Europe to pitch the province's settlement scheme. Williams' report detailed life at the front and included letters from serving soldiers concerned about demobilization and soldier settlement policies. See Chapter Five for additional discussion of Williams' report.

<sup>53</sup> *Soldier's Civil Re-establishment: Proceedings of the Special Committee appointed by Resolution of the House of Commons on the 18th of September, 1919, and to whom was referred Bill No. 10, An Act to Amend the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment Act, Together with Certain Orders in Council Relating to the Work of the Said Department, etc., etc.* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1919), 712.



unskilled farmers to prosper and it assumed that because the men lacked the requisite experience they would need additional direction and supervision. Unfortunately, none of the superintendents proved capable of controlling the settlement and its administration deteriorated along with the prospects of the settlers.<sup>54</sup>

When the colony opened, settlers had immediate difficulty meeting their production targets. In exchange for their plot of land, men were required to clear ten acres. In both 1917 and 1918, however, few were able to meet this goal. A contract system was implemented to address this shortfall whereby settlers pooled their labour on each other's farms. The hope was that working together would help men meet their objectives. Ideally, each group of farmers would be led by a more experienced hand, so that they could gain practical experience while learning how to carry out their work.<sup>55</sup>

No amount of training could prepare men for the climate in Kapuskasing. In 1918, for example, the colony suffered frost every month of the year. Whole crops were ruined, especially potatoes, one of the main vegetables under cultivation. A harsh climate was not the only reason Ontario's settlement scheme failed. The provincial government also undermined the colony by supporting incompetent or inefficient administrators. Kapuskasing was isolated and the settlement relied heavily on a centralized system of stores and lodging. Veterans were angered that

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<sup>54</sup> *Report Commission of Enquiry Kapuskasing Colony 1920* (Toronto: Wilgress, 1920), 9. Men alleged too that the administrators refused to provide instruction to the men. Capt. Fishwick even denied providing men to show the works how to cut roads.

<sup>55</sup> AO, RG3-5, Kapuskasing Evidence.

these services, including the provision of food stores, were lacking or expensive. Colonists also faced delays in the preparation of their land, and, once prepared, their clearings proved insufficient, “either to provide fodder for a cow or a team of horses.”<sup>56</sup> Worse yet, the province misrepresented the price for pulpwood and a lack a local employment meant men could not supplement their meager earnings outside the colony.

When the veterans began to complain about these setbacks a series of superintendents refused to address the colonists’ concerns, causing the settlers to lose confidence in their leadership. Rather than address these complaints, administrators clashed with the colonists. When one superintendent, Colonel Ennis, discovered that some of the settlers had attempted to organize a branch of the GWVA at the colony, he ordered it disbanded and had the “ringleaders” rounded up, placed in a boxcar, and removed from the settlement.<sup>57</sup> By 1920, many Kapuskasing veterans felt that they had been sold a shoddy bill of goods. They were not making money, there was inadequate medical care for themselves and their families, and the stores in the settlement were over-priced and inferior. Moreover, their debts were rising, rather than decreasing, and the veterans felt the capital they invested in their homes was going to be lost because they were not worth projected market value.

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56 Watson Kirkconnell, “Kapuskaing: An Historical Sketch,” *Queen’s Quarterly* 28 (1 July 1920): 276.

57 AO, RG3-5-0-63, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (1), Testimony of Ed Stephenson, n.d. See too *Report Commission of Enquiry Kapuskasing Colony* 1920, 10.

The deterioration of the Kapuskasing colony contrasted with the rosy picture the Ontario government painted in its advertisements for the settlement plan. The province touted the scheme in publications overseas and at home. Yet, as a commission of inquiry called to investigate the settlement's failure concluded, none of these advertisements accurately portrayed the conditions in northern Ontario. According to the inquiry, this literature "induced" men to come north under false pretenses. "Faced with unexpected, but not unusual conditions," the settlers blamed the government for their failures.<sup>58</sup> They were unhappy with the conditions at the settlement, with their training, with the scheme's management, and with the returns they failed to receive. Ferguson was finally informed about the state of the camp towards the end of Hearst's time in office. Instead of dealing with the complaints, however, he opted to do nothing, and left the matter to E.C. Drury's incoming United Farmers of Ontario (UFO) government.<sup>59</sup>

The new premier was critical of the scheme from the outset. Drury concluded that Ferguson's plan was "ill conceived, ill executed, [and] founded on a mistaken appraisal of the agricultural possibilities" of the region.<sup>60</sup> To rectify matters, the premier met with a delegation from the Kapuskasing settlement immediately after taking office. Life on the settlement, men complained, was "intolerable." They informed Drury that the situation was near "open rebellion." The premier agreed and wasted little

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<sup>58</sup> *Report Commission of Enquiry Kapuskasing Colony 1920*, 7.

<sup>59</sup> AO, RG3-5, Kapuskasing Evidence.

<sup>60</sup> E.C. Drury, *Farmer Premier* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), 97.

time in appointing a commission of inquiry to study the “administration, management, conduct, discipline, equipment and welfare of the Soldiers' Settlement Colony at Kapuskasing.”<sup>61</sup> It vindicated the settlers' claims and recommended that they be moved out. The government agreed, compensated every man who opted to leave, and wrote the entire scheme off “as a total loss.”<sup>62</sup>

While the Kapuskasing scheme proved unrealistic, its failure was not entirely the fault of the climate, or the personalities involved. The settlers were poorly prepared for the rigors of homesteading. Many men who joined the program were “unsuited to pioneer life.” These veterans based their interest on idealized notions of farming and domestic life, not on an experienced understanding of the challenges they would face working the land in northern Ontario. They placed great importance on spending time with their families and such colonists “felt that having been overseas for a considerable time they should now have work such that they could be at home each night at least.”<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the scheme was flawed, no matter how hard veterans were willing to work.

Ed Stephenson, for example, was a colonist with over ten years experience homesteading on the Prairies. Given his time farming in the West, he should have been an ideal candidate to succeed at Kapuskasing. Yet, this experience did little to prepare him for the mismanagement and

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61 *Report Commission of Enquiry Kapuskasing Colony 1920*, 3

62 Drury, *Farmer Premier*, 96-97.

63 *Report Commission of Enquiry Kapuskasing Colony 1920*, 8-9.

disorganization in Ontario's colony. Stephenson believed that the settlement compared poorly to the prewar system of federal settlement in the West, particularly the quality of the land. On the Prairies, homesteaders paid less for more land and these holdings were "level as a table." With hard work, this veteran argued, settlers could have their land cropped in the first year and Prairie settlers could make a living within three years. This was not the case in northern Ontario. At Kapuskasing, the men were given 100 acres compared to the 160 offered by Ottawa, all of it completely unprepared for cultivation. Under the provincial scheme

the settler ... might clear [the] first ten acres himself and receive an amount fixed by the authorities, or it could be farmed out. At any rate ... then he was obligated to clear another ten acres at his own expense, and then having put in two seasons of arduous labor in a rather inclement climate and facing rather unusual conditions from an agricultural standpoint ... he then came under the Dominion Homestead laws on the same status as a foreign born immigrant, and at the end of five years he would have his patent for one hundred acres of bushed land.<sup>64</sup>

These problems were compounded by incompetent management, which Stephenson likened to a "vicious form of benevolent autocracy." The veteran was incensed that the government controlled every facet of the plan, including "every inch of land," and all access, services, and decisions about its management. Moreover, Stephenson was angry that the provincial government insisted on maintaining this level of control, despite calls by veterans to allow them to share in the colony's administration. The province

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<sup>64</sup> AO, RG3-5-0-63, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (1), Testimony of Ed Stephenson, n.d.

was “jealously” guarding against any attempt by the colonists to form a local government.<sup>65</sup>

The veterans who signed on to the province’s settlement scheme did so with high hopes, but the challenges they faced at Kapuskasing left them disenchanted. William York, for example, was initially enthusiastic about his participation in the settlement plan. As he explained to the commission investigating the scheme’s failure, he “had faith in the country” and he considered the colony a way to “make good” his peacetime future. York remained optimistic that the scheme could work if its organization and administration were changed. Unfortunately, this did not happen and continued setbacks tested the colonists’ resolve. York warned that if “one more thing” went wrong, they would be forced to quit.<sup>66</sup> These men were keen to succeed but recognized that they were “steadily [getting] behind.”<sup>67</sup> Even if they did not want to stop farming, they concluded that they had to cut their losses. John Davidson was equally eager to succeed, but after the scheme’s failure, he was reduced to “hoping to save a loss, as I had all I owned in my holding.”<sup>68</sup> Thomas Boyle’s position on the viability of the settlement captured the sense of utter frustration: “I most decidedly want[ed]

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65 AO, RG3-5-0-63, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (1), Testimony of Ed Stephenson, n.d.

66 AO, RG3-5-0-64, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (2), letter from William H. York, n.d.

67 AO, RG3-5-0-64, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (2), Statement of George Dyson, 5 March 1920.

68 AO, RG3-5-0-64, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (2), Statement of John Davidson, 4 March 1920.

to get out.”<sup>69</sup> As George Harrow explained, there were “no prospects of making farming go.”

Harrow’s disillusionment was made worse because, much like Ed Stephenson, he had been a farm labourer before the war and believed that farming was what he did “best.”<sup>70</sup> If Harrow and other farmers found the scheme unworkable, then the Kapuskasing settlement was doomed, a view shared by William Baker. Baker had farmed in Prince Edward County for eleven years before he enlisted. Despite his prewar experience, however, the veteran complained that he could not “make enough to live” at Kapuskasing. He informed the inquiry that “the farm does not pay. The climate is too cold. The frost killed all my stuff and my neighbour’s last summer. I do not want to quit, but I must.”<sup>71</sup> Charles Clifford Waterhouse summed up the colonist’s sentiments. He was “greatly disappointed” with the whole experience.<sup>72</sup>

The failure of Ontario’s soldier settlement scheme demonstrated the limits of the province’s program to support returned men and was another example of the setbacks veterans faced. When this failure became clear, the province provided limited compensation, but it was unwilling to re-consider its wider approach to re-establishment, no matter how difficult a time men

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69 AO, RG3-5-0-64, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (2), Statement of Thomas. C. Boyle, 5 March 1920.

70 AO, RG3-5-0-64, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (2), Statement of George William Harrow, 6 March 1920.

71 AO, RG3-5-0-64, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (2), Statement of William Baker, 6 March 1920.

72 AO, RG3-5-0-64, Soldier Settlement – Kapuskasing Evidence (2), Statement of C.C. Waterhouse, 6 March 1920.

had re-establishing their lives. The federal-provincial agreement of 1915 divided responsibility for disabled and able-bodied veterans and continued to shape provincial and federal reactions to re-establishment. If a veteran was not disabled by wartime service, he was considered a provincial responsibility and the provincial Soldiers' Aid Commissions had no power to create positions for returned men. If veterans had trouble securing employment, it was up to each individual to take the initiative to find a job. For many returned men, however, the transition from military life to civilian society was not so easy.

When men enlisted, they entered a military world defined by discipline, hierarchy, and orders. Few understood how significantly this experience would change them.<sup>73</sup> After demobilization, neither the military nor the state made a concerted effort to guide men back towards civilian independence and any energy expended to this effect focused exclusively on the rehabilitation of wounded and disabled soldiers. The DSCR recognized that veterans would face setbacks but its officials expected them to prepare themselves for civilian life. The department warned able-bodied men that re-

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73 Lt.-Col. L.W. Mulloy, "Demobilization," *Reconstruction: Bulletin Published by the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-Establishment for the Information of all Interested in the Welfare of Canada's Returned Soldiers* (December, 1918), 3-4. Walter Segsworth, Director of the DSCR's vocational training program explained that when a man enlisted, "everything was done to make him a small unit in a large organization. He was taught to obey rather than to think; he was for the most part relieved of the care of his dependents; clothing, food and a place to sleep were provided for him. If he was guilty of a misdemeanour he was punished, but he was not deprived of the necessities of life, whereas in civilian life he would have been discharged. Thus the whole system, for the time being, tended to reduce the action of his own will and relieve him of all sense of responsibility." See Morton, "The Canadian Veterans' Heritage from the Great War," 21. Pierre van Paassen remembered that veterans had "grown accustomed to being treated as mere automatons." Once they got home, men were left "waiting for the next word of command." See van Paassen, *Days of Our Years*, 90.



establishment was not the responsibility of the government. "Individual effort," it advised, had won the war and the same would be true for peace.<sup>74</sup>

Veterans were disappointed that the state's demobilization policies conflicted with commitments made during and after the war.<sup>75</sup> The federal government made public promises to soldiers that they "need have no fear that the government and the country [would] fail to show just appreciation of [their] service." Prime Minister Robert Borden considered it Canada's "first duty" to support the troops and he promised them that none would have "just cause to reproach the government for having broken faith" with its men. Later, the Union Government made more sweeping commitments promising to expand state support for veterans. These vague promises included care for the "maimed," "broken," "the widow and the orphan." According to the federal government, each would be protected and Ottawa re-assured serving men that "duty and decency demand[ed] that those ... saving democracy [should] not find democracy a house of privilege, or a school of poverty and hardship."<sup>76</sup> Borden never revealed what he thought about these

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<sup>74</sup> *Back to Mufti*, 4. *Returned Soldiers' Handbook, Containing Instructions and Information Dealing with Returned Warrant Officers, Non-Commissioned Officers and Men of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Canada: Militia and Defence, May 1918), 52

<sup>75</sup> After surviving life in the trenches, Harold Innis believed strongly that the war sapped men's sense of initiative, leading to widespread "indifference." See "The Returned Soldier," 6.

<sup>76</sup> *Scott v. Canada (Attorney General)*, 2013, BCSC, 1651, Amended Notice of Civil Claim, [http://equitassociety.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/8834829\\_1\\_Filed-Amended-Notice-of-Civil-Claim-.pdf](http://equitassociety.ca/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/8834829_1_Filed-Amended-Notice-of-Civil-Claim-.pdf)

commitments or how they would be implemented.<sup>77</sup> Although vague, soldiers and the public understood these promises to mean they could expect postwar social and economic assistance if needed.

Veterans and their families had good reason to believe in such support because the promises to assist returned men were only one part of a much wider chorus of voices offering support. All of these commitments remained vague, but they assured men that in return for military service, they and their families would be looked after, especially if they needed postwar employment. Any veteran who read the mandate of the MHC, for example, would learn that the commission committed itself to the “provision of employment for returning soldiers and training of disabled soldiers.”<sup>78</sup> Public statements by the commission reinforced this position. Once established, the MHC quickly assumed responsibility for “taking care of and providing for all returned soldiers who for any cause are incapacitated for employment, or who require special training or treatment before being able to undertake employment.”<sup>79</sup> The MHC secretary, E.H. Scammell, was even more direct in his support for returned men. He believed that the government and the public needed to ensure that Canadian veterans returned “to a means of livelihood.” To Scammell, a livelihood meant both the disabled and able-

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<sup>77</sup> The Prime Minister’s memoirs, for instance, make no mention of how he would have addressed the commitments. According to John English, however, he may not even have done so because, by 1918, Borden “seemed to lose confidence in his capacity to govern Canada” and he turned his attention to international diplomacy. See John English, *Borden: His Life and World* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1977), 161.

<sup>78</sup> AO, RG3-3-0-95, “Employment and Settlement of Returned Soldiers,” R.L. Borden to W.H. Hearst, 11 October 1915.

<sup>79</sup> AO, RG 3-3-0-106, “War: Settlement of Returned Soldiers (1915),” n.d.

bodied, and he considered the former an “obligation” which fell “primarily on the State.” The government’s duty for veterans’ care and livelihood went beyond a simple cheque and was a responsibility that could not be “extinguished by the award of a pension from public funds.”<sup>80</sup>

Provincial premiers were also supportive of Canada’s soldiers. Ontario Premier William Hearst understood that families expected politicians to keep their promises to veterans. “As public men,” he explained, “we say to the Soldier, ‘Go and fight for us and we will take care of you.’” With such statements of support, Hearst recognized that the state fostered an impression that it was bound by “a compact, and a most solemn one at that” that committed Canada to “take care of [its soldiers] to the best of our ability.”<sup>81</sup> Hearst could not foresee that failure to keep these promises would cause postwar disillusionment, but he did appreciate that breaking them would affect support for the war effort. The promises politicians made were integral to recruitment and, in a memorandum on federal-provincial responsibilities relating to the care of returned men, he explained that if the government did not act,

men would be justified in saying ‘It is all right to get up on the platform and tell me to go and fight, it is all right to cheer and applaud as we go away, but what we want to know is: Who is going to look after our wives and families or who is going to

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80 *Sessional Paper* No. 35a – 1916, Military Hospital Commission, The Provision of Employment for Members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on their return to Canada and the Re-education of those who are unable to follow their previous positions, 5.

81 AO, RG 3-3-0-106, “War: Settlement of Returned Soldiers (1915),” n.d.

look after us if we return maimed, or find us work that we are able to do.’<sup>82</sup>

To what extent the war generation appreciated that their politicians promised support in exchange for service is unknown, but the wartime and postwar record indicates they expected to be ‘looked after’. To veterans, the state had established a ‘social contract’ and they and their families considered wartime promises of support to be assurances that they would be cared for after the war.<sup>83</sup>

After 1918, when returned men faced difficulty finding work, veterans expected Canada to “do its duty in caring for them” but all levels of government resisted responsibility for men’s postwar employment.<sup>84</sup> Apart from the land settlement schemes, however, governments did little more than direct men to provincial Soldiers’ Aid Commissions, which remained limited in how they could assist veterans needing employment. The call for postwar aid was not a surprise, as the provinces had begun studying questions about demobilization as early as 1917.<sup>85</sup> In Ontario, for instance, the provincial government commissioned a report from Cecil G. Williams, Chief Recruiter for the Dominion, to determine what the province’s men expected upon their

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82 AO, RG 3-3-0-106, “War: Settlement of Returned Soldiers (1915),” n.d.

83 AO, RG 3-3-0-106, “War: Settlement of Returned Soldiers (1915),” n.d.

84 AO, RG 3-3-0-106, “War: Settlement of Returned Soldiers (1915),” n.d. This was not the case in France and Germany, where governments instituted quotas requiring businesses to hire veterans. See Morton, “Noblest and Best,” 83

85 A 1915 report to the Minister of Education made this case even earlier, arguing that “vocational education” for veterans would prove a matter of “utmost importance.” *Report of the Minister of Education, Province of Ontario for the Year 1915*, 58.

return. Williams was struck by the extent to which Ontario's soldiers were worried about postwar jobs. He warned Hearst that these men would not just "seek reward for [their] sacrifice," but would "aggressively demand what they esteem their right to support, maintenance and betterment at the hands of those in authority."<sup>86</sup>

Appended to his report were letters from Ontario's soldiers describing their desire for postwar work. This correspondence reveals that soldiers were deeply concerned about the future. They planned to hold Canada's politicians to their promises. Private Frank Oldacre, who worked as a printer in Toronto before enlisting, explained that ensuring there were jobs for returned men must be the top priority for any re-establishment program.<sup>87</sup> He anticipated that men would emerge from the war both physically and mentally wounded and he worried about whether the province (or nation) would live up to its promises. Would veterans be given the opportunity to "earn a decent livelihood," he asked? Although he never defined "decent," Oldacre explained that veterans wanted to "live comfortably," to have a chance to support a wife and family, and to avoid having "to depend on charity." Achieving this goal was essential to a meaningful peace and these vague ideals were the benchmarks by which he measured proposed solutions to the problems of the returned man.

If a man could not return to work then Oldacre maintained that a new job had to found for him at least "as good as the one he quit" upon enlisting.

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86 AO, RG3-3-0-109, "Reports on the War Conditions Overseas,"

87 AO, RG3-3-0-109, "Reports on the War Conditions Overseas."

For a man invalided home, Oldacre went even further. He had earned the right to receive full pay while recuperating and, once able to be discharged, that “a suitable job [be] given [to] him whereby he could earn a decent livelihood.” Should the state not back up its claims, then Oldacre warned that Canada’s soldiers risked regretting “standing by the Empire” and the last thing the government wanted was a postwar world where a man rued the “day he answered the Country’s call.”<sup>88</sup>

While Frank Oldacre’s vision of postwar Canada outlined what men wanted, other veterans who contributed to Williams’ report focused on soldiers’ worries about the future. Stanley Bennett wrote Williams a lengthy memorandum on what Canada needed to do to demobilize successfully. He believed that rather than focus on what men hoped for, Williams needed to concentrate on what soldiers were concerned about. The latter would tell Williams far more than the “vague” hopes of a serving soldier. Bennett argued that dealing with veterans required a holistic approach to demobilization. He called for a committee to oversee “employment, labour relations, and demobilized men.”<sup>89</sup> Unfortunately, Bennett did not have the chance to elaborate on his scheme. He was killed in August 1918. His surviving memo nonetheless laid out a series of recommendations about how to approach the postwar era. Returned men wanted a “square deal.” Although also vague, this general sense of a need for fair treatment reflected the links soldiers drew between the state and its wartime promises, and their

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88 AO, RG3-3-0-109, Oldacre to Williams, 23 June 1917.

89 AO, RG3-3-0-109, “Reports on the War Conditions Overseas,” Stanley Bennett, “Demobilization,” n.d.

concerns over the economy and postwar prosperity. Men were worried that the war was going to hurt their ability to earn a living, either because of injury, lost experience, or a lack of training. Bennett believed these fears were the key to formulating effective demobilization policies because they went to the “root of the troubles that are going to cause many anxious moments to the future political parties when in power.”<sup>90</sup>

Bennett argued that soldiers realized the economy was changing. He highlighted the fact that businesses were adapting to the wartime economy and that soldiers feared missing out on the new positions being created. To ensure that veterans were not disadvantaged in this new world, he recommended that Ontario create a committee to integrate policies of employment and demobilization.<sup>91</sup> This position reflected his belief that Canada needed to embrace a comprehensive approach to re-establishing veterans. According to Bennett, the problems accompanying demobilizing tens of thousands of men dovetailed with existing social challenges, such as the need for employment. If they were not treated together, then Canada’s leaders would make “a jumble” of demobilization. Only a comprehensive committee could avoid postwar “chaos” and alleviate employment pressures by ensuring the most efficient use of resources.<sup>92</sup>

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90 AO, RG3-3-0-109, “Reports on the War Conditions Overseas,” Stanley Bennett, “Demobilization,” n.d.

91 AO, RG3-3-0-109, “Reports on the War Conditions Overseas,” Stanley Bennett, “Demobilization,” n.d.

92 AO, RG3-3-0-109, “Reports on the War Conditions Overseas,” Stanley Bennett, “Demobilization,” n.d. Interestingly, Bennett’s characterization of Canada’s wartime economy and the potential created for postwar Canada foreshadowed the analysis of the

Harold Innis was another young veteran who supported a more comprehensive approach to demobilization. In his Master's thesis, Innis anticipated the creation of the Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment and he called for a "rational" plan to guide men's return to civilian life. Innis, who rightly believed that the system in 1918 was haphazard at best, called for a "Department of Demobilization" that would supervise "all matters in connection with returned or discharged soldiers, or with the dependents of deceased soldiers." Innis did not limit his analysis to ex-service men and he argued that a successful postwar Canada had to plan for the care of widows and orphans, disabled soldiers, and able-bodied soldiers as well. Like Oldacre and Bennett, Innis understood that the economic and personal impact of the war extended to families and he recognized that securing employment was not just a concern for men in service.<sup>93</sup>

While Innis took the long view, Bennett believed that the most pressing requirement for successful demobilization was caring for disabled men. He also drew attention to the problem of failed wartime businesses, the need to plan for the transition from wartime to peacetime industry, the question of women in the workforce, and the importance of adequate "political representation" for veterans.<sup>94</sup> First and foremost, however, were

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Rowell-Serois Commission's report on the impact of the war. Its chapter on the postwar era argued that: "the success with which the Dominion Government had organized a peaceful society for combat showed how governments could alter the conditions of economic and social life. If governments could organize so effectively for destruction, they should be able to organize the conditions of the good life for their citizens." See *Rowell-Sirois Commission*, 90.

<sup>93</sup> Innis "Returned Soldier," 5.

<sup>94</sup> AO, RG3-3-0-109, "Reports on the War Conditions Overseas," Stanley Bennett, "Demobilization," n.d.



the interests of returned men. Any committee established to oversee postwar re-establishment had to be for their benefit and, in a recommendation that foreshadowed postwar division between veterans and civilians, Bennett recommended granting such a committee wide power, including the ability to compel businesses to justify their employees' wartime service. His goal was to ensure that veterans were employed. Returned men, not those who stayed in Canada, were going to benefit from wartime service.<sup>95</sup>

Bennett's concern over postwar employment was fuelled by fear that the war's end would bring about a "retrenchment" of the economy. The Canadian market had expanded during the war, Bennett warned, and if the country was going to ensure postwar prosperity, then it had make sure the economy continued to expand. His solution argued for an interventionist monetary policy: "Even as we [Canada] were prepared to lavish vast sums of money for the prosecution of the war, so must we be equally ready and determined to put our hands in our pockets and spend freely but wisely for the purposes of reconstruction."<sup>96</sup> In a similar vein, Bennett argued that if unemployment persisted, the government should be willing to keep men in the military. This policy of ensuring long-term employment would support men facing unemployment. Those who had jobs could demobilize and return to them immediately. Men without work, however, could stay in the service

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<sup>95</sup> AO, RG3-3-0-109, "Reports on the War Conditions Overseas," Stanley Bennett, "Demobilization," n.d.

<sup>96</sup> AO, RG3-3-0-109, "Reports on the War Conditions Overseas," Stanley Bennett, "Demobilization," n.d.

and be put “into construction and forestry work until absorbed in factories, warehouses, railroads and mines as business gradually revives.”<sup>97</sup>

As Williams’ report made clear, soldiers such as Bennett worried about postwar employment even before they returned home. They had enlisted as young men, some just out of high school or early in their careers. These men did not have jobs lined up for when the war ended and the prospect of demobilizing without a secure future was frightening. Edmund Malette, for example, enlisted after graduating from high school. He worried that even if he was spared by the war, and “not made a cripple,” that a lack of job would burden his parents.<sup>98</sup> John Wordley also worried about his postwar future. Prior to enlisting he was a locomotive engineer for the Canadian Pacific Railway, a position to which he hoped to return. If the war left him “unable to do so,” then he believed his service entitled him to a “chance of learning some occupation,” as least “as remunerative” as his former profession.<sup>99</sup> Harold Innis was also concerned about men’s postwar employment prospects, which he considered a problem for all veterans, not just wounded men: “The end of

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97 AO, RG3-3-0-109, “Reports on the War Conditions Overseas,” Stanley Bennett, “Demobilization,” n.d.

98. AO, RG3-3-0-109, Williams, “Col., C.O.: Reports on the War Conditions Overseas / Land Settlement after war, 1917” Malette to Williams, 19 July 1917.

99. The soldier was also concerned for his family’s wellbeing. His prewar position earned him approximately \$35.00 per week. As a sergeant, he earned half that and feared his family’s ability to cope in his absence. Wordley wanted the state to do more than just ensure he had a postwar position. It needed to “ease the burden” on the families men had left behind. He was upset by the cost of living increases his family faced and wrote Ontario’s premier about the “inconvenience and hardship” faced by his wife and other families in Canada. AO, RG3-3-0-109, “Reports on the War Conditions Overseas,” Wordley to Williams, 3 August 1917.

the war will immediately present a task of finding employment for able-bodied soldiers." Innis believed that if the employment problem was not addressed, it would quickly spread beyond veterans. He sensed that the war had created an "unemployment problem" more generally and that successful postwar re-establishment needed to account for returned men and civilians labourers alike, particularly those in wartime industries.

The postwar recession, combined with a hostile business climate, left returned men without the support they expected upon demobilization. The war generation considered this situation a broken promise and the slight was carried for years after. To their minds, these men were promised support in exchange for their service overseas and they now felt entitled to assistance when the jobs they had hoped for failed to materialize.

In his embittered memoir, *Not Mentioned in Despatches* (1933), Frederick Bagnall singled out Canadian leaders for failing to live up to their wartime commitments. Bagnall, who was born in 1889, had enlisted with the First Contingent in 1914. He believed politicians like Borden when they promised to help Canada's soldiers. The realities of postwar Canada, however, made it clear that Borden and other leaders could not be trusted. They were mere "orators," Bagnall raged, who made "impossible promises about the things the soldiers would get when they got back." While they may have delivered slick speeches, they failed to realize that failure to keep their promises left men "cynical." Bagnall's cynicism was rooted in postwar treatment. Those who had stayed home did not understand what returned men were going through. When faced with an unemployed veteran, Bagnall explained, society's leaders did little to help and he singled out the "middle aged" for

special criticism, noting that if confronted with a returned soldier they did not say “‘young man, take my job’. Rather they would show you their fine places while you would be returning penniless.”<sup>100</sup>

Broken promises and a lack of help with postwar employment were two grievances among many. Another was a simple lack of respect. This was worse than the government’s “lack of support” because it symbolized the conflict’s wasted idealism. Bagnall claimed that the outbreak of war brought with it a chance to “make good capital” on the “idealism of soldiers and their superb and enduring courage.” Such hope was fuelled in part by the heady rhetoric of politicians like Borden. But the opportunity was “lost” amidst postwar mismanagement. Instead of prospect and promise, peacetime Canada was defined by “continual calamities and a succession of lies.” Veterans lamented that nobody was making allowances for their difficulties. Certainly the war changed men but how could it have done otherwise? “The wonder,” wrote Bagnall, “was that [men] didn’t come back vastly different.” When they served Canada, men had embraced “ideals” and notions of “sacrifice.” These were not appreciated at home, leading to “a terrible wastage because of the lack of intelligent interest [in the plight of returned men] by the most highly educated and by the leaders in business.”<sup>101</sup>

The fact that their mistreatment was unnecessary angered many veterans. Despite a series of setbacks, the war generation continued to believe Canada was capable of living up to its promise to make the postwar world a

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100 Bagnall, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 78.

101 Bagnall, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 77.

better place. "Had the war ended in 1916," Bagnall lamented, its "promises might have been fulfilled. There might have been a chance to do something but there was to be too much war to make any scheme of the kind workable." In place of the world he fought for, however, this veteran concluded that the fighting had achieved the exact opposite. Instead of improving, the postwar world had gone to "ruin."<sup>102</sup> His memoir summed up his bitterness with a description of how wounded men, like himself, were treated:

There were many unfortunate lads coming back crippled like myself. To give them a paltry pension and not to help them to fit into civilian life was cruel, cruel, as that barbed wire between the lines. We were to be allowed to carry that crippled feeling into that interminable vista of civilian life and we would be calloused by our sense of wrong. When we were to reach Canada we were to feel this like a blow for the civil life was too far from the war and its horrors.<sup>103</sup>

Fred Bagnall was not alone in his criticisms. Other veterans offered similar critiques of postwar Canada, including Edward Chesley, who first voiced his concerns about veterans in 1921 when he wrote to the Toronto *Star* arguing for a more equitable distribution of the country's Canteen Funds.<sup>104</sup> Ten years later, on the eve of his premature death, Chesley laid out a damning evaluation of the problems faced by returned soldiers. In a piece entitled "The Vice of Victory," published in Bill Deacon and Wilfred Reeves'

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102 Bagnall, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 78.

103 Bagnall, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 131-132.

104 "Disposal of Army Canteen Fund," *Star*, 6 December 1921, 6.

*Open House* (1931), Chesley explained the consequences of the failure to address the problem.<sup>105</sup>

Deacon's intention for *Open House* was to give voice to his generation, especially "the younger writing men of Canada." The list of contributors reads like a who's who of up-and-coming literary Canadians, including Bertram Brooker, Wilson MacDonald, Merrill Dennison, W.A. Irwin, J.H. McCulloch, D.M. LeBourdais, E.J. Pratt, John Armitage, and Charles W. Comfort.<sup>106</sup> Deacon considered the book a "symposium of broader scope" that covered politics, economics, and the arts.<sup>107</sup> Salem Bland, Frederick Banting, Emily Murphy, and other prominent Canadians all praised the book and it proved a moderate success that received "kind" reviews.<sup>108</sup> In Deacon's estimation (which should not be discounted given his position in the Canadian book market), if *Open House* had had "more efficient merchandising," it would have been a best seller. Despite the advertising

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105 Edward Turquand Chesley was born in 1894 and grew up in Ottawa. As a young man, he traveled to Guelph to join the agricultural college. When war broke out, he enlisted in 1915 as part of the Canadian Field Artillery. Having survived the Somme, he won a commission and transferred to the heavy artillery. After the war he returned to Guelph to complete his studies, where he worked as editor for the college's *Review*. Chesley then worked at various editorial and advertising posts at the *Globe*, with Ottawa's Central Experimental Farm, and at Massey-Harris. Six months prior to his death he changed careers again, this time joining the Ontario government in the Department of Agriculture, where he headed publicity for the department's Markets Branch. Outside of work, Chesley was also a member of the Toronto Writer's Club, where he met Bill Deacon. See TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 4, folder 42, clipping "Taken Suddenly Ill E.T. Chesley Dies," n.d.

106 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 8, folder 12, Deacon to Eisendrath, 14 September 1931.

107 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 3, folder 19, Deacon to Brooks, 6 June 1933.

108 See TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 8, folder 12, Deacon to Eisendrath, 14 September 1931 and Box 3, folder 48, Deacon to Campbell, 23 December 1931.

campaign's shortcomings, however, Deacon still considered the sale to have gone "really well." More importantly he told Austin Campbell, a businessman and occasional author, that the book had

caused more talk than any other 1931 book of whatever origin. With all its defects, *Open House* has made history; and is leaving a profound impression. Eaton's displayed it on their center aisle on publication, and after three months it is still there. They have been ordering 25 at a time which is the peak performance for non-fiction. Libraries everywhere are stocking it.<sup>109</sup>

Deacon was obviously proud of the book and he reserved his highest praise for Campbell's friend, Edward Chesley, whose contribution was an "enraged and bitter indictment of the total futility of the Great War and of the indifference of society to those who returned handicapped physically and psychologically."<sup>110</sup> In Deacon's opinion, Chesley's study of returned soldiers, was "justification" alone for publishing *Open House*.<sup>111</sup>

Deacon believed in Chesley's piece. He liked its style, its contribution to the debate over veterans, and how it aligned with his personal feelings on the war, his country, and Canada's responsibilities to those who served overseas. "No other contribution [to *Open House*]" he wrote Chesley, "comes as near to what ought to go into this book." The chapter on veterans was an "important" subject that amounted to a public service. "As one who did not

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109 See TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 3, folder 48, Deacon to Campbell, 23 December 1931. Campbell's best known publication was *The Rock of Babylon: Adventure in an Ancient City* (Ottawa: Graphic Publishers, 1931).

110 Clara Thomas and John Lennox, *William Arthur Deacon: A Canadian Literary Life* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 175.

111 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 4, folder 41, Deacon to Chesley, 17 April 1931.

get into the army,” Deacon explained, “I have always felt that I carried a peculiar burden; that it was up to me, someway, to compensate.” Publishing Chesley’s piece helped Deacon fulfill this debt.<sup>112</sup>

“The Vice of Victory” challenged denials of the problems faced by returned men. It listed specific points of contention, including access to proper medical care and sanatoriums, inadequate pensions, and the fact that men were unemployed and left peddling minor goods to survive. Failure to reach a solution to the “returned soldiers’ problem” was also undermining Canada’s future.<sup>113</sup> As a result, Chesley launched an attack against the status quo, arguing that Canadians had drawn the wrong lessons from the war and that the failure to learn from the experience was jeopardizing the nation’s most valuable asset: its youth. The resulting critique was a major statement of postwar disenchantment.

Chesley argued that no one was more tired of the debates over veterans than returned soldiers themselves. Whether in newspapers, royal commissions, or political speeches, nobody seemed capable of solving the problem. “For a dozen years now the clamour has swelled or waned according to political need,” a situation that Chesley blamed on politicians, profiteers, and those overtly religious or patriotic.<sup>114</sup> Their ‘clamour’ lacked rhyme or reason, however, and their failures resulted in a needless re-hashing

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112 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 4, folder 41, Deacon to Chesley, 17 April 1931.

113 Edward Chesley, “The Vice of Victory,” in W.A. Deacon and Wilfred Reeves, eds., *Open House* (Ottawa: Graphic, 1931), 26.

114 Chesley, “The Vice of Victory,” 26.



of painful memories and broken dreams. Whenever their issues were brought up, veterans found their old wounds “twitching” as they tried to protect their “quiet homes” from being surrounded by the “froth and dirty debris of war.” Chesley’s bitter conclusions echoed Fred Bagnall’s belief that Canada had squandered the optimism and idealism of the war effort. Dredging up grievances achieved nothing except to remind men of “four years of wasted effort and lost opportunity for happiness.”<sup>115</sup>

Chesley did not shy away from tackling the consequences of the war, unlike many of his contemporaries. Between 1918 and 1939, ex-combatants of every stripe published books, articles, and pamphlets about the conflict, which explored a variety of experiences, particularly in the different branches of military service. Some wrote about the artillery, others about their time in the infantry or in the cockpit of an early aeroplane. The resulting work (like the war novels *All Else is Folly* and *Generals Die in Bed*) could be extremely critical of the war, but its focus was the war itself, not the conflict’s aftermath. Not so with Chesley. He did not shy away from the subject. In fact, he thought so strongly about the issues of returned soldiers that he considered them “Canada’s problem.” In his view, the war, commemoration, and returned men were interconnected, requiring the “maturest consideration.”<sup>116</sup>

Chesley was clearly an impassioned writer, occasionally at the expense of clarity. His piece lacked structure and its themes—youth, betrayal, and duty—were developed haphazardly. He was not blind to these shortcomings,

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115 Chesley, “The Vice of Victory,” 26.

116 Chesley, “The Vice of Victory,” 31.

however, and he admitted that his paper was incomplete. After submitting it, Chesley wrote Deacon explaining that he would likely come to “regret” how he had expressed his thoughts. Despite organizational shortcomings, however, Chesley maintained that his arguments “came straight from my heart” and, because he refused to tone down his criticisms, he could only agree to publish his paper anonymously.<sup>117</sup> This decision was not taken lightly, or out of any “fear of criticism.” Rather, Chesley knew his criticisms of the war and Canada’s treatment of its veterans was provocative. Although he stood by his opinions, he was barely a few months into a new job with the provincial government, and at the height of the Depression. He desired anonymity to avoid the inevitable “complications” his article might create for his career.<sup>118</sup>

Chesley asserted that ten years after the war veterans were a lost cause. Yet, like many of his generation, he believed that Canada still had an opportunity—even a duty—to learn from their experience. He acknowledged the disillusionment of returned men and the futility of rehashing their complaints. These men were bitter for good reason. Their government failed them repeatedly. With each failure, “bitterness” was “added to bitterness” as veterans descended into a “chamber of death in agony of mind and body.”<sup>119</sup> Inadequate pensions, lack of hospital beds, and all other grievance were

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117 The 1933 edition of Fred Bagnall’s memoir was also published anonymously as *Not Mentioned in Despatches by Ex-Quaker*. See Bryan Tennyson, *The Canadian Experience of the Great War: A Guide to Memoirs* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013), 27.

118. TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 4, folder 41, Chesley to Deacon, 22 April 1931.

119 Chesley, “The Vice of Victory,” 31.

dismissed outright because the sick would “soon die.” According to Chesley, fair treatment amounted to more than being “generous” or “humane” to returned men. The only thing that would lead to veterans’ “tranquility of mind” was if Canadians learned the proper lessons from the war. Then, the war’s sacrifices would have been worth it.<sup>120</sup>

Chesley was not optimistic that Canadians could draw the correct lesson from the conflict. He did, however, see an opportunity in the nation’s youth. If properly educated, there was a chance the “younger generation” could avoid their parents’ fate. Teaching the youth the right lessons, however, required cutting through a decade of misinformation. The young might have been aware that some returned men were struggling but such awareness barely scratched the surface. “You are not allowed to know the details of the suffering of hundreds, yes, thousands, of men,” he explained. Veterans’ troubles were too often brushed under the rug, leaving youths wondering “what the hell [the war was] all about.”<sup>121</sup> Instead of recognizing their difficulties, veterans were championed as examples of “magnificent sacrifice for Justice and Right.” As a result, the youth learned that these postwar struggles were the price required to protect “Freedom, Prosperity, and true Patriotic feeling.” For Chesley, these were the wrong lessons to teach about the conflict. Had the nation’s leaders learned nothing? Instead of teaching youth about patriotism, Canadians needed to guard against such thinking. Veterans had been destroyed by the war. They had gone overseas a “motley

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120 Chesley, “The Vice of Victory,” 31.

121. Chesley, “The Vice of Victory,” 26, 30.

lot" of younger men but had returned shadows of their former selves, "dulled" and deprived of their pre-war inspiration. Whatever a man's experience, those who returned after being "dragged through weary years of warfare," did so with one thing in common: "they were thoroughly disillusioned."<sup>122</sup> In Chesley's view, returned men could not come through the war "unscathed." The conflict tested men's faith in their leaders and their religion. "When the end came and the guns stopped," there was nothing left but a "weary, disillusioned Canadian soldier [who] waited for the dawn of the drab day of peace."<sup>123</sup>

In making the case for a Canadian Lost Generation, Chesley wanted to protect future youth from the same mistakes. He and his contemporaries viewed the war as righteous. While it was waged, enlisting was a matter of duty, patriotism, and honour: "This was the war of all wars to set things right in the world to make decency and living the lot of all mankind. ... Yes, indeed, this was a war in which all right-thinking men with a spark of manhood should take part."<sup>124</sup> But the war generation was ignorant about what modern conflict would cost. While "many thousands of our best men and youths" had accepted the call, too many had never returned. Their loss was not a sacrifice, however. It was simply a waste. Chesley concluded that the postwar world remained wracked by the same problems as before. In fact, from the standpoint of the 1930s, the world seemed even worse: "We never

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<sup>122</sup> Chesley, "The Vice of Victory," 35-36.

<sup>123</sup> Chesley, "The Vice of Victory," 37.

<sup>124</sup> Chesley, "The Vice of Victory," 32.

imagined that thoughts of material gain from the struggle could lurk in the minds of any Canadian worthy of the name." Chesley admitted that his generation had been naïve:

We were brought up to hold our fathers and our preachers and our big business executives in great respect. We had too great a veneration for the judgment of our political leaders. We placed mankind generally on too high a pedestal. We did not suspect the wealth, luxury and power would be bought in blood. We had been fed on romantic history of war, songs of war, glories of war.<sup>125</sup>

Support for the war was misplaced and, in many ways, the dead were lucky they never lived to see the betrayal. They were spared having to bear witness to the "jackals of greed and gain that would soon feast fat upon these human sacrifices."<sup>126</sup> These men squandered the best Canada had to offer. They had been "manhandled by numskulls; weakened in spirit; deadened in faith; injured in body; and finally sent under woeful leadership into the mud and filth, to fall at last, riddled with poisoned iron, upon the thorny last resting place of barbed wire."<sup>127</sup>

War destroyed the promise of Canada. The loss of so many promising minds left the country "beggared for want of leadership and inspiration." Society's elders offered no solution. They may have tried to carry on, but inevitably they found themselves lamenting the passing of the "flower" of Canada's youth. What about the younger generation? Surely it offered hope

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125 Chesley, "The Vice of Victory," 33.

126 Chesley, "The Vice of Victory," 33.

127 Chesley, "The Vice of Victory," 33-34.

for the future. In light of the direction of postwar Canada, however, Chesley was skeptical. He feared that the war had also sapped the prospects for youth. After all, they were “fathered by weary men” who had lost the “bright hopefulness and eager spirit” of the pre-war days. Disillusion and skepticism now abounded, “poor food” for the country’s youth to live on. Canada had not emerged from the war unscathed. It was now a “horror,” in a world filled with despair:

The men who returned from the war take little part in the country’s affairs. Many are physically or mentally unable to do so. Others are disinclined. They had their day when the fighting was keen for a better world. Now they starve quietly, struggle on for the means of existence, laugh bitterly, get drunk when all else fails, and are at times querulous over little things connected with their comrades’ wealth.<sup>128</sup>

When so much was at stake, how could men not be disillusioned by their treatment? Chesley tried to protect future Canadians from a similar fate. If they were not taught the proper lessons about the war, then they too were ripe for similar sacrifice. He pleaded that Canada listen to returned men. They knew the horrors of war first-hand. More importantly, they knew the disappointments of peace. If war did come again, as it looked like it could, Chesley hoped Canada would learn its lesson. When the fighting broke out, the country needed to do more than just start to plan for the future; it had a duty to start the right kind of planning “for equality of loss, equality of

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<sup>128</sup> Chesley, “The Vice of Victory,” 38-39.

suffering, and equality of material gain." Doing otherwise would all but ensure that the sacrifices of the Great War generation were for naught.<sup>129</sup>

These critiques of the place of returned men in Canada were based on more than personal experiences. They were part of a larger story, shared by those who lived the war and its aftermath. Veterans who discussed their disillusion felt secure taking a stand because they considered their personal experiences representative of their generation. Fred Bagnall, for example, felt his views were worthy of record because his experiences were "representative of a phase of life in a condition of war, the effects of which are still close to us in our problems." He compared his experience with those of his peers: "[although] many of my remarks are made just in passing I know hundreds of thousands have passed along the same way."<sup>130</sup>

Chesley's generational identification was equally strong. In a letter to Bill Deacon, he explained that he grappled with questions about the representativeness of his views and the diversity of men's experiences: "My main trouble, and what caused me to hesitate & ponder often was this point: it is so difficult to interpretate [sic] the feeling of such a varied mass of humanity as our returned men." Yet, he was confident in his conclusions:

I truly believe that I have struck the truth in the main. Whether acknowledged by many an individual or whether declared 'the Crank', it appears to me that a vast army of men now a'carrying on 'at home' are not capable of the same inspired thought or

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129 Chesley, "The Vice of Victory," 39.

130 Bagnall, *Not Mentioned in Despatches*, 132

action that would have been theirs if war had not dulled and hurt their minds & bodies.

The rest of the paper, it seems to me, will be acknowledged as close to the truth by all decent thoughtful minds that are not the tools or playthings of the fool “patriot” or the cruel money barons.<sup>131</sup>

On 14 June 1931, Edward Chesley fell ill. Thinking he was suffering from indigestion, he went to rest and slipped suddenly into a coma. He died before his friends could reach a doctor. They attributed his death to his war experience.<sup>132</sup> Like countless veterans, it burned Chesley out. Yet, he joined the conflict freely and continued to believe in its purpose. Living in its aftermath, however, sorely tested these beliefs. What set Chesley apart was a willingness to discuss this aftermath and its affects. While his peers were rarely as open about their disillusionment, Chesley refused to remain silent in the face of failed policies and a series of broken wartime promises. He believed he spoke for his generation and, as the embittered letters from thousands of veterans in Canada’s canteen records demonstrate, he was not wrong.

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131 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 4, folder 41, Chesley to Deacon, 22 April 1931.

132 TFRBL, Deacon papers, Vol. 3, folder 48, Deacon to Campbell, 15 July 1931.



## Chapter 6

### Returned men and the Promise of the Canteen Funds

*"[The] health of almost everyone who served throughout the war was, to some extent, adversely affected. Men may not have been wounded nor have suffered from any illness, but I do not believe that any man could go through the campaigns of the Great War without his power to resist disease being minimized. It might be difficult to say that an infection of the lungs, or heart or nerves is unquestionably attributable to war service, yet a man would have to be superhumanly wise to say it was not."*

- Sir Arthur Currie, 21 April 1927.<sup>1</sup>

Wartime life strained the physical and psychological health of those who served. The resulting side effects manifested themselves differently in every individual. Often, however, as Sir Arthur Currie attested, these traumas went undiagnosed or untreated.<sup>2</sup> For those eligible, pensions were the most

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1. Currie, cited in Cook, *Shock Troops*, 603. According to Morton and Wright, Currie "was hardly a typical veteran, but he symbolized the physical cost of war service. The robust commander of 1919 had ... become a stooped, white-haired man of fifty-four." See *Winning the Second Battle*, 207.

2. According to Cook, the former Commander of the Canadian Corps suffered from "undiagnosed post-traumatic stress disorder." See *Shock Troops*, 603.

common means through which wounded men received assistance. Between 1919 and 1935, the number of pensioners increased from 19,000 to 78,040.<sup>3</sup> Despite this growth, thousands of men battled with their own government over pension issues and over two-thirds were informed they were not eligible for assistance. These same injuries also undermined their ability to retain work and thousands struggled to find long-term employment throughout the 1920s and the Great Depression.

Returned men spent much of the early postwar period looking for a solution to these employment and health-related problems. Their first effort—a call for a postwar bonus—split the nascent veterans’ movement. The largest group, the GWVA, sided with the federal government, which rejected calls for a bonus. Other groups, including the United Veterans League (UVL), backed the bonus campaign. When the fight failed, veterans’ organizations ceased trying to act on behalf of all veterans. Instead, the leading groups (including the GWVA) focused on specific policies (particularly pensions) as a means to improve the lives of wounded and disabled men. The federal government responded positively to this more targeted advocacy by calling successive commissions to address veterans’ concerns.

The most significant effort to reconsider the veterans’ assistance system in the 1920s was the Commission on Pensions and Re-establishment, headed by J.L. Ralston. The commission was convened to examine complaints raised by the GWVA and “questions relating to pension, medical treatment

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3. Cook, *Shock Troops*, 606.

and re-establishment needs” of returned men.<sup>4</sup> It was the first time the Pension Board was held to account. The commission’s first report agreed with the GWVA that the board paid more attention to the treasury’s purse strings than to the “rights and benefits” of veterans or their dependents. Ralston also found it “striking” that the Pension Act did not allow for appeals. As his interim report concluded, the Pension Board was free from “appeal, control or effective review by any outside body” and he insisted that a reformed system had to include appeals.<sup>5</sup>

The Ralston Commission altered how veterans interacted with the pension system but it was neither the first nor the last attempt to do so. Between 1919 and 1939, the *Pension Act* was amended sixteen times.<sup>6</sup> The most important revision was the *War Veterans’ Allowance Act*, passed by Mackenzie King’s Liberal government in 1930. Better known as the ‘burnt out pension’, the War Veterans’ Allowance (WVA) was designed to assist “aged and permanently unemployable veterans.” Applicants had to be at least sixty years old, a pensioner, or a veteran of a theatre of war. Some men younger than sixty were also eligible for assistance, but only if approved by the WVA Committee established within the DPNH.<sup>7</sup> The WVA, however, was never intended to address the problems returned men faced during the

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4. J.L. Ralston, *Royal Commission on Pensions and Re-establishment* [Hereafter Ralston Commission], *Final Report on Second Part of Investigation* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1924), 7.

5 See Ralston Commission, *First Interim Report on Second Part of Investigation* (Ottawa: King’s Printer, 1923), 12 and Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 167-68.

6 Neary, “Without the Stigma of Pauperism,” 33.

7 Neary, “Without the Stigma of Pauperism,” 35.

Depression and it was unable to address widespread unemployment amongst veterans.<sup>8</sup>

The Canadian Legion began a concerted effort to address veterans' unemployment in 1931. By the middle of the decade, the organization lobbied Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett, calling on him to recognize that the plight of ex-service men "constituted a special case within the general crisis" of the Depression. The federal government responded by calling for an inquiry, headed by J.D. Hyndman, President of the Pensions Court. The Committee, which submitted its report in 1935, found that Ottawa had not shirked its duty to returned men but there were "unemployed veterans who, though not eligible for pensions, had been handicapped by their war service."<sup>9</sup> Hyndman estimated that at least twenty-percent of veterans without a pension were unemployed and concluded that because "no single scheme would be suitable for the whole body of the employed," a Veterans' Assistance Commission should be established to address unemployment.<sup>10</sup>

Of the sixteen recommendations suggested by Hyndman, most were "readily accommodated" by the DPNH, including increased pension payments, the hiring of more administrative workers, and the need for better co-operation with municipalities. The committee's seventh

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8 By 1933 only 5,790 veterans had qualified for the new allowance.

9 Neary, "Without the Stigma of Pauperism," 37, 39-40.

10 J.D. Hyndman, *Report of the Committee Appointed to Carry Out an Investigation into the Existing Facilities in Connection with the Unemployment of Ex-Service Men and Care and Maintenance while Unemployed, and to Report Thereon with such Suggestions and Recommendations as may be Deemed Advisable* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1935).

recommendation—a call for Ottawa to supplement municipal relief efforts for non-pensioned veterans—was “flatly rejected.” According to Peter Neary, what “led an essentially cautious and conservative committee” to make such a recommendation “was the shocking distress it found among many unemployed” veterans. The federal government was not willing to provide assistance to returned men whose “service did not disable them.”<sup>11</sup>

When Mackenzie King’s Liberals swept back into power in Ottawa in 1935, the government rolled many of the proposed changes to the veterans’ system from Bennett’s tenure into a Special Committee on Pensions and Returned Soldiers’ Problems, chaired by Charles “Chubby” Power. When Power’s committee finally presented its findings in 1937, it again rejected the call for Ottawa to fund local relief payments for unemployed veterans. Power argued that war service did not “establish a claim on the Canadian people for special treatment beyond that given to ordinary civilians” because implementing such a policy amounted to giving “a pension or payment of some kind for every man who wore a uniform simply because he served in the Canadian army and not because he incurred any disability during that service.” In terms of men who were unemployable, Power committed only to further consultations with veterans’ organizations in hopes that an agreeable solution could be found.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> One departmental report described the plan as a “radical departure from Canada’s policy in providing for her veterans.” See Neary, “Without the Stigma of Pauperism,” 42.

<sup>12</sup> Neary, “Without the Stigma of Pauperism,” 51.

The series of interwar recommendations presented to Ottawa to address the veterans' assistance programs did help some returned men. While lowering the age of eligibility for the WVA assisted those old enough to qualify, however, it did little to assist younger men deemed ineligible for a pension. These men continued to struggle throughout the 1920s and 1930s. The failure to acknowledge their claims left them hoping for an alternative to the pension system, which many believed they had found in the promise of the country's canteen funds.

During the First World War, the British government centralized the provision of supplies for its soldiers. The resulting Expeditionary Force Canteen (EFC) handled the procurement and sale of goods. It was operated by the Canteen and Mess Society (CMS), a co-operative organization that served the Empire's soldiers, rather than shareholders. By 1917, the CMS morphed into the Navy and Army Canteen Board (NACB), which operated over two thousand canteens. The sale of its goods eventually amounted to 223 million francs. When the war ended, the profits from these sales were transferred to the British Army Council, which, in accordance with the *War Service Canteens (Disposal of Surplus) Act*, were then allocated to the United Services Fund, under the direction of Lord Byng.<sup>13</sup> Colonial units, including the Canadian Corps, were permitted to opt into the program and Canada's share was overseen by Sir George Perley, Sir Edward Kemp, and the Canadian Chief of General Staff. After 1918, the funds were slated for division between the dominions.

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<sup>13</sup> John Fortesque, *A Short Account of Canteens in The British Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928), 45-53, 72.

Wartime estimates expected the Empire's canteen funds to total over £13,000,000, although the total amount was debated. According to the British Legion, any account of these profits also had to include an additional £2,000,000 provided by the Army and Navy Canteen Board and another £1,000,000 from the War Office. If the £13,000,000 figure proved accurate, Canada was due upwards of \$35,000,000.<sup>14</sup> The existence of outstanding debts, including paying for the material lost during Germany's Spring offensive in 1918, made exact estimates difficult. These and other losses remained un-tallied and they had to be deducted before any disbursement of canteen profits could take place. Nonetheless, the prospect of a multi-million dollar payout left returned men with high expectations. Moreover, having been disappointed in their push for a victory bonus and better pensions, many veterans hoped these profits would finally provide them with their monetary due.<sup>15</sup> Again, they were to be disappointed.<sup>16</sup>

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14 "35,000,000 to Vets From O'Seas Canteens," *Star*, 18 December 1919.

15 General John A. Clark, the MP for Burrard, B.C., wished, despite the impossibility of doing so, that the canteen funds had been distributed prior to demobilization. Since this was not practicable he hoped returned men would be appointed to the boards of trustees. "All the soldiers want," he believe, "is an even chance with those who remained at home during the war." See "Make it Easier for Warriors to Own Farms," *Globe*, 22 June 1922, 2.

16 According to Robert England's study of demobilization and re-establishment, *Discharged: A Commentary on Civil Re-establishment of Veterans in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1944), 315: "there are few subjects which cause so much dissatisfaction amongst ex-Service men than that of the disposal of the canteen funds. The amount of money involved is not great when compared with the large sums that are expended in the assistance given to a Service man, but the canteen is always the subject of criticism and scrutiny by a soldier. He always expects the worst and if funds are lost the annoyance caused may be out of all proportion to the amount involved. This interest of the Service man continues among discharged men, and throughout the years canteen funds have proved to be a frequent subject of enquiry and hardy perennial at all ex-Service men gatherings. ... The ex-Service

When eventually distributed, the canteen money failed to live up to expectations. Returned men were also disappointed at the pace of distribution, which was supposed to happen in 1919 or 1920, but did not formally take place until 1926. But the time it took to disburse the canteen money was only one aspect of the failure. Debate over how to divide the funds proved divisive and was often exasperated by disagreements over veterans' postwar financial compensation, including the failed bonus campaign, the bankruptcy of the GWVA, and a sense that returned men were not getting a fair postwar deal. Nor did trouble end once the funds were distributed. By the end of the 1920s, veterans in Alberta, Nova Scotia, and the Yukon leveled complaints against the trustees overseeing their share of the canteen money. In Ontario, disagreement over who was eligible to use the funds was even more contentious.

As the product of soldiers' labour, the canteen funds were held in high regard. Canada's soldiers had "spent freely" from their relatively respectable salaries of \$1.10 a day because they believed they were "spending money in their own stores." In a postwar interview, J. Harry Flynn, president of the United Veterans League, explained that it was simply "understood" among serving soldiers that they would share in the canteen's profits.<sup>17</sup> Men did not see this money as another government fund. They had paid into it throughout the war and considered it an earned reward. As such, canteen money was different from other types of social assistance emerging in

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man rightly feels that these monies belong to Service men and if there is any loss of maladministration or misdirect expenditure, the subject becomes a catalyst which encourages the crystallization of all the grievances of ex-Service men."

17 "Veterans Want Share of Canteen Profits," *Star*, 18 December 1919, 30.



interwar Canada. Most notably, the fund did not carry the social stigma of employment assistance. Gaining access was not easy, however, and as the management and disbursement of the funds became mired in bureaucratic and human failings, anger and frustration mounted. The story of the canteen funds contributed significantly to veterans' sense of disillusionment.

Returned men did not expect that accessing their canteen funds would prove difficult. They assumed they would collect their money as soon as the war ended, and certainly by the end of 1919. Veterans returned home not just at the end of the conflict but throughout the war. Many were facing difficulties and the canteen money was expected to help them in the short term. The quick dispersal of the funds was widely recognized as a "most acceptable and well deserved Christmas present" that would cap off Canada's victory overseas.<sup>18</sup>

Expectations were also high because the Empire's canteen profits were projected to total tens of millions of dollars. Rumours shaped expectations about the eventual size of the fund's profits and, in the immediate aftermath of the war, huge sums were bantered about. Indeed, many Canadian newspapers reported that returns on the canteens were going to lead to a massive windfall. Both the *Toronto Star* and the *Globe* reported that Canada's share of the total Empire fund amounted to \$35,000,000.

Returned men agreed to divide the funds equally amongst themselves. They called on the federal government, which controlled the funds until 1926, to distribute them equally to all ex-service men. In December 1919, the UVL,

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18 "Veterans Want Share of Canteen Profits," 30.

which supported the Bonus Campaign (unlike the GWVA), was inundated by a “stream” of calls, letters, and telegrams from its members calling on it to lobby the government. The association responded and its directors wrote the Minister of Militia, Sydney Mewburn, whose department was then holding the funds:

returned soldiers of Toronto and Ontario request that the profit of the Canteen Fund be paid directly to the soldiers who served in France and England; also that the fund be distributed equally and paid as far as possible before Christmas.<sup>19</sup>

The UVL’s call to divide the money tapped into a sense of brotherhood and shared experience. By pushing for control of the funds, however, veterans wanted more than just recognition of their service. They were demonstrating increased skepticism as to the government’s willingness to assist them. Lobbying to keep the money within the control of the former CEF was intended to protect their wider interests and the aggressive push for compensation revealed that the issue was already adding to postwar discontent.

Returned men called on the government to use all funds available to assist them. Some groups, including the Army and Navy Veterans (ANV), wanted to pool all assistance funds available, which could then be administered by the Canadian Patriotic Fund. According to ANV estimates, the resulting lump sum would yield \$2,500 for every ex-service man.<sup>20</sup> The patriotic fund was a civilian organization, however, and many veterans were

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<sup>19</sup> “Veterans Want Share of Canteen Profits,” 30.

<sup>20</sup> “Army and Navy Veterans’ Demands,” *Globe*, 23 July 1919, 8.

angered at the prospect of civilian control of their canteen money. They were adamant that the group could have nothing to do with the fund. Whatever the proposals, veterans believed that the canteen profits belonged to them and not to the government or another benevolent organization. The funds were the “property of returned men” and no government had the right to transfer control of them to another organization. “Anything short of a direct and equal distribution” of the canteen profits amounted to “robbing the men of money which is justly and legally theirs.”<sup>21</sup>

Not all veterans opposed the Patriotic Fund administering the canteen funds. One former branch president of the Tubercular Veterans Association was disheartened that the group was scaling back its operations and suggested that the canteen profits be handed over to the CPF so it could continue with its “good work.” Even supporters, however, believed that canteen assistance was only for ex-soldiers who were not disabled. Furthermore, the Dominion Veterans Alliance (DVA) needed a soldier representative on the board of the fund.<sup>22</sup> As one GWVA Secretary explained, handing administration of this money to any other group — whether government or civilian — “would be disastrous.”<sup>23</sup>

Even if returned men gained control of the canteen funds, they still had to decide how the money would be used and who was eligible to receive it. Should every man in the CEF get a portion of the funds or just those who

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21 “Veterans Want Share of Canteen Profits,” 30.

22 “The Canteen Fund,” *Star*, 3 February 1923, 6.

23 “Veterans Want Share of Canteen Profits,” 30.

served overseas? Did distinctions between officers and enlisted men matter? What about dependents of those killed? Were they also worthy of assistance from the fund? With an estimated \$35,000,000 payout on the line, these and other questions motivated significant debate and disagreement about how to use the canteen profits.

The largest veterans organization—the GWVA—argued that disbursement had to account for the dependents of those killed. Families suffered unimaginable loss and, as one of the executive noted, even “a little may go a long way.”<sup>24</sup> In terms of organizing the distribution of the money, the GWVA’s various branches favoured committees to oversee disbursement. The federal government, however, preferred a plan to distribute the money to each province. The association’s branches held such proposals in “contempt.” Instead, they preferred entrusting the fund’s handling to returned men who had served overseas (or to the dependents of those killed). Regardless, veterans were adamant that “no civilian organization” could be “entrusted” with the handling of the funds.<sup>25</sup>

Debate on dividing the money soon spilled over into the newspapers. Men wrote to papers across the country with suggestions. Edward Chesley recommended that the funds be split into two blocks. The first would benefit widows, orphans, and other needy dependents. The rest of the money could then be collected in a lottery and divided up among returned soldiers. This proposal gained traction among the paper’s readers and, in 1921, many wrote

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24 “Veterans Want Share of Canteen Profits,” 30.

25 “Returned Men Require Man on Control Board,” *Star*, 19 December 1919, 22.

in support of the idea.<sup>26</sup> Admittedly, Chesley did not know if his plan was legal, but he considered it a “satisfactory method” of dispensing the funds. As he put it, those who won would gain something worthwhile, while those without “would probably be no worse off than they would be under any other scheme.”<sup>27</sup>

Returned men were not the only ones requesting access to the fund. Parents of men who had died overseas also believed themselves entitled to support. The provincial secretary of the GWVA may have agreed with equal distribution for returned men and their dependents, but he stopped short of sanctioning the fund’s dispersal to every living relative of deceased or returned men. “Only the claims of the dependents of those who were killed,” he believed, “will have to be remembered, along with those who came back.” One mother of fallen soldier disagreed:

Many of those so very near and dear to the fallen soldiers are left much worse off financially than the dependents. Many of the fathers and others are left now, since the war has ended, broken in health and spirit. In some cases fathers have died leaving young children with no means of getting schooling. Those fathers getting up in years have no sons now to lean on as old age creeps on.

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26 The idea obviously resonated with others. A week later another returned man, this one formerly of the 19th Battalion, wrote in support of Chesley’s proposal. What appealed was that it provided a definite way of ensuring support to between six and seven hundred men, who would certainly get “a nice little nest egg.” See “Disposal of Canteen Fund,” *Star*, 12 December 1921, 4.

27 “Disposal of Army Canteen Fund,” *Star*, 6 December 1921, 6.

“Why,” should those who “suffered so much through long days of anxiety and dread be called upon to bear this insult?”<sup>28</sup> Her questions went unanswered but they pointed to the ever-increasing sense of entitlement that Canadian families affected by the war were feeling, especially when faced with the prospect of real monetary returns from the canteen funds.

Chesley’s plan to use a lottery to distribute the canteen profits highlighted one of the major issues: there was no easy way to distribute the money. With over 420,000 soldiers who served overseas, and another 200,000 in Canada, it was impossible to find a single solution to satisfy over half a million men.<sup>29</sup> The first step to divide the money was not, however, taken in Canada. In 1919, the British Army Council asked Lord Byng, soon to become Governor General of Canada, to lead the distribution of the Empire’s funds. He agreed, provided he had “freedom” from government control.<sup>30</sup> A Council of Management was subsequently established, made up of a representatives from ex-servicemen organizations. They divided Canada into ten areas and tasked over 2,500 local committees with determining the wishes of returned men. Although designed to canvas veterans, these committees did little to reach out and returned men not were consulted about their preference for the use of the canteen funds.

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28 “Hero’s Mother Replies to Turley,” *Star*, 27 December 1919, 6.

29 To discourage calls for per capita distributions, the DSCR explained that each man would only secure \$3.50 and that the disbursement itself would be prohibitively costly. See “Suggest Four Plans for Canteen Profits,” *Star*, 12 November 1921, 14.

30 Ralston Commission, *Final Report on Second Part of Investigation*, 143-44.

A decision on disbursement was slow in coming. By 1921, the federal government had been grappling with problems of re-establishment—including distribution of the canteen funds—for nearly three years, far longer than other members of the British Empire. In Britain and Australia, the funds were divided by 1920, with the latter splitting the money according to military district (an administrative division of the country also used in Canada). Australia's *Canteen Fund Act* stipulated that these funds were the property of ex-service men and should be disbursed "irrespective of other grants or provisions of repatriation."<sup>31</sup> Canada took note and tried to hasten its allocation of canteen money by grafting the decision to distribute the funds onto an existing Special Committee called to address questions of veterans' pensions, insurance, and re-establishment. This committee examined the approaches taken in Britain and Australia and solicited further suggestions from the Canadian veterans organizations.

The Discharged Solders and Sailors' Federation wanted the money used to enable "the transportation of the mothers and widows of the men who died overseas to visit the graves of their soldier sons and husbands."<sup>32</sup> Lord Byng suggested that there was "no better" use for it than funding rest homes for ex-service men.<sup>33</sup> The Dominion Command of the GWVA wanted the funds headed by trustees and devoted to scholarships for the children of

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31 The A.E.F. Canteens' Fund Act, 1920, cited in *Special Committee* (1921), 404.

32 *Special Committee* (1921), 527.

33 "Canteen Fund for Soldiers' Homes," *Regina Morning Leader*, 11 October 1922, 3.

returned soldiers.<sup>34</sup> Colonel J.L. Regan, director of pay services in the Department of Militia and Defence, agreed with the GWVA. In addition to entrusting the fund to trustees, however, he preferred distributing it along military lines, as occurred in Australia. But, rather than distributing the money for educational purposes, the “trustees should be appointed to distribute [the funds] to the needy cases of ex-members of the forces, or their dependents.” Regan also stipulated that administration of the money required strong local representation by returned soldiers.<sup>35</sup> No clear plan for how to distribute or administer the funds materialized, despite increased consultation. In fact, confusion about how the government’s role originated with the very committee tasked with finding answers to the canteen fund problem. When asked by committee member and New Brunswick MP, Arthur Copp how the canteen funds were to be spent, Regan replied: “That is up to your Committee.”<sup>36</sup> Such uncertainty reflected a lack of information about how much money the fund entailed, but it was also a result of disagreement over its purpose and the difficulty of determining how veterans actually wanted their contributions distributed.

Prior to 1921, veterans protested loudly against the fund being administered by civilian or political organizations like the Patriotic Fund.<sup>37</sup> According to the *Toronto World*, it was always understood that soldiers “were

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<sup>34</sup> *Special Committee* (1921), 404.

<sup>35</sup> *Special Committee* (1921), 408.

<sup>36</sup> *Special Committee* (1921), 404.

<sup>37</sup> “Soldiers Demand Canteen Profits,” *Toronto World*, 19 December 1919, 7.



to receive a direct share in canteen profits.”<sup>38</sup> The newspapers reported that men wanted a direct payment. The UVL demanded that the fund’s profits “be paid directly to the soldiers who served in France and England.”<sup>39</sup> After three months of deliberation, the committee recommended a combination of the approaches put forward by Regan and the GWVA. It recognized that the funds were for the “benefit” of returned men and their families and that the government needed to carry out a full investigation to “determine the balance now held in trust.”<sup>40</sup> Accordingly, the committee suggested the government further consult with the major veterans organizations to determine the “best method” to dispose of the funds.<sup>41</sup>

In November 1921 the DSCR convened a Canteen Funds Disposal Committee to try to determine the method of distribution.<sup>42</sup> The committee, headed by deputy DSCR minister F.G. Robinson, sought additional input from veterans. The department and the leading veterans organizations agreed to conduct a plebiscite on the use of the canteen funds. 555,000 ballots were distributed with four suggested options:

- 1) Establishment of memorial workshops for the provision of sheltered employment and home employment for disabled ex-service men, including the tuberculous;

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38 “Soldiers Demand Canteen Profits,” 7.

39 United Veterans League telegram, quoted in *Toronto World*, 19 December 1919, 7.

40 *Special Committee* (1921), xxiv.

41 *Special Committee* (1921), xxiv.

42 Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 190.

- 2) Establishment of a non-competitive industrial enterprise jointly owned and operated by ex-service men;
- 3) Provision of scholarships of other educational facilities for the children of ex-service members of the Forces in need of such assistance;
- 4) Provision of burial facilities for ex-members of the Canadian Forces who die in indigent circumstances.

In addition to choosing among assistance for employment, children's education, and burial options for the indigent, there was also space to add additional suggestions. The ballot did not offer an option to use the funds for veteran unemployment, a serious omission in light of the postwar recession.

When the votes were counted, only 22,974 men replied. Of these 5,764 opted for option One, while 3,574 added that they wanted the fund distributed as cash payments. The responses were weighed using a transferable vote, producing 11,565 votes for the first option. The Special Committee, having reconvened in 1922, rejected the plebiscite because it did not yield "conclusive results."<sup>43</sup> In so doing, it attempted to determine why veterans' responses were so low. No definite answer emerged. Grant MacNeil of the GWVA explained to the committee that the poor turn out was "absolutely inexplicable," but he wondered how different it was from the general electorate that did not vote on Election Day.<sup>44</sup> What was clear was that the ballot options had not motivated returned men.

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<sup>43</sup> *Special Committee* (1922), xv.

<sup>44</sup> Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 149.

The decision to further delay distribution merged the canteen profits issue with the larger debates over how the state was addressing (or failing to address) the problems of returned men. During pension debates, for example, the canteen money was invoked as an issue alongside the failed bonus campaign and a myriad of other veterans' complaints. In November 1920, the money was linked to a disagreement over wartime salaries. In what became known as the "eight million dollar exchange question," returned men battled the federal government for what they deemed to be unpaid wages. During the war, the pound sterling decreased in value. Canada's dollar, however, remained relatively strong. Because men had been paid based on the exchange rate, many now believed that they had been shorted considerable amounts of pay. The missing funds were estimated to approach eight million dollars. The solution, many veterans hoped, was that their salary claims could be added to the ample profits from the canteen funds.<sup>45</sup>

In 1921, the GWVA called on the recently elected Liberal government of Mackenzie King to put the canteen funds to use. It presented the federal government with three options: distribute the funds among the provinces, establish an old-age pension fund, or use them for child education.<sup>46</sup> The objective of these proposals was to distribute the funds to help alleviate the downturn in the economy while also limiting the government's handling of their money. Unemployment had been rising since 1920 with conditions "particularly severe" in the Maritimes. All told, real wages dropped fourteen

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45 "Ask Exchange Difference for Orphan Kiddies," 10 November 1920, 6.

46 "Premier is Told Soldier Claims," *Globe*, 11 March 1922, 7.

percent in two years.<sup>47</sup> As an added incentive to address these economic challenges, the GWVA offered to help coordinate employment relief.

“Organized co-operation,” the association’s Grant MacNeil explained, “will undoubtedly do much to eliminate the necessity for unemployment relief on the part of the Federal Government.”<sup>48</sup> In exchange, the leading veterans’ organization, which was financially-strapped, asked for an advance on the canteen funds to shore up its coffers.

The government responded. On 5 July 1921, it authorized a \$50,000 payment from the canteen funds for the GWVA. Three months later an additional \$120,000 payment was made. This second payment was split among the twenty-two ex-service men’s organizations, with the GWVA receiving the lion’s share (\$80,000), bringing their total assistance to \$130,000. These canteen payments were considered an advance “for the purpose of extending the scope and usefulness” of the GWVA. The Order in Council authorizing the plan recognized that the employment problem for returned men demanded “immediate attention” and allotted the money to deal with unemployment.

Despite taking action, \$200,000 could not solve the unemployment problem for returned men and allegations that the GWVA improperly handled its advance added to veterans’ growing frustrations. Instead of setting up a separate account to administer its allotted canteen money, the GWVA deposited its payment into its general account, making it impossible

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<sup>47</sup> Rowell-Sirois *Commission*, 113-114.

<sup>48</sup> MacNeil, cited in Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, 188-189.

to trace. As MacNeil explained to a 1925 Senate Committee examining the handling of the canteen funds, the GWVA considered the money, which had been allocated for the benefit of ex-service men, synonymous with its own goals. As a result, it did not need to distinguish between its funds and those advanced by Ottawa. Captain J.T. Shaw, a sitting MP from Calgary West who represented the GWVA at the federal hearings investigating charges of mismanagement, noted the association considered the purposes of the two sums to run “concurrently with the purposes set out in the [Canteen Fund] Orders in Council ...” and that “the purposes of the G.W.V.A. are exactly in line with the purposes for which the money was voted.”<sup>49</sup> Not everyone agreed. According to the audit conducted of the GWVA’s books, between July 1921 and August 1922, the GWVA spent its entire canteen fund allotment on “general” expenses, particularly on salaries and the publishing costs of its magazine, *The Veteran*.<sup>50</sup> The committee further concluded that it did not appear that “any portion” of the money was spent on unemployment relief.<sup>51</sup> This mismanagement would not come to light until 1925, but in the interim, veterans were deprived of relief measures.

The GWVA spent its canteen money by 1922 and this fact did not bode well for unemployed veterans who, after losing out on pensions and a bonus, now faced a third setback. The co-incidental establishment of the Ralston Commission, called to investigate issues relating to insufficient pensions,

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<sup>49</sup> *Special Committee* (1925), 29-30.

<sup>50</sup> *Senate Committee* (1925), 6.

<sup>51</sup> *Senate Committee* (1925), 6.

however, offered another opportunity to decide how to disburse the funds. Ottawa asked Ralston to consider how the canteen money should be administered. As head of a federal commission, Ralston was concerned about whether the federal government had authority to dictate how the fund was administered or whether the money was the property of the individuals who paid into it.<sup>52</sup> His commission also considered how the funds should be used. After a series of consultations, it concluded that Ottawa did have the right to dictate dispersal of the money. The two major issues for ex-service men were assistance for their children's education and relief from "distress" among ex-servicemen and their dependents. The commission determined that assistance could not be divided among individuals because it would be "impossible" to determine the appropriate share each contributor would be issued. As a result, the report recommended dividing the fund along provincial lines, with the money administered by groups of trustees. The commission concluded that this would be the most effective way to help individuals because it would "increase the facilities for securing an intelligent expression of opinion from ex-service men and make the administration of the money more effective by direct interest."<sup>53</sup>

A lack of provincial enlistment data made determining the percentages allocated to each province highly contentious. The commission considered a combination of provincial enlistment, discharge, and pension records as the fairest method to estimate the proportion of men in any one province. It

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52 Ralston Commission, *Final Report*, 143.

53 Ralston Commission, *Final Report*, 146-147.

further determined that the government should make “reasonable efforts to ascertain the wishes of the beneficiaries, and if any consensus of opinion is obtained to conform therewith.”<sup>54</sup> The report addressed veterans’ concerns about eligibility and the government’s responsibilities to them. It stipulated that any use of funds for relief purposes should be limited to men to whom no other source of relief was available. The goal was to ensure that the fund did not “relieve the State of any responsibility devolving on it.” Ralston’s report recommended that use of the fund be limited to men or their dependents. It advised that the funds not be spent immediately. Ideally, the funds would be “used over a period of fifteen years” to help provide enough time to accommodate those affected by the war and to give their children assistance in “particularly distressing circumstances.”<sup>55</sup>

The move to allocate canteen money to the GWVA was immediately opposed by other veterans groups. The Discharged Soldiers and Sailors’ Federation protested the decision by the Conservative government of Arthur Meighen to grant the funds to the largest veterans’ organization and demanded that MacNeil’s group return all money advanced, plus 6½ percent interest because the prime minister acted without a legal mandate. Meighen took the brunt of their anger and his actions were compared to “Prussian Kings.”<sup>56</sup> Robert H. Harrison, former V.P. of the Ontario Command of the GWVA, disagreed with the federal government’s decision to advance canteen

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54 Ralston Commission, *Final Report*, 143, 147.

55 Ralston Commission, *Final Report*, 149-150.

56 “Says Cabinet Illegally Used Canteen Fund,” *Globe*, 2 September 1921, 5.

money to his own association. "Although I am a member of the G.W.V.A. and proud of my connection with that body," Harrison explained, "I believe that the government has made a grave error in agreeing to turn over this fund." In his opinion, the association was not a representative organization. Until one was created, any move to advance the GWVA such funds was "illegal."<sup>57</sup>

The decision to provide the GWVA with a portion of the canteen funds was criticized during the federal election campaign of 1921. Election literature for the Liberal candidate, A.T. Hunter, openly addressed the Union government's handing of the canteen funds. "Isn't it the [funniest] thing" one editorial wondered, how the Tory candidates for the so-called soldier city (Toronto) "do not include a single soldier?" Perhaps this omission explained why the government proved so inept at determining how to distribute the canteen profits. Rather than divide the money amongst those to whom it belonged, Ottawa used the funds to bribe returned men "to keep out" of the election. The canteen funds, it was pointed out, were held by the government with coffers running "into seven figures." Were the Conservatives really above doling out money to veterans' organizations for political gain? "What body of veterans," the paper wondered, "looking for the interest in their own money would think of voting against the echoes of an administration that has the power to dole or withhold?"<sup>58</sup>

Pressure to divide the canteen funds was increasing, in large part because it was now apparent that the \$35,000,000 many expected was greatly

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57 "Canteen Fund Gift is Called Illegal," *Star*, 3 September 1921, 20.

58 "The Spotlight," *Star*, 29 November 1921, p. 6.



exaggerated. As early as 9 January 1920, efforts were underway to clarify the workings of the canteen funds. The Department of Overseas Military Forces of Canada (OMFC) issued an explanatory statement in hopes it could quell expectations of a windfall. It emphasized that the tally was still underway and that any attempt to estimate the total was “impossible.” According to the *Globe*, and contrary to press reports, the OMFC wanted Canadians to know that no British Dominion had yet received its funds and it would not be until at least the end of the year before they knew how much money Canada would receive. It was “premature” therefore to estimate the total returns, especially because there was no account of canteen losses sustained at the end of the war, costs that needed to be recouped before any money could be paid out.<sup>59</sup> Rumour of the fund’s value continued to circulate widely, however, despite such clarifications.

Some newspapers did attempt to attribute figures to specific officials, but the idea that Canada would receive millions of dollars persisted for years after 1918.<sup>60</sup> By late December 1920 the government decided to address the canteen fund rumours directly. The \$35,000,000 so widely reported was deemed a “fairy tale.”<sup>61</sup> The *Star* was similarly blunt, calling the figure a “dud.”<sup>62</sup> By early 1921 no specific total existed, but the government made it clear that men would not be receiving huge sums in return for their service.

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59 “No Account Yet to Government of E.F.C. Profit,” *Globe*, 9 January 1919, 7

60 “\$35,000,000 to Vets from O’Seas Canteens,” *Star*, 18 December 1919.

61 “\$35,000,000 Story is Hoax, Ottawa Hears,” *Star*, [Dec 19/20?].

62 “Canteen Nest-Egg of War Veterans is Two Millions,” *Star*, 25 November 1920, 1.

The *Montreal Gazette* reported that the fund had shrunk from this expected £13,000,000 to only £7,000,000. Canada's share was still hoped to be "substantial," but disappointment was mounting.<sup>63</sup> Five months later, with funds still held by London, the *Regina Morning Leader* suggested that Canada would receive nearly £100,000. The final sum eventually amounted to \$2,402,586.02.<sup>64</sup>

The administration of the central fund was now subject to allegations of corruption. What made matters worse was that the mismanagement was happening in Britain, far beyond the control of the Canadian government. According to news reports, the British Navy and Army canteen board was guilty of "amazing charges of waste and fraud." The board, which formed a monopoly on the supply of canteens, was said to have accumulated fourteen million pounds. The United Services Fund, formerly headed by Sir Julian Byng, before he was appointed Governor General, had managed to secure this entire sum from the War Office for distribution to ex-soldiers. Upon Byng's departure for Canada, however, the government procrastinated and evaded handing over the profits. In the process, it had "muddled" away, either through mismanagement, or outright loss, close to ten million of the total, leaving only four million available to transfer.<sup>65</sup>

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63 "Canteen Fund Shrinks," *Montreal Gazette*, 10 June 1922, 1.

64 AO, RG 29-165, B408253, Ontario Canteen Fund – Misc., Report on activity of B.C. Canteen Fund 1926 to March 31st, 1935 with supplementary figures as to Disbursement to December 31, 1935.

65 "Millions Wasted of Canteen Fund?" *Star*, 23 July 1922, 3.

The Board was incorporated under Sir George May, with a reserve estimated at £10,000,000. It was these funds that were in dispute between Canada and Britain. Canada claimed a proportional share of the profits. The British, however, contended that because Canada was not a partner in the board, it was only eligible for the ten percent rebate already provided. Canada argued that the reserve was the product of accumulated profits that should have been included in the rebates. The question was eventually submitted for arbitration.<sup>66</sup> In 1922 the British Parliament finally passed an Act ratifying payments already made between the dominions, totaling £363,450, which also made provision for the distribution of future funds.<sup>67</sup> Ottawa further delayed its decision for another four years, however, only dividing the money between the provinces in 1926.

Once again returned men were disappointed. The Ralston commission did not produce a clear plan to distribute the canteen money. It only placed limits on how the funds could be used. The commission continued to call for consultation with veterans in hopes of securing consensus on disbursement. This assumption was naïve. Returned men were not a unified body. The divisions in the ranks still existed in the postwar era and, as a meeting of veterans at Massey Hall in Toronto demonstrated, divisions among officers, enlisted men, and different veterans' associations remained contentious. Under the front-page headline "Veterans in Anger Cry Down Speakers and Refuse Hearing," the *Globe* reported that a large group of unemployed

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<sup>66</sup> "Canteen Nest-Egg of War Veterans is Two Millions," *Star*, 25 November 1920, 1.

<sup>67</sup> Ralston Commission, *Final Report*, 142.

returned men disrupted an April 1922 veterans meeting. Most of the speakers could not make themselves heard over the “hooting and booing” from the crowd. Enlisted men explained that they were fed up with the legion’s leadership.<sup>68</sup> During the raucous meeting, the canteen funds were called into question. The crowds called for investigations into the handling of the Canadian Patriotic Fund and the accounting of the canteen profits. Some called for abolishing all veterans’ organizations because they were controlled by officers.<sup>69</sup>

Sir Arthur Currie, the former commander of the Canadian Corps, criticized Ottawa’s desire for a unanimous consensus on how to distribute the canteen money. He rejected the need for unanimity among veterans as “useless.” Personally, he felt the money should be spent on education for returned men, but regardless of these opinions it was clear to him that the government was not proving a capable administrator of the funds.<sup>70</sup> Currie was skeptical about the use of trustees to administer the funds. “For five years” he declared,

no Government has been able to [decide how] these funds should be devoted, and now it is proposed to ‘pass the buck’ to a board of trustees in each Province who not only are to determine to which the funds shall be devoted, but to create the machinery for the funds disposal.

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68 This is the *Globe’s* reference to ‘legion.’ It is unclear from the article which organization the paper was referring to, though it could well have been the GAUV in light of later references to that association. See “Veterans in Anger Cry Down Speakers and Refuse Hearing,” *Globe*, 11 April 1922, 1 and 14.

69 “Veterans in Anger Cry Down Speakers and Refuse Hearing,” 1.

70 “Fund Withdrawals Without Authority, Currie’s Contention,” *Globe*, 11 July 1924.

If no government could decide what to do, Currie concluded that “the task will hardly be found easier by a board of trustees.” All the government had done was to shift responsibility away from cabinet to the “poor” trustees. Currie criticized the use of the canteen funds up to that point, arguing that the monies spent should have come out of government coffers, not from the fund itself. He considered the withdrawals “without authority or legal right,” and openly wondered whether the government would be topping up the fund to its original amount.<sup>71</sup>

The GWVA was equally skeptical of Ottawa’s intentions. Its members echoed Currie’s concerns and were particularly disturbed that officials appeared to be looking to the canteen money, rather than the government’s own coffers, to pay for commitments made to veterans. For many returned men this was outrageous. They viewed the canteen profits as their property and it was up to the government to raise additional funds to cover expenses, not to raid veterans of their hard won proceeds. As Grant MacNeil explained, many in the GWVA suspected that the government was trying to use the canteen funds to pay for programs to assist veterans:

I know that an effort was being made in many instances to devote this sum to enterprises which should be properly financed by the state. The general opinion of ex-service men is that this money should be devoted to enterprises supplementary or apart from post-war measures for ex-service men.<sup>72</sup>

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71 “Fund Withdrawals Without Authority, Currie’s Contention,” *Globe*, 11 July 1924.

72 *Special Committee on Pensions, Soldiers’ Insurance and Re-establishment* (1922), 148.

These were pointed criticisms of the government's handling of the canteen funds but by 1925 they had little effect. Due to a series of scandals, the GWVA secretary lost all credibility when it came to the question of canteen money.

MacNeil's trouble was rooted in the GWVA's chronic funding shortfall. The problem dated back to 1921, when the Meighen government decided to bail the association out with a canteen fund advance. The association's meager membership dues could not support its national lobbying efforts. Additional federal money was not forthcoming, thanks in part to the organization's criticisms of federal policies regarding veterans. Indeed, between 1919 and 1924, the GWVA had become a troublesome critic on the issue of the government's handling of veterans' issues. The organization pushed back against the fight for a bonus campaign but this was the exception that proved the rule. By 1924 the GWVA was increasingly an organization led by the 'other-ranks', bent on populist solutions to the grievances of returned men. This interpretation did not sit well with members of the Senate or the government. The Liberals nonetheless understood that they risked political problems if they openly attacked the GWVA and its leadership. By spring, the government seemed to have come up with a solution that both addressed concerns with the GWVA and would assist returned men. Ottawa would advance the veterans' association another portion of the canteen fund while also disbursing them along the lines outlined by the Ralston commission.<sup>73</sup>

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73 Morton, "Resisting the Pension Evil," 218.

The federal government was fed up with the canteen funds. In 1924 the debate and proposals put forward had reached the point where MPs were sufficiently satisfied that the government's legislation had the requisite support of returned men, at least as "represented by their organizations." This did not mean the GWVA would escape criticism. Chubby Power, the future minister of Pensions and National Health, called for the veterans' association to account for the money it had already been advanced. Power wanted to know whether the GWVA had used its share of the canteen funds to help returned men or, as many suspected, to pay the salaries of its officials. According to the *Globe*, the MP "regretted" that no Minister could account for the use of these funds. He also remained critical of the government's oversight of the money, agreeing that it was unclear how much had been lost through mismanagement "or worse."<sup>74</sup>

Three days later, on 17 July, the Senate killed the Liberals' canteen bill, denying veterans and a hopeful GWVA any access to the canteen money.<sup>75</sup> Without the expected canteen money, the GWVA was now desperately short of cash. It suggested that the government turn to a long forgotten Disablement Fund to help the association cover its expenses. The Minister of the DSCR, Henri Béland, agreed. According to Desmond Morton, however, neither MacNeil nor Béland anticipated the actions of the DSCR's deputy minister, Ernest Scammell. Unbeknownst to his minister, the "dutiful civil servant" engineered a "trap" for MacNeil. If the government lent just the

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<sup>74</sup> "Commons Approves Plan to Disburse Canteen Profits," *Globe*, 15 July 1924, 1.

<sup>75</sup> "Canteen Funds Bill Defeated in Senate," *Globe*, 18 July 1924, 1

GWVA money from the Disablement Fund, then the other veterans' organizations would surely be up in arms. To prevent discord, Scammell suggested that the loan be made out to the Dominion Veterans Alliance (DVA), a loose organization of the returned soldiers' associations. Scammell realized that the "quarrelsome" DVA would not willingly pass money on to the GWVA. MacNeil was also aware of the problem. Scammell's solution doomed MacNeil. The deputy minister suggested that because MacNeil was a member of DVA as well, he could personally cash the cheque. Having done so, "the trap closed." Rightly or wrongly, word quickly spread that MacNeil was stealing from veterans.<sup>76</sup>

When rumours began circulating that a new grant was authorized to the DVA, the other veterans' organizations began to complain. The Amputations Association of Canada (AAC) protested to Mackenzie King, Arthur Meighen, and Henri Béland that the decision be deferred. It was the only organization that represented disabled veterans and it called the decision to assist the DVA "not representative." In place of a loan, they hoped the money would be administered by a "responsible and independent" board.<sup>77</sup> The critique had merit. If the government could portion out a loan to the DVA, why not disburse the funds properly? The government was sensitive to such rumours. It moved quickly to quell any idea that the DVA

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<sup>76</sup> Morton "Resisting the Pension Evil," 218-219.

<sup>77</sup> "Canteen Fund Grant Subject of Protest," *Globe*, 26 February 1925, 12.



was receiving assistance and Béland offered the house “definite” assurance the government was not entertaining a proposed advance.<sup>78</sup>

MacNeil was in hot water. In the Senate, Brig.-Gen. W.A. Griesbach called for an investigation. The resulting inquiry undermined the GWVA’s existing leadership and laid bare its supposed wrongdoing. The association claimed that the non-judicial inquiry was “charging” it with misconduct and tried to limit the scope of the investigation. MacNeil and others argued that the GWVA’s use of funds before 1921—including use of its earlier canteen fund loan—need not be scrutinized since their general purpose was “exactly in line with the purposes for which the money was voted.”<sup>79</sup> The argument did not fly. Even if it had, however, it was revealed that between 1 July 1921 and 31 August 1922 eighty-five per cent of GWVA expenditures used money allocated from the canteen fund.<sup>80</sup> When published, the inquiry’s report found that the GWVA had mismanaged the canteen funds and that it could not properly account for their use. It recommended that the remainder of the fund be paid out as soon as practicable. The authors of the report further argued that the money in the canteen fund belonged to “all ex-solders” of the CEF and that it should “only have been expended in whole or in part, in such a way as to confer a direct benefit upon all ex-service men.”<sup>81</sup>

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78 “Canteen Funds Plan Satisfies Veterans,” *Globe*, 27 February 1925, 2.

79 *Senate Committee* (1925), 30.

80 *Senate Committee* (1925), 43.

81 *Senate Committee* (1925), 6.

By March 1925, debate was again underway to determine how to disburse the fund. The federal government finally acknowledged that there would be opposition regardless of what decision it made. The main concern was to get the funds out, preferably under the direction of trustees who included ex-soldier representation.<sup>82</sup> In May, the Bill received a second reading in the House of Commons. Béland, prompted by MP Robert Manion, revealed that Sir Arthur Currie was now willing to stand as a Chairman of the Central Board of Trustees. Veterans' organizations would nominate the second appointment and the third would come from either the Canadian Red Cross or Canadian Patriotic Fund. There was still division over the use of canteen funds for an adjustment bureau, however, with MPs Manion and J. Arthurs both protesting against the decision.<sup>83</sup> Despite their concerns the *Act respecting the disposal of the Canteen Funds* became law on 27 June 1925. Returned men would finally get the chance to access their contributions to the fund.

Gaining access to the canteen fund profits proved an unexpected challenge. In 1918, Canada's veterans believed that the money would be paid out by Christmas. None realized it would take nearly a decade before the federal government authorized its disbursement. This failure to distribute canteen money added to veterans' growing sense that too little was done to assist them in the war's aftermath. What few realized was that their struggles were far from over. As applicants to the long-awaited provincial canteen

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82 "Plan is Explained for Canteen Profits," *Globe*, 25 March 1925, 6.

83 "Canteen Fund Bill Read Second Time," *Globe*, 2 May 1925, 2.

associations soon learned, securing the assistance they believed themselves entitled proved an equally disillusioning experience.

## Chapter 7

### **“Right up against it”: The canteen funds and Ontario’s war generation**

*“In connection with your application for assistance from the Ontario Canteen Fund please be advised that the provisions of the Canteen Fund Act, 1925, do not permit the Fund to be used for the assistance of persons who are in receipt of pensions, pay and allowance or War Veterans’ Allowance.”*

- Ontario Canteen Fund form letter

Ontario controlled Canada’s largest canteen fund program, which began operating in late 1927. The province’s returned soldiers waited nearly a decade for their share of the funds, longer than any other veterans in the country. When these men finally gained access to the money, however, they learned that their trustees had instituted policies denying assistance to veterans with pensions as well as to any applicant who was unemployed. Such limits were never part of the debate over the distribution of the funds and Ontario’s veterans were outraged. For the war generation, the canteen funds were a means of last resort, to be used to help shoulder the financial

burdens brought on by their war-related deteriorating health. The resulting uproar among returned men denied assistance (a situation made worse by the onset of the Great Depression) is echoed in the tens of thousands of letters that survive in the fund's case files. They number over 26,000 and demonstrate just how unhappy the province's returned men were in the war's aftermath. The canteen fund issue, combined with their wider treatment by the veterans' bureaucracy and society more generally, added to their growing sense of frustration and discontent in postwar Canada.<sup>1</sup>

Seven years after the war ended these disappointments were still simmering. The postwar struggle had not been easy, but the country's veterans were pleased that the 1925 *Canteen Funds Act* had finally detailed how the country's canteen profits were to be divided and administered. The amount for disbursement reached approximately \$2,500,000 and was a combination of funds from the British War Office, the proceeds of canteen sales in the CEF, Canada's share of the profits of Britain's War Office Cinematograph Committee, and the Royal Canadian Navy's allocation from the British Admiralty. The money was distributed by the Receiver-General for Canada for the "benefit" of ex-soldiers and their dependents.<sup>2</sup> In keeping with the Ralston Commission's recommendations, the *Act* stipulated that the

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1. The records are now located at the Archives of Ontario. Their holdings represent the surviving portion of the original OCF files and only include the cases of men who successfully gained assistance from fund. Many of these contain notices of denial for earlier claims, suggesting that the total number of men who applied is in excess of the 26,000 figure.

2. *Act respecting the disposal of the Canteen Funds* [Hereafter *Canteen Fund Act*], 1. See Appendix I.

money be distributed among between the provinces and territories.<sup>3</sup> The amount distributed was determined by an equation that considered enlistment, discharge, and pension figures.<sup>4</sup> Each province and territory administered its portion through a board of trustees. These boards were appointed by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council of each province (and the Governor in Council in the Yukon). The boards comprised three appointees, except in Ontario, which was given five appointments because of its disproportionate share of the total allocation.

**Table 2. Provincial Distribution of Canteen Funds, 1925<sup>5</sup>**

<u>Province</u>	<u>Per cent.</u>
Alberta	7.8
British Columbia	10.9
Manitoba	10.7
New Brunswick	4.1
Nova Scotia	5.6
Ontario	41.2
Prince Edward Island	0.7
Quebec	11.6
Saskatchewan	7.2
Yukon Territory	.3

**Data derived from *The Canteen Fund Act***

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3. *Canteen Fund Act*, 3.

4. *Ralston Commission*, 148.

5. Total does not equal 100 due to rounding.

The *Act* placed few restrictions on the use of the funds.<sup>6</sup> As a result, Ottawa empowered the provincial Lieutenant-Governor (or territorial Governor) to regulate them, provided these regulations took into account the “wishes” of the fund’s potential users. Once it was decided how to divide the money, the board was free to administer its portion of the fund, as well as “such other things as may be indicated in the Order in Council.”<sup>7</sup> Any expenses incurred in the administration of the programs were to be charged to the fund. Vacancies on each provincial board could only be filled by the Lieutenant-Governor or Governor.

The one limit imposed by the *Act* on the trustees was the definition of what constituted service in the armed forces. Ottawa stipulated that to be eligible for assistance, a veteran had to have served overseas, either in England or in France.<sup>8</sup> The canteen legislation also provided general guidelines to administer the fund. The *Act* made it clear, however, that Ottawa did not want to limit the powers of the provinces. It limited its recommendations to a list of three “general principles” governing the distribution of the canteen profits:

A) Any plans formulated should be based on the assumption that there will be prospective beneficiaries for several years to come;

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6. QUA, Location Number 2150 [Hereafter Power papers], Box 12, folder 12.E787, Power to Owen, 17 November 1937.

7. *Canteen Fund Act*, 1925, 3.

8. *Canteen Fund Act*, 1925, 1.

B) Any use of the fund for relief purposes should be limited to the class of case for which no relief is then available from governmental sources, and in particular to specially meritorious cases;

C) If the provision of scholarships in schools and universities is undertaken for specially promising children of ex-members of the forces or of members of the forces who have died this should not necessarily be confined to the higher grades.<sup>9</sup>

With these guidelines in place, Ottawa disbursed the funds. By March 1926 British Columbia, Saskatchewan, Manitoba, New Brunswick, and Nova Scotia received their allotments. Ontario had yet to form a committee, however. Its share of the canteen proceeds were held in trust in the interim.<sup>10</sup>

The delayed distribution of the canteen money left many returned men disgruntled. One veteran denounced the fate of the canteen funds and the resulting “apathy” the delays caused. Men who were facing unemployment and war-related health issues needed help and, although the total sum in question was significantly reduced, decisions about its use deserved “the most careful and serious consideration.”

Many of our comrades through no fault of their own are objects of charity and during the past winter have been forced to seek the shelter of police stations. This state of affairs should cease to exist among men who were willing to pay the supreme sacrifice in trying to make this a more safe and better world for mankind. It is to be hoped veterans in the interest of these men will spare a few moments of their time, and advise the government that no

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9. *Canteen Fund Act*, 1925, 4.

10. “Canteen Fund Distribution,” *Montreal Gazette*, 19 March 1926, 3.



action be taken until such time as a consensus of opinion be obtained from the veterans as a whole as to the best method of disbursing this fund ... whatever is decided on in regard to the fund should be in the best interests of veterans now in need and those who will need care and attention as the years go by.<sup>11</sup>

Despite the lengthy delay in distributing the funds, veterans never forgot what was owed to them. Interest in the administration of the canteen funds was a popular topic of discussion, which packed local halls and theatres. Such was the case in Hamilton in March 1926, when several hundred veterans turned out to Lyle Theatre to discuss recommendations for the fund's distribution. They gathered because Ontario finally named a committee to distribute its share.<sup>12</sup> The meeting, however, proved "stormy." Men debated appointments and how the money was going to be distributed. They were concerned with healthcare, housing, and education, and laid out four uses for the money: funding for the Brant Hospital to be used as a home for old soldiers, setting aside hospital beds for ex-service men, assisting veterans through low-interest loans to build homes, and establishing scholarships.<sup>13</sup>

A month earlier, Ontario Premier Howard Ferguson began negotiating with representatives of the various veterans' organizations regarding the use of the funds.<sup>14</sup> The premier hoped the money would be used for educating children and that the appointed trustees would be champions of "integrity,

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11. "Veterans 'Shun'," *Star*, 8 April 1925, p.6.

12. "Committee is Named to Distribute Funds," *Globe*, 4 January 1926, 3.

13. "Blaze Threatens Hamilton Block," *Globe*, 8 March 1926.

14. "Premier and Veterans Discuss Canteen Funds," *Globe*, 15 February 1926, 10.

ability and sympathy for the soldier movement.”<sup>15</sup> To help canvas opinion about distribution policies, the province’s Canteen Fund Association sought out the views of returned men. It asked whether veterans wanted their share of the funds immediately or if they should be expended on relief measures, education, or for establishing a provincial memorial home.<sup>16</sup> In an effort to reach as many men as possible, the association commissioned a poll to determine how to split the province’s nearly one million dollars. Ballots were printed in the major newspapers, including the *Globe*, *Evening Telegram*, *Star*, and the *Mail and Empire*. Respondents, who had to list their name, address, unit, and serial number, were presented with these options.<sup>17</sup>

The five trustees appointed were Maj-Gen. Victor Williams, Percy Bould (the only enlisted man on the board), Capt. J. Jules Ferry, Capt. W.S. Haney, and Lt.-Col. B.O. Hooper. In addition, Maj. Alex C. Lewis, clerk of the Ontario Legislature, was selected as Secretary Treasurer. The board considered the results of the provincial ballot in conjunction with the recommendations of the Ralston report and the directions included in the *Canteen Fund Act*. Ontario’s trustees also devoted considerable study to the approaches in other provinces, as well as the United Service Fund of Great Britain. They agreed on three priorities: to assist in the education of children, to offer medical assistance for ex-service men not in receipt of pension, and to

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15. “Radio Places War’s Victims in Touch with Wide World,” *Globe*, 23 February 1926, 1.

16. “Seek Suggestions on Canteen Funds,” *Globe*, 25 February 1926, 12.

17. “To Take Vote of Veterans On Use of Canteen Fund,” *Globe*, 11 March 1926, 12.

assist widows and dependents of returned men not in receipt of pension who were in need of urgent (primarily medical) help.<sup>18</sup>

VETERANS' CANTEEN FUND	
(Ballot)	
Mark Ballot and send to Canteen Fund Association	
c.o. A. R. Johnson. 18 Dundonald St., Toronto Ont.	
Do you want — mark your choice with an "X" in ink.	
1—Your Share	<input type="checkbox"/>
2—Spent in Relief	<input type="checkbox"/>
3—Spent to Educate Orphans	<input type="checkbox"/>
4—Provincial Memorial Home	<input type="checkbox"/>
Send in any other Suggestions with Your Ballot.	
Let our Provincial Government know your views.	
Help Roll in the Votes. Extra Ballots mailed on request.	
City.....	Street..... Prov.....
Name.....	Reg. No..... Unit.....
These Ballots will be open to any Veteran after result is announced.	

**Figure 5. Ontario Canteen Fund Ballot**

After selecting the trustees and deciding on priorities, the board next outlined its investment strategy. Ontario's portion of canteen profits amounted to \$950,000. This amount had been invested in Ontario Treasury Notes at five per cent interest, netting an annual return of \$47,000.<sup>19</sup> Additional investments were made to separate trusts and savings accounts, but these contributions were considerably smaller. The trustees' plan also shifted a portion of its investment return to the capital fund. This was planned "for the next two or three years" so that the capital fund could reach

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18. AO, RG 29-165, B408253, Ontario Canteen Fund – Minutes from First Five Meetings, 1927-1929, 21 September 1927.

19. "Ontario to Invest \$950,000 Canteen Fund," *Ottawa Citizen*, 27 February 1927, 1.

one million dollars. As a result, the trustees also agreed to use just over \$48,000 in the first year. At this time, the capital fund would receive an additional \$10,000. Another \$10,000 was put aside for assisting special cases involving children's education. \$7,500 was allocated for the relief of urgent cases and an equal amount was earmarked for the relief of widows and orphans. The balance of \$13,681 was to be used for administration and to cover "unforeseen emergencies."<sup>20</sup>

With the OCFs investment strategy ratified by the province, the federal *Canteen Fund Act* now governed the trustees. Its vague stipulations mandated that Ontario's policies had to provide for "prospective beneficiaries for several years to come," that relief must be limited to those ineligible from other sources of assistance, and for the provision of scholarships for promising children.<sup>21</sup> Ontario's trustees interpreted these guidelines according to the needs of the province. In February 1928, the board laid out a four-point policy for the administration of the province's fund. Its first three regulations aligned closely to the federal legislation. They were designed to help those not in receipt of federal aid, such as pensions. The rules stipulated that the OCF could be used for the education of returned soldiers, the relief of urgent cases resulting from sickness (provided the ex-service man was not a pensioner) and for the relief of widows and orphans of former members of the CEF who, again, were ineligible for a pension. The fourth point, however, proved to be a major point of contention. It stipulated that no relief would be

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20. AO, RG 29-165, B408253, Minutes from First Five Meetings, 2 March 1928.

21. *Canteen Funds Act* (1925), "Canteen Committee Ratifies Bond Issue," *Globe*, 3 February 1927, 14.

granted for “conditions resulting from unemployment.”<sup>22</sup> As the chairman of the trustees explained to the board, no relief would be granted for the unemployed because such a move would “seriously deplete the fund.” In the view of the OCF trustees, unemployment relief remained a matter of “municipal responsibility” and the board believed that the OCF should not be used to supplement existing government commitments to returned men.<sup>23</sup> By 1928, the provincial canteen funds were operating across Canada. The unemployment issue, however, ensured that the process of disbursement would remain a matter of contention for veterans.

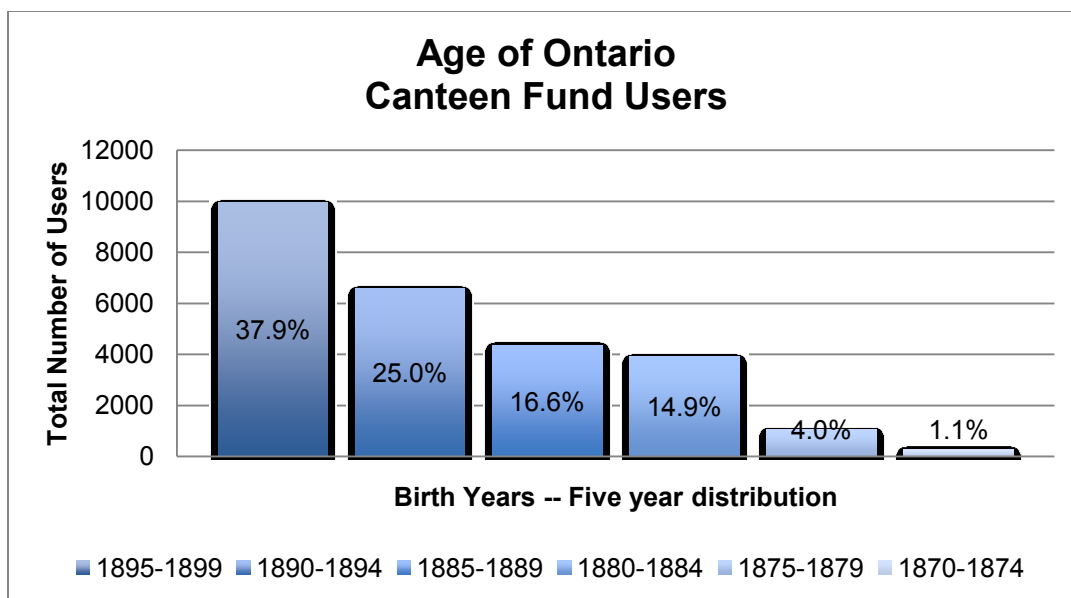
In order to receive assistance from the OCF, men (or their dependents) had to apply. Each applicant listed their biographical details, employment, health, and family histories, military service, and any debts owing. The majority of those eligible had enlisted in their late teens and early twenties and over sixty-percent of the men who applied were born between 1890 and 1900, with over ninety-percent born after 1880.<sup>24</sup> Applicants could apply directly to the OCF from its office at Queen’s Park or by mail. In either case, they were encouraged to indicate the reasons for seeking assistance. Many men were directed to the fund by means of another veterans’ organization or via the Department of Pensions and National Health (DPNH), the federal successor to the DSCR.

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22. AO, RG 29-165, B408253, *Ontario Canteen Fund, Annual Report*, 1928.

23 “General Williams Announces Policy for Canteen Fund,” *Globe*, 9 March 1928, 1.

24. See Figure 6.



**Figure 6. Age of Ontario Canteen Fund Users**

Veterans applied to the fund as soon as it was operational and the numbers increased rapidly. By 1929, total applications reached nearly a thousand. Three years later, the number applying increased to over thirteen thousand. Applications peaked in 1936, when more than twenty thousand men sought assistance from the fund. During this same period, monetary payouts totaled slightly more than half a million dollars. In two of the worst years of the Depression (1931-32), the payouts reached their zenith. While detailed records on the number of applicants were not kept for each year the fund operated, the surviving data suggests that the total number of users matched the proportion of money expended. Between 1928 and 1932 the number of applicants climbed in proportion to disbursements. A similar

trend existed between 1934 and 1937, indicating that OCF payouts continued to respond to demand.<sup>25</sup>

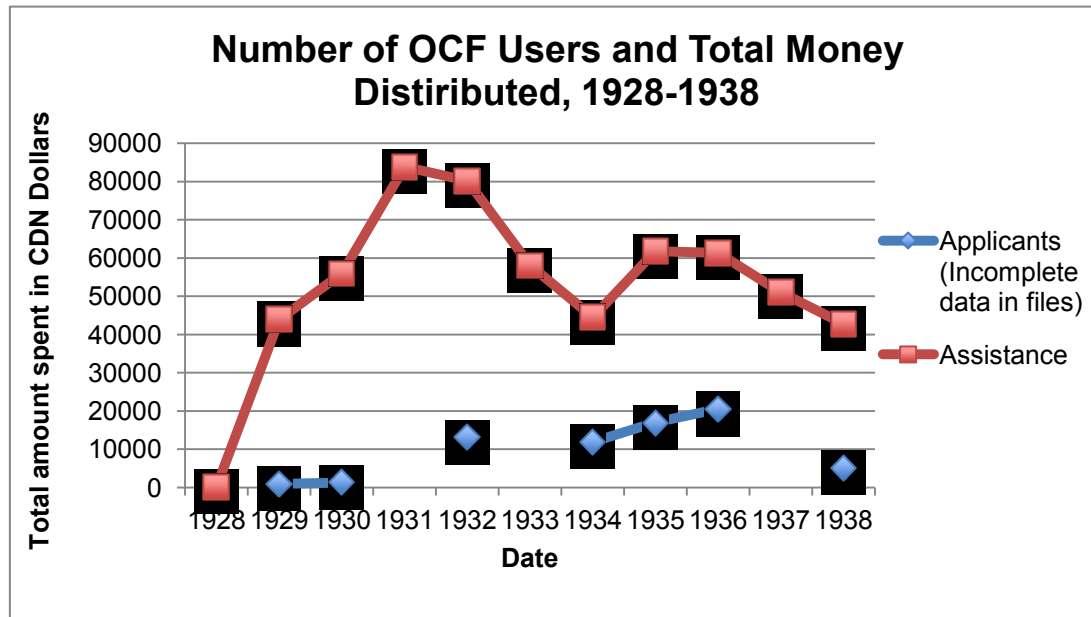


Figure 7. OCF Users and Total funds distributed, 1928-1939

During the first decade of operation, grants to returned men were the largest draw on the Fund's coffers. The OCF paid \$422,735 to these veterans. Dependents of returned soldiers received \$155,292 and grants for education totaled \$131,363 during the same period.<sup>26</sup> Individual payments averaged between ten and twenty-five dollars. Some were issued as installments for a larger sum to help cover monthly costs; others were one-time grants. A single family never received more than \$200 – \$300 over a lifetime. This limit was

<sup>25</sup> See data in Figure 7.

<sup>26</sup> AO, RG 29-165, B408253, Ontario Canteen Fund – Miscellaneous, "Canteen Fund Brief," n.d.

arbitrary, however, and there was no standard for how much a family could receive. In the middle of the Depression, for example, the trustees turned one widow down after receiving nine grants totaling \$171.<sup>27</sup> Another was denied further assistance after eleven grants, totaling \$183,<sup>28</sup> whereas a third was turned down having received \$226.<sup>29</sup> Each of these grants totaled over \$150, but even this was not a reliable benchmark. Other applicants were turned down after receiving as little as \$125.<sup>30</sup> In this latter case, the family was informed by the trustees that they had received “more than the amount usually granted in one case.”<sup>31</sup>

The trustees did not track the actual use of the funds. The surviving case files indicate that the majority of grants were issued to alleviate healthcare costs. These varied widely, ranging from physical to psychological ailments. Many of the men who applied to the fund were living with limbs that had been crushed, often resulting from injuries sustained serving in military labour units—an important reminder that not all casualties were the result of combat. Psychological cases were also present and generally referred

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27 AO, AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1578 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 21 December 1931.

28 AO, AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1529 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”

29 AO, AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1519 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”

30 AO, AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No 1678, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 9 May 1939.

31 AO, AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No 1678, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 10 July 1939.



to as cases of bad nerves or mental instability.<sup>32</sup> Unlike the federal pension board, the fund recognized that these were legitimate health issues which were often related to the war.<sup>33</sup>

Men sought assistance for a variety of reasons, but most did so to cover expenses for health care costs or household debts. Families turned to the fund for assistance because it was considered the property of all veterans. As one dependent explained, the canteen money belonged to “our soldiers.”<sup>34</sup> Herbert O. told the trustees that he preferred to draw on canteen money because it was the “property of returned men.” He wanted his “share” because he was more comfortable asking for something that belonged to him rather than to “ask for Charity.”<sup>35</sup> The veterans were, not surprisingly, protective of the fund. But when they did find it necessary to apply, they expected it to be there for them. “I have had so much sickness,” William R. wrote in his application that he was “almost to the end of my rope.”<sup>36</sup>

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32. See for example AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1785 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 7 October 1936; and AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File No. 3175, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act], 6 November 1933.

33 Humphries, “War’s Long Shadow.”

34. AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File No 3506, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 10 July 1939.

35. AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 2139 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 20 February 1930.

36 AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1473, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 24 August 1929.

This sense of desperation was common. Many, including Stanley Y., considered themselves “right up against it.”<sup>37</sup> Samuel G., who applied for aid in 1930, was so stressed that he was seriously considering robbing a bank. “I am out of work and in a state of extremity,” he declared. He wanted at least one hundred dollars to help him overcome his debts, but the OCF trustees discovered that Samuel lied on his application for aid. He was in receipt of a small pension and he realized that if the board found out, he would be turned down. Only “honest” men, he declared, were doomed to be “left behind.” To Samuel, the OCF was his last hope. If it could not help him, then he would be forced to have to take matters into his own hands:

I am resolved [I’ll] not walk about in dejection like the countless thousand British Empire Subjects are doing because they are to cowardly to strike in Armies and strike quick. [I’ll] solve my own Problem. But I prefer the honest way if it can be got.<sup>38</sup>

What was particularly frustrating for veterans was that they were being denied assistance from a fund that profited from their wartime service. These men had been wounded overseas and granted a pension in recognition of their losses. Now that same pension, which was insufficient to support their

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37. AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1794, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 4 March 1937; Arthur S. used the same expression as Stanley Y., telling the OCF “I am right up against it.” See AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1934, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 12 January 1930; so too did George S. See AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 2134, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 9 October 1934.

38 AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File No. 2944 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 4 September 1930.

livelihoods, was being used as justification to deny them further assistance from a program they considered themselves entitled.

Ontario's trustees were sympathetic to the plight of returned men. Their concern ensured the fund stayed solvent for decades to come. It was their responsibility to ensure that eligible returned men had access to assistance throughout their lives. They feared that if they opened the OCF coffers to every returned man, they risked depleting the fund for the future. The trustees realized that the war generation would likely "break down physically at an age when they should still be in good physical condition." To ensure these men had assistance when they most needed it, the OCF board structured disbursement policies so that it could continue to provide for men as their health declined, provided, of course, that their illness could "truthfully be attributed to some extent to their overseas service."<sup>39</sup>

Federal legislation mandated provincial use of the funds. The scope of the Act, however, provided provincial board members with considerable flexibility. The federal act only defined the requisite period of the fund's solvency as one decade, rather than the projected lifespan of returned men. By overestimating how long the OCF would need to care for returned men, the trustees' attempts to provide assistance for returned soldiers ended up denying them the very assistance they needed to combat the effects of the Great Depression.

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39. "General Williams Announces Policy for Canteen Fund," *Globe*, 9 March 1928, 1. The Soldiers' Aid Commission also recognized the importance of accounting for "the need for aid of the disabled soldier ageing prematurely," and the continuity between the two bodies' positions is likely reflected by the fact that they shared several of the same members. See "Discuss Imperial Pensions," *Star*, 12 May 1927.

For a board so concerned about the long-term solvency of their fund, the OCF could not have started operating at a worse time. For many men, employment remained seasonal. The fall and winter of 1929 and early 1930, for example, placed particular strain on returned men as they struggled to find work in an increasingly depressed economy. These years unfortunately coincided with the operation of the OCF, placing it under considerable (and unexpected) strain. In the face of the Depression, the demand on the canteen fund exceeded anything its trustees anticipated.<sup>40</sup> None of the planners intended the fund to act as a form of relief and the desire to provide long-term help to returned men compelled the trustees to turn away many who applied. The situation was made worse by the policies denying aid to pensionable and unemployed men, which caused the OCF board to turn down thousands of applications a year.<sup>41</sup>

The veterans were furious at being denied assistance. They considered themselves deserving of aid, both because of their service and because they

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40. AO, RG 29-165, B408253, Soldiers' Aid Commission Administrative Records, Ontario Canteen Fund, Financial Statements (1929-1938), 1930 Annual Report. Similar statements were made throughout the decade, evidenced by the following from the 1932 Annual Report, which stated "The demands on the Fund during the year continued to reflect the condition of want throughout the country consequent upon the prevailing lack of employment" and that from 1936: "The demands on the resources of the Fund continue to show a large increase from year to year."

41. A full accounting of the number of rejected applications is not possible because only successful applications were kept by the OCF. Many of these files date from the 1960s, but they also include rejections dating from the interwar era, indicating that these same men who successfully received assistance after the Second World War had also been turned down on multiple occasions before 1939. This suggests that the OCF initially kept records for cases they did not fund. These unsuccessful records have not survived as part of the SAC material at the AO. Establishing how many applications were turned down is also complicated by the incomplete recording by the OCF trustees and the lack of documentation about how many applications were received/funded in a given year.

had paid into the fund while overseas. Ontario's government faced the brunt of the criticisms. James Robinson, a self-described "unemployable pensioner" blamed the Ferguson government for the handling of the fund. "What authority," he wondered, did the provincial government have "to hold the canteen money of the returned veterans?" Robinson was adamant that the funds belonged to "the veterans, not the country." As far as he was concerned, the trustees' decision to focus only on employed, non-pensioned men meant that while those "sick and absolutely unable to work" were getting assistance, it resigned poor pensioned families to dire circumstances. There were, he explained, veterans with large families who were "on the verge of starvation, just eking out an existence from charity." As far as Robinson was concerned, these families were entitled to aid as well, but they were unable to receive it because of a shortsighted government.<sup>42</sup>

Robinson saved his harshest criticism for the province's treatment of single men. A line of single, unemployed men waiting for charity was embarrassing; the fact that they were also veterans who had sacrificed for their country was disgraceful. "Go down to the abandoned church on Parliament St. any night," he told the *Star*. There the paper would find more than a hundred homeless men, most of them single ex-soldiers: "They'll tell you a thing or two about how fair the Ferguson government is in distributing the canteen fund." The federal government of Mackenzie King gave the canteen money to Ferguson "for distribution." The premier was failing in his responsibility. James Holmes, another veteran, was equally fed up with the

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42. "Workless Have Hard Words for Ferguson Government," *Star*, 19 September 1930, 2.

province's handing of the canteen profits. Ferguson was not doing anything to help his former comrades. "I have seven children and four of them are sick with infantile paralysis," he noted. Yet the government was not doing "a thing for me."<sup>43</sup> "I'm one of the men to whom the government refused to give a share of the canteen funds," John Moss told the *Star*. When he applied for aid, Moss was informed that he was ineligible because the fund was "only sharing the money with sick men - and I was only unemployed." The fact that his wife had been ill for six years made no difference. "It didn't do any good," Moss explained. "I've been taking treatments at Christie St. hospital since February. It isn't fair."<sup>44</sup>

Single men felt particularly isolated and ignored. They were often the first to go to war, but when they returned, they faced a barrage of "married men first" initiatives. As one destitute man wrote, "the single man has no claim for relief. ... Have not [they] a right to live?" He did not begrudge married men, but he felt the focus on families left him, and other men "who fought for [their] country," without a "square deal."<sup>45</sup>

For its part, the OCF made no effort to define its mandate or explain who could and could not apply for assistance. According to its early financial statements, the OCF's purpose was broadly defined as providing assistance to returned soldiers and their dependents when there was "no other fund

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43. "Workless Have Hard Words for Ferguson Government," 2.

44. "Workless Have Hard Words for Ferguson Government," 2.

45. "Unmarried Veterans," *Star*, 15 October 1930, 6.

available to furnish such relief.”<sup>46</sup> Generally, this restriction meant canteen money could not be used for the “assistance of persons who are in receipt of pensions, pay and allowance or War Veterans’ Allowance.”<sup>47</sup> Yet, this interpretation of its mandate was both inconsistent and contradictory. William D., for instance, was told that the fund was not available for distribution “in a general way.” Instead, it was for “granting assistance to ex-service men or their dependents in cases of urgent need resulting from illness.”<sup>48</sup> It makes sense that Gilbert M’s widow received \$25 from the fund for her doctor’s medical bills.<sup>49</sup> At the same time, however, George D. was informed that the fund could not be used to pay “either hospital or doctor’s accounts.”<sup>50</sup>

Pensioners in need of additional assistance were the first to complain about these inconsistencies. In 1929, the *Globe* reported on their anger and how the OCF was operating. Pensioned men could not understand why Ontario had decided to exclude them. As they pointed out, the boards in both Alberta and British Columbia allowed pensioners relief. Why not Ontario? G.J. McDonagh, Dominion President of the Canadian Pensioners’ Association,

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46. AO, RG29-165, B408253, OCF Financial Statement 1929.

47. Wording belongs to an OCF form letter commonly distributed among all case files. See for example AO, RG29-65, B108762, File No. 1472 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”

48. AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File No. 3361, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 20 November 1930.

49 AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1578, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”

50. AO, B161739, “File No. 2909, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 20 October 1931.

claimed that he could not see “why pensioners should be barred from receiving relief or economic assistance from this fund.”<sup>51</sup> The fund, after all, was not “charity.”<sup>52</sup>

By the end of 1929, the criticisms from pensioned men were increasing. They were angry that they could not access the very funds they had paid into overseas. Many of the most vocal were returned soldiers in receipt of small pensions that hardly covered the costs of their hardships. These men found themselves in a difficult position. Their disabilities often prevented them from working full time but their pensions were insufficient to cover the difference in lost wages. Howard H., for instance, was a returned man who applied for OCF assistance in August 1930. He had enlisted in 1916 at the age of 19.<sup>53</sup> He was in receipt of a small disability pension but he had been out of work since the previous January. Howard explained to the trustees that he was struggling to support his wife and five children, and they had been living on “two meals a day.” Their clothes were “pretty shabby” and he hoped the fund might help with his family’s “distress.”<sup>54</sup>

Howard blamed the war for his present troubles. When he enlisted, he was a big man, standing nearly five-foot-ten and weighing roughly two

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51. “Disabled Veterans Receiving Pensions are Seeking Relief,” *Globe*, 18 November 1929, 15.

52. “Disabled Veterans Receiving Pensions are Seeking Relief,” 15.

53. Howard H.’s Attestations Papers.

54. AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File No. 2873, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”



hundred pounds.<sup>55</sup> More than a decade after war's end however, he weighed little more than one hundred and thirty pounds and he considered himself to be a "mere shadow" of his former self. The most difficult part was the strain on his family:

I am turned down with every employer as I shake so much with my nerves and it is heart breaking to my wife to see me turned back with my dinner bucket in hand not able to land a Job Making over old clothes for the children for the past two years and no sign of a silver cloud for a good while yet.

Howard H. assured the OCF that he was a responsible breadwinner and that it was his circumstances that had forced him to seek assistance. "[W]e are living economical as anybody possibly can," he explained, but his tax burden and medical bills simply exceeded the meager wages he was able to bring home. Howard feared that if he did not get help soon, he and his family would be forced from their home. He assumed that he was a good candidate for canteen assistance because large portions of his debts were related to his war service.<sup>56</sup> His application, however, was denied because of his pension.

Another veteran unhappy at being turned down because of a small pension was Ernest R. He was a patient at the Christie Street veterans hospital and had already been admitted twice that year "for major operations." As a result, Ernest was not able to work. His son drowned in the summer of 1929 and his work dried up. Without employment, and because of his time in hospital, he was forced to move. He needed a month's rent. Ernest

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55. Howard H.'s Attestations Papers.

56. AO, RG29-65, B161739, "File No. 2873, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]."

knew his pension made him ineligible for OCF assistance but he wrote to the trustees in hopes that the board would be willing to make an exception, especially for veteran with a “small pension & so much sickness.” To help his case, the veteran even offered to repay the OCF “as soon as I am able” and he pointed out that—despite his eligibility for a pension—he was not presently receiving one. The trustees took his appeal under advisement, but informed him that “much as we may sympathize with your need for assistance, the Act under which the Fund is administered does not permit us to assist men who are in receipt of a pension.”<sup>57</sup>

By the 1930s, the OCF received thousands of applications from unemployed men who were denied pensions.<sup>58</sup> The letters demonstrated their growing sense of futility which translated into a fundamental questioning of the value of the war. The strain of the trenches continued to affect veterans long after the war ended. “Any man who lived in the filth and horrors of active service,” McDonagh explained in an interview with the *Globe*, “did not return to Canada in the same condition in which he left it.” Those who had not gone overseas, it was pointed out, and who were of the same age and social standing, were not “suffering from this breaking up.” The war was the reason for their problems. As a result, it was vitally

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57. AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1874, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].” Multiple pieces of correspondence.

58. “Relief Immediately from Canteen Fund Urged by Veterans,” *Globe*, 21 November 1929.

important that these returned men be given access to the fund. Doing so was nothing less than a “duty resting on the shoulders of the Canadian people.”<sup>59</sup>

McDonagh knew that calling for increased assistance challenged prevailing ideas about a man’s responsibility to support himself and his family. If every returned man in need of employment could get assistance through the OCF, where was his incentive to work? As a result, he carefully hedged this call for canteen assistance for pensioned men. McDonagh made it clear that he supported the male breadwinner model and that his criticisms did not mean that every man was ‘owed’ assistance. Rather, he believed that assistance should be given only “where it can be shown, without too much humiliation and red tape, that the man has done his part to re-establish himself, and is not, in the vernacular, ‘swinging the lead’.”<sup>60</sup>

To prevent abuse of the system, McDonagh called for yet another conference to sort out the issue. He believed that governments had a “responsibility” to repay the debts owed returned men. McDonagh considered veterans’ problems far larger than any one government’s jurisdiction. Their problems were Canada’s problems and thus a social responsibility that all Canadians—their governments included—needed to recognize before anything could improve. The goal was to determine how to share the burden. “There was a tendency on behalf of provincial and municipal governments to shift responsibility for the matter to the feet of the federal government. “Surely,” McDonagh figured, “this is the wrong point of

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59. “Relief Immediately from Canteen Fund Urged by Veterans.”

60. “Relief Immediately from Canteen Fund Urged by Veterans.”

view,” especially because it ran counter to the position taken by Canadians “during the days of enlistment.”<sup>61</sup>

In September 1928, and again in May 1929, the OCF trustees met to discuss their controversial decision to refuse assistance to unemployed men or veterans in receipt of pensions. Section 10.b of the federal legislation mandated that “any use of the fund for relief purposes should be limited to the class of case for which no relief is then available from governmental sources, and in particular to specially meritorious cases.”<sup>62</sup> Men with minor pensions argued their meager payments were insufficient and, as a result, they believed themselves ‘meritorious cases’. The Ontario board considered revising its position but in the end decided to remain firm. “Pensioners,” were already “eligible for assistance from the relief fund administered by all local representatives of the Department of Pensions and National Health” and they were not eligible for two types of aid.<sup>63</sup> Moreover, the board argued, the OCF’s policy was no different from other sources of assistance, which had similar restrictions. The trustees avoided responsibility for its decision by pointing to the federal *Act*, claiming it did not give them “authority” to amend the policy because of its provisions under Section 10.b.<sup>64</sup> They maintained that returned men who were out of work should seek assistance from their municipalities. The problem for the OCF was the positions taken in

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61. “Relief Immediately from Canteen Fund Urged by Veterans.”

62 *Canteen Fund Act* (1925), 4.

63. AO, RG29-165, B408253, Minutes from First Five Meetings, 28 September 1928.

64. AO, RG29-165, B408253, Minutes from First Five Meetings, 29 May 1929.

other provinces. The boards in Alberta and British Columbia did not interpret the vague federal legislation as stringently as Ontario's and, as OCF applicants were aware, in these western provinces men with meager pensions were not denied aid.

By November 1929, two years after the fund started, many returned soldiers remained unaware that the program was even operational.<sup>65</sup> The decision to invest money in place of a direct payout also came under criticism. In September 1930, unemployed returned soldiers demonstrated their anger at the province for opting to have the money administered by a group of trustees. Men who gathered outside the Church and Adelaide employment bureau in Toronto told reporters from the *Star* that they had a "definite dislike" of Premier Ferguson, whom they blamed for "unjustly" holding and denying access to the canteen funds which were the "property" of returned soldiers.<sup>66</sup> Similar complaints were made at the fourth annual convention of the Ontario Command of the Canadian Legion. The canteen funds were debated for over two hours. A.C. Soloman from Windsor took issue with the decision to invest the money, claiming that it contradicted the "spirit" of the fund:

There is no sense that I can see in leaving the funds in the bank to multiply for posterity. We feel as veterans, that we have done enough for posterity on ensuring them some measure of

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65. "The Canteen Fund," *Star*, 2 November 1929, 6.

66. "Workless Have Hard Words for Ferguson Government," *Star*, 19 September 1930,

freedom. If ever there was a time when the burned-out veterans need help it is now.<sup>67</sup>

Criticisms of the management of canteen money were not limited to Ontario. Saskatchewan's Canteen Fund, for example, faced a financial scandal in 1940. Over \$40,000 of the fund's money was illegally disbursed, leading to the creation of a Judicial Commission of Inquiry and a Regina city inquest. The former investigated allegations of blackmail, among other charges. The latter uncovered that one of the province's trustees, Capt. A.H. White, committed suicide after suspicion of stealing from the canteen fund.<sup>68</sup>

Elsewhere on the Prairies criticism of the financial management of the province's canteen fund emerged almost a decade earlier than in Saskatchewan. In 1932, the Alberta Canteen Fund (ACF) was singled out for criticism for its decision to invest the funds. During an annual Legion convention, a Calgary alderman offered up what the Lethbridge *Herald* dubbed a "verbal broadside" when he demanded that the fund's trustees provide statements of its finances. Veterans were not convinced that the ACF was using the canteen money in the best interests of Alberta's men. When asked to provide the information requested, the trustees directed Russell to the Alberta government. This rebuff did not sit well and the alderman rebuked the ACF board for exceeding their mandate and for misinterpreting the federal *Canteen Fund Act*:

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67. "Col. J.K. Mackay Ontario Legion Head," *Globe*, 23 August 1930, 22.

68 See "Hint of Blackmail at Canteen Probe," *Montreal Gazette*, 31 January 1940, 2, "Story of 'Loot' of War Not Black, Sinister One," *The Evening Citizen*, 1 December 1950, 18, and "Trustee of Fund Died by Cyanide, Inquest Decides," *Saskatoon Star Phoenix*, 5 January 1940, 3, 5.

the board admits having invested in different enterprises. The Canteen Fund Act gives no authority for investing this money. We would like to have a board of trustees who spend the money in alleviating the suffering of ex-servicemen. We don't want our money tied up in investments.<sup>69</sup>

Such critiques illustrate how debates over the canteen funds shifted between war's end and the onset of the Depression. In 1919, veterans were furious that the canteen profits were not distributed among all returned men, as a pseudo-replacement for the failed bonus campaign. By the 1930s, former soldiers remained unhappy with how the money was being used but they were no longer pushing for direct distribution. Instead, their criticisms were directed at how the money was being managed and the failure of provincial trustees to adequately provide for veterans struggling in the depths of the Great Depression.

For their part, the blanket criticisms of returned men often rested on frustration rather than legitimate grievances, reflecting how invested veterans were in the promise of the canteen money. Critics often misinterpreted the purpose of the fund and there was consistent confusion over the role of the federal and provincial governments. They also failed to understand that the federal government had transferred its control of the funds to the provinces in 1926. Community leaders, for instance, continued to suggest ways for Ottawa to use the money long after it had any involvement. In 1932, for example, Joseph Fulton was president of the Earl Haig Memorial branch of the Canadian Legion. Like many, he considered the funds a fair way to assist men who could not find work. Fulton wanted Ottawa to use the canteen

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69 "Canteen Fund Under Fire at Legion Meet," *Lethbridge Herald*, 21 July 1932, 14.

money as preliminary payments for unemployment insurance. To him, the "Dominion government" should use these resources "on behalf of unemployed veterans."<sup>70</sup> Such suggestions were typical of the confusion surrounding governmental control of the canteen money, which mistook which government administered the money and the limitations that groups like the OCF trustees had placed on the fund's use. The same confusion, however was evident within the shifting debate over the state's responsibility for the unemployed.

Press coverage of the canteen fund issue subsided once the provinces began distributing the money. For its part, the OCF did a poor job at explaining its mandate and how to gain access to its assistance.<sup>71</sup> This lack of press coverage did not go unnoticed. In 1931, a veteran of the First Division, CEF wrote the *Star* wondering when returned men were going to receive an updated account of the canteen funds. He wanted a statement indicating how much money the province received, the overhead expenses of the board of trustees and their salaries, the state of the fund's principal deposit, accounts of any interest earned, and whether either political party had received any help from the fund.<sup>72</sup> He never received an answer because the OCF annual

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70 "Workless Insurance Urged by Veterans," *Star*, 6 July 1932, 3.

71 The OCF was not alone in this problem. It was also an issue for the SAC, which shared several personnel with the administrators of the province's canteen fund board. Towards the end of the war the aid commission recognized that it was not adequately publicizing its services to the public. Its solution was to take up advertising in the papers in hopes that the commission's work would be "appreciated by the returned soldier and brought to the notice of the public." See AO, RG 29-165, Soldier's Aid Commission, Minutes of the Soldiers Aid Commission, 14 February 1917 and again a similar note from 17 January 1918.

72 "Canteen Fund," *Star*, 22 July 1932, 4.



reports were not distributed and they received little to no attention in the media.

To some extent, the OCF board was aware of the communication problem. They did not have an easy solution, however. One trustee wondered if their troubles might be alleviated if they could secure more media coverage. The trustees also recognized that veterans' organizations needed to be more aware of the OCF's mandate and to stop directing ineligible men to the fund.<sup>73</sup>

The lack of information about the OCF's official operations, combined with unceasing demand for the canteen money, resulted in a rumour mill that only caused further confusion. Three years into the Depression, the fund was seriously strained. The trustees reluctantly dipped into the capital fund to shore it up, but it was not enough. By 1932 the board recognized that it was "expected" that some of the fund's capital would be required "each year" if the OCF wanted to meet the "necessary legitimate expenditures in the way of relief and educational assistance."<sup>74</sup> Veterans misunderstood the reduction in the OCF account. They assumed these changes were the result of inefficient administration at best, and corruption at worst, and many believed that the fund had depreciated because of the board's decision to purchase securities.

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<sup>73</sup> Correspondence between OCF trustees located in AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 1794 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," 30 December 1929. It states in part, that "it is most surprising the number of returned men who are under the impression that the Ontario Canteen Fund amounts to the tens of millions of dollars, and for that reason should help all and sundry."

<sup>74</sup> AO, RG 29-165, Soldiers' Aid Commission administrative records, Ontario Canteen Fund, Financial Statements. 1932 Annual Report.

The Secretary of the fund, Alex Lewis, vehemently denied these charges. "The assertion is quite unfounded," he told the *Star*, before pointing out that the OCF had been invested in government bonds from its inception. "Our reports are available to show how the original sum was invested and its disposition since that time." Where these reports were kept, or how returned men could gain access to them, was never made clear. The lack of transparency and accountability prevented the OCF from distancing itself from its critics.<sup>75</sup>

The press only appeared interested in the canteen fund question when it related to federal scandals. The *Star*, for example, tended to combine the coverage of the canteen fund issue with pensions and responsibility for unemployment generally. The newspaper wanted to highlight the plight of returned men during the Depression and it ran corresponding stories profiling their struggles. During winter months, the federal ministry of pensions and national health provided supplementary relief for pensioners to ensure that the destitute had access to medical care. These men were identified as 'Class Two', and were typically disabled and unemployed. A 1932 report from the *Star* highlighted the case of an ex-service man, Christopher D. Mann, whose difficulties typified the struggles veterans faced. Mann was thirty-six years old and had served with the 159<sup>th</sup> Battalion. When he was evicted from his home after failure to pay rent, he and his family sought assistance from the leading veterans assistance sources, including the Poppy Fund, which raised money to assist veterans through sales of poppies, and the OCF. In each instance he was denied because of his pension. Mann

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<sup>75</sup> "Canteen Fund Rumor is Strongly Denied," *Star*, 8 September 1932, 4.

recounted his story for the paper, describing how he was physically fit before the war but that upon returning, his legs gave out. He was forced to move to Toronto for treatment. "I had to take any kind of a job," he explained. Soon the family was out of money and he was forced to seek out a meager pension. Doctors were of little help. Some diagnosed him with neuritis, others with sciatica. The crux of the matter, however, was that they refused to attribute his troubles to his war service. "The doctors figure my condition is not directly attributable to war service," Mann lamented. What most upset him, however, was that his physical state was jeopardizing his position as father and breadwinner for his family. "It is not myself," that he worried about, "but the kiddies ... when I'm lying in the hospital I'm all right, but I lie in bed worrying, not knowing whether the wife or kiddies have enough to eat or not."<sup>76</sup>

Mann's troubles highlight the issue of a veteran's inability to receive credit for war related injuries. One former soldier, writing in the *Globe* under the pseudonym "Fourth Battalion," criticized the assistance situation. It was wrong that pension boards privileged men's service records, which unfairly assisted men who served in 'safe' jobs in Canada or overseas. Those who served at the 'sharp end', faced significantly more risk. Moreover, while men behind the lines could easily report medical issues, those at the front did not have the same luxury. When they were ill, they received basic treatment and then ordered to return to the line, often without a record being kept: "No record would be on [the] medical sheet, which was kept at base." The same went for the men at discharge. Having spent years in the front lines, they

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76 "Relief Only Temporary Ottawa Officials Say," *Star*, 13 June 1929, 3.

were only too eager to get home. To avoid being held up for medical reasons many indicated that they were “Fine” upon discharge. So many were in a hurry to be discharged that doctors would often examine as many as 160 men an hour. It was only when they arrived home that the toll of their service was evident. “We discover we have heart trouble, chest trouble, and nervousness,” Mann recounted. As A1 men they were not eligible for treatment. Their only recourse was the pension board. Without a record of their injuries, however, they were turned down.

The solution was to consider men’s service as holistically as possible. If returned men could not get access to assistance due to a lack of records, then why not expand the documents under consideration? Battalion records, including war diaries, were kept extensively during the war. If a man’s record was lacking, could his claims not be compared to what his battalion “went through during the time [the man was] in it?” What they did in the battalion and how long they were there one veteran explained, mattered as much to overall victory as a missing form. A man’s service was what mattered and “any man who served in a line battalion for a year [was], at the very least, entitled to treatment.” This veteran recognized that the repeated disappointments men endured meant that “most returned men [had] given up any hope of ever receiving justice under the present system and [had sunk] into a slough of despondency.”<sup>77</sup>

Other returned men laid out even longer lists of grievances. One veteran complained of the raw deal men were receiving and wrote off the

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<sup>77</sup> “Agrees with Sir Arthur Currie,” *Globe*, 6 December 1929, p. 4.

whole veterans' assistance system as a "washout." The fact that men were being turned down due to prior illness was particularly galling. Why, he asked, were these men accepted at recruitment stations if their disabilities were so debilitating? How was it that a man who spent the war on the exhibition ground because of poor health received a full pension, while holding down a government job, when a wartime amputation case had his pension cut twenty percent when the board discovered he held a job with the City of Toronto? The veterans' organizations were of little help. "They pass these resolutions every year," he complained, but "what have they yet attained?" The Canteen Funds did not escape his ire. How was it, he wondered, that Premier Ferguson gained "control" of the fund? How could returned men have a say about the money when it was controlled by so few? "If every employer of labor in Toronto had the veterans' interests at heart and employed them ... there would not be so many handicapped men seeking employment."<sup>78</sup>

The postwar situation of ad hoc financial aid, when combined with the physical and emotional trauma, and the economic distress of the 1920s and 1930s, left returned men "right up against it."<sup>79</sup> Without a reliable income, and often facing obstacles and barriers from pension boards, veterans increasingly turned to the OCF. The organization found itself swamped with applications for assistance and the resulting strain on its finances caused the fund to tighten its purse strings. This tightening only increased the desperate

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<sup>78</sup> "Fragments from France," *Globe*, 6 December 1929, p. 4.

<sup>79</sup> AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 2134 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," 9 October 1934.

plight of veterans, which in turn increased their frustration and disillusionment.

A major point of frustration among Ontario's veterans was that approval for canteen assistance bore no relation to their need. Men or their families had to provide doctors' notes, bills, or other documentation supporting their claim for aid. Yet, this material was no guarantee that a man's application would be approved. In John B.'s case, his doctor backed up his claim and he wrote to the OCF in support of his patient. "[B.] was wounded at Battle of Amiens in back on Aug 8<sup>th</sup>." The doctor "treated him from time to time for muscular pain ... which has at times rendered him unable to work – I have no doubt that there is muscle or sheath ligamentations injury here which renders him partially disabled after doing heavy work and at seasonal influence."<sup>80</sup> Thanks to his doctor's intervention, John's application was successful, but later calls for aid were turned down.<sup>81</sup>

Archibald M. wrote to the OCF in support of another returned man, John W., who had served with the Horse Auxiliary. John was born in 1890 and enlisted at Kingston, Ontario early in the war. In 1915 he was decorated for service.<sup>82</sup> While overseas he was "slightly gassed" and, ten years after the war ended, he faced a few "minor debts." John was under medical care. He

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80 AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 1768 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," John B.'s doctor to OCF trustees, 26 December 1929.

81 AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 1768 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," John B. to OCF trustees, 11 January 1930.

82 AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 1678, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]."

included a note from his doctor in his application for assistance who explained that John had “done his bit” and was more than “worthy of being helped [if] at all possible.” Unlike John B., however, one of the OCF’s trustees agreed. This trustee made inquiries into the veteran’s worthiness, concluding that he was “satisfied” John’s case was genuine and that there existed “an urgent need for assistance.”<sup>83</sup>

Such investigations into men’s applications occupied a significant amount of the OCF’s attention. The trustees feared that men would try to manipulate the system and they expended considerable effort working to ensure that only those who met their strict guidelines would be successful in their applications. Yet, despite their concerns, carrying out investigations for the hundreds of applications received each month was far beyond the board’s ability. To help lessen the load, the board turned to the Soldiers’ Aid Commission of Ontario and the service bureaus operated by the Ontario Command of the Canadian Legion. In the latter’s case, the OCF financed the bureau’s work at a cost of approximately ten thousand dollars per year.<sup>84</sup> Between November 1930 and April 1931, the SAC carried out at least 134 investigations on behalf of the OCF.<sup>85</sup> These investigations resulted in hundreds of men being found ineligible for assistance each year.

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83 AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1678, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”

84 AO, RG29-165, SAC Minute Book, 19 November 1930.

85. AO, RG29-165, SAC Minute Book, 19 November 1930.

In such cases, the commission and the OCF tried to make arrangements for men to obtain assistance from other assistance programs. The most common referral the trustees made was for those ineligible for canteen funds to seek out a war veteran's allowance.<sup>86</sup> Veterans who had commuted pensions were unaware that they could apply for the allowance passed after 1930. "I am in receipt of your application for assistance for the Ontario Canteen Fund," wrote a board member to a man applying for assistance. As a "former pensioner you are eligible for assistance from the Department of Pensions and National Health and should make your application to Mr. Anderson at Christie Hospital."<sup>87</sup> Similar referrals were also suggested by other veterans' agencies for men to seek aid from the OCF. Such was the case for Percival J., a returned man who, in 1929, found himself at the end of his financial rope. Percival had worked for several months and was now struggling to support his wife and two children. He was corresponding with a DSCR employee in Hamilton who informed him that he was unable to help because Percival was not in receipt of a pension. The employee did, however, enclose the contact information of the OCF in hopes that the fund might be able to assist him.<sup>88</sup>

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86. AO, RG29-165, SAC Minute Book, 19 November 1930. See too RG29-65, B168859, "File No. 4868, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act], 15 August 1931; and B161739, "File No. 3077, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act], 17 January 1931.

87 AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 1951 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," 20 January 1930.

88. AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 2168, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," 15 February 1930.



Returned soldiers and their dependents were appreciative of these efforts to secure assistance. In many cases, however, the OCF's policies denying aid to the pensioned and unemployed left men and their families even more frustrated because they had not been made aware of these policies ahead of time. Even worse, it often seemed to Ontario's veterans that the various agencies were not fully informed about each other's regulations. In some cases, employees at different organizations were clearly confused by the details of men's eligibility for assistance. Officials from the federal DPNH, for example, often misdirected unemployed men with medical expenses to the canteen fund, despite the fund's regulations stipulating against such claims. The federal department's employees were under the impression that only non-pensioned men were ineligible for medical aid from the fund. Accordingly, pension officials advised returned men to apply to the canteen fund because it was used "for the relief of those not drawing pension." As the fund's trustees concluded, this was "to a certain extent true," but also "misleading" because it did not accurately reflect their regulations.<sup>89</sup> Such errors proved an annoyance to veterans. Indeed, as one OCF board member wrote, the problem was so serious that angry men risked disrupting the fund's operation and they became "obstinate and unreasonable to deal with."<sup>90</sup>

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89. AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 1794 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," 12 December 1929.

90. AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 1785 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," 7 October 1936.

Most applicants to the OCF assumed they were entitled to its assistance and being turned down was not an easy pill to swallow. Men such as Samuel G., who considered his refusal “twisty,” interpreted their denial as proof that the fund’s trustees were duplicitous.<sup>91</sup> Others were simply “hurt” by their denials. What they could not understand was why the fund was turning them down in their hour of need. As Herbert O. asked the trustees, surely “no man would ask for anything like this when he is working and able to keep things going on his wages.”<sup>92</sup> Veterans were apt to assume the trustees were turning them down for other reasons. William V. believed that the trustees were out of touch with the plight of returned men. “You who has never known what it is to be hungry and not have anything to eat,” he angrily wrote the Board, before closing with a final plea to the trustees. William begged them to reconsider their decision. “I would not ask if I was not in dire need,” he explained. “I have struggled along all these years. but [sic] now I am down and out. so [sic] please [help me] for God’s sake if not for mine.”<sup>93</sup>

Pleading for help was not easy. The war generation was raised in an era when men were supposed to be self-sufficient. Asking for help from the canteen fund was a matter of desperation. W.S. wrote the trustees that his inability to support his wife and two children cost him “the affection &

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91 AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File No. 2944 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 4 September 1930.

92 AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 2139 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 20 February 1930

93 AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File No. 3506, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”

respect of my family.”<sup>94</sup> Yet, need for aid overcame even the proudest of men. They were willing to beg, if need be. As Jason W. wrote the Board, he knew the canteen fund was supposed to provide “[a]id where there is sickness in a Ex Soldiers['] Family.” He was a veteran and he needed help. If he had had a job, he would not have been asking for assistance: “If I was in Employment it stands to reason I would not ask for Aid.”<sup>95</sup> This veteran did not want food. He was already receiving assistance through his municipality. What he needed was assistance for medical bills. “Who, I ask you, can I appeal to when there is sickness and the need is very urgent,” he asked the trustees, especially when the fund “is for such a purpose for us Ex service men.”

Although unemployed and sickly myself I have never asked for anything for myself like a good soldier I tried to carry on under my own steam. But sometimes one must ask for help and when it is for sickness well, who can I apply to, But the Canteen Fund[,] which I understand does help in Cases of Sickness etc. does one have to be at deaths door before help is given we need lots of things in the Medicine Line etc need them badly.<sup>96</sup>

The challenges this veteran faced were a sad indictment of life in postwar Canada and the failure of the canteen fund to meet veterans’ expectations for aid.

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94 AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File No. 2863, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”

95 AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File 3545, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”

96 AO, RG29-65, B161739, “File 3545, [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act].”

The repercussions of these failures undermined more than veterans' sense of entitlement. They also forced returned men to question the meaning of their service, a reality summed up in the cases of Robert L. and John B. Robert was a farmer near Cornwall, Ontario. In 1916, he attested with the CEF at age eighteen. He survived the war, married and had four children. In 1938, Robert wrote to the fund asking for assistance. He was on relief and believed his war service entitled him to additional help.<sup>97</sup> Like many of Ontario's veterans, he was denied assistance because he was unemployed. When Robert received the news, he was furious and penned a blistering letter to the trustees. It lambasted the canteen fund for its inequity and bitterly questioned the purpose of his war service:

I thank you very much for what I have resived [sic] from yous [sic] since I came back from Over-Seas, As for unemployment I'm just working to keep myself from crawling on my knees to you people I think I earn't anything that I ever got. But I do notice that just certain class of people can get the Canteen Fund that is the ones that went as far as England. I been taking Doctor's medicine for a year and half. The time you get the Canteen fund is when your deid [sic] thats' when we need it most.<sup>98</sup>

Robert believed strongly that, despite his unemployment, he had worked for a living and, as a result, he did not consider his time on relief representative of his work ethic. He informed the fund's trustees that he was not a slacker, having "earn't [sic]" everything he had achieved. Furthermore, Robert was

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97. AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 1876 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," 15 December 1938.

98. AO, RG29-65, B108762, "File No. 1876 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act]," 20 December 1938.

not asking for charity. What he wanted was due recognition for his time overseas. This, he explained, was why he had been ill for a year and a half.<sup>99</sup>

When men like Robert L. were turned down for canteen assistance because they were unemployed, it undermined their belief in the war's wider meaning. These men believed they were entitled to OCF assistance and took pride in the fact that they could turn to it in place of government charity. Denying them access further entrenched their bitterness and left men disillusioned with the postwar peace. John B., for example, was a general labourer, born in 1882, who enlisted in late 1915. He served overseas with the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion, CEF, arriving for duty in France in October 1916. He served in the field until August 1917, when he was granted ten days leave to Paris. While on leave he contracted a mild case of gonorrhea, which kept him in hospital until November. Once fit for duty, he returned to his unit. He distinguished himself on at least two occasions and was appointed acting Corporal in January and then full Corporal in July 1918. He also received the Military Medal for his actions in August 1918. Later that month he was wounded. According to his service file, John was "blown up by a mine," suffering injuries to his head, his back, and right hip. He was subsequently treated for contusions to his back and diagnosed neurasthenic, with particular susceptibility to noise. In 1919, he was discharged as unfit for duty with "partial loss of function of [the] nervous system" and 183 days for his War Service Gratuity.<sup>100</sup>

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99. Lara Campbell, "We who have wallowed in the mud of Flanders'," 128.

100. All information obtained from John B.'s service file.

After the war, John B. held seasonal jobs. In December 1929, he was facing serious hardship and applied to the OCF for help. His application complained that while his jobs paid enough during the summer, his wages were never sufficient “to keep my self in the winter.”<sup>101</sup> “I am writing without anything to eat, and have no coal to keep my sick wife warm,” he explained in his application. John was in debt, partly because of the medical costs he faced as a result of wounds sustained overseas. Although he received some canteen assistance, he was eventually turned down. John’s family was outraged that he was denied assistance. The believed that his war service entitled them to help:

my husband went when the call came and fought bravely for his country and I do think they are doing the right thing with him, he was a strong healthy man when he enlisted but he has not been the same since he came home. I think it is a shame you cant help us, we simply cant live this way.<sup>102</sup>

John also blamed the war for his plight. “I would not ask you for anything if I was as good as before The War,” he wrote the trustees, telling them “I dont [sic] think it is up right for me to be paying doctors bills over this great war,” and that “I served my King and country, and this is what I get for it.”<sup>103</sup> John, like so many of his generation, was left disillusioned in the Great War’s aftermath.

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101. AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1768 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 12 December 1929.

102 AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1768 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 22 January 1932.

103. AO, RG29-65, B108762, “File No. 1768 [Name withheld under the Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act],” 20 December 1929.

Returned men who applied for OCF assistance had at least a decade's experience of dealing with Canada's nascent veterans' system and, however grateful they were for its existence, they never felt it worked for their benefit. Some older veterans received a war gratuity but that was the extent of the state's general aid for military service. A lesser number were eligible for a pension, although the majority of these were often meager, especially in the war's immediate aftermath. By the 1930s, veterans had several options to which they could turn, including the War Veteran's Allowance, provided they were old or disabled enough to qualify. For able-bodied men deemed employable by this system, however, the only substantive alternative remained the canteen fund.

The applicants to the OCF served as enlisted soldiers and, unlike the war's writers, many were borderline illiterate. These veterans were not happy they had to apply for assistance, but they were proud they could turn to the fund in place of municipal aid. Nonetheless, applicants felt compelled to justify their need. In addition to lengthy explanations that detailed what these men required, their letters also explained how they had struggled after war's end. The veterans were clearly affected by their war experience, a situation made worse by failing health and the challenge of widespread unemployment. These setbacks undermined men's idealized roles as veterans, fathers, and breadwinners—struggles that influenced the meaning of the war.<sup>104</sup> Faced with nearly two decades of trial, returned men inevitably

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<sup>104</sup> Lara Campbell's work with the letters sent to Ontario's premier suggests that veterans corresponded with their government more readily than we have previously assumed. See Campbell, *Respectable Citizens: Gender, Family, and Unemployment in Ontario's Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2009).

questioned their service and sacrifice. The result was a deep sense of disillusionment that marked a generation of men.



## Conclusion

The outbreak of another global conflict in 1939 did not change the fact that untold numbers of the war generation believed themselves “psychological and physical casualt[ies] of the last war.”<sup>1</sup> These men came of age with the Great War and believed it was a formative experience. The most influential of the generation, including men such as A.Y. Jackson, Will Bird, and Bill Deacon, described the conflict as a generational catalyst. It was not just elites who identified generationally. Ordinary men, including A.W. Cooke, an artillery gunner from Hamilton, also cited the war’s generational influence.<sup>2</sup> So did Matthew MacGowan, a veteran of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, CEF. He too believed in the war’s formative influence. “Our generation” matured because

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1 Harold Innis, cited in Watson, *Marginal Man*, 90.

2 A.W. Cooke clipping scrapbook, author’s collection.

of the conflict, MacGowan explained. The war brought “a definite change in everybody, in his mind,” because you grew from a “boy to a man.”<sup>3</sup>

P.L. Kingsley was just as adamant that the war shaped his generation. He enlisted in August 1914 and served throughout the conflict, seeing action at Second Ypres, Festubert, the Somme, Vimy, Passchendaele, and during the last Hundred Days. At the age of eighty-five, Kingsley wrote his memoirs, describing them as a “tale of the youth of my generation.”<sup>4</sup> While the war that these men lived through amounted to a “kaleidoscope of events and experiences,” they agreed that the conflict remained a fundamental part of their collective identity for the rest of their lives.<sup>5</sup>

Yet, as indelible an impression as the Great War left on a generation, the conflict was not the only event that shaped them. Its aftermath also left its mark. Upon their return home, many struggled in the face of failing health and economic hardship, experiences that came to define the war’s meaning in the years and decades that followed. This was not what these men signed up for when they enlisted; the failure of the peace to meet wartime and pre-war expectations was a major disappointment. But Canada’s war generation did not give up easily. It fought its ‘second battle’ for years after, advocating both

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3 LAC, RG 41, Vol 7, 1st Battalion folder, M.C. McGowan transcript, tape 2/2. The transcription inaccurately names him McGowan. See Service File for Matthew Campbell MacGowan, CEF Service number 6243, for the correct man.

4 Percy Leland Kingsley, *The First World War As I Saw It: From Valcartier in Quebec and on to Armistice Day and the March to the Rhine* [1972] (Privately published by Patricia Anne Thomas, 2013), 1.

5 Tim Cook, *Fight to the Finish: Canadians in the Second World War* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2015), 11.

publicly and privately for improved treatment. Although often victorious on the battlefield, this peacetime struggle ended in defeat. The bonus campaign, better access to healthcare, a less exclusionary pension system, and easier access to their canteen funds eluded returned men throughout the 1920s and into the 1930s. In time, setback upon setback eroded the generation's beliefs about the war and its sense of purpose.

Canada's war generation was further embittered that its governments failed to keep their promises made to veterans. The country's leaders assured Canadians that they would support their troops, both during the war and after. Despite such claims, few returned men felt that the postwar re-establishment system was sufficient. Its hallmark programs were the pension system and the soldier settlement plan. Neither succeeded. These failures were only two of many reasons why veterans felt their future was undermined by poor planning and broken promises. While the pension question often dominated debate, the failure of the soldier settlement scheme represented an even bigger setback because it was the only way federal and provincial governments willingly assisted 'able-bodied' veterans needing postwar employment.

It was a different story for the wounded. For these men, a series of government agencies, including the Military Hospitals Commission and its subsequent reincarnation as the DSCR and DPNH (and finally the DVA), helped shoulder the war's burdens. Not so for the so-called able-bodied. If they encountered difficulty, then the only option for those unwilling (or unable) to turn to municipal aid were the soldiers' aid commissions and provincial canteen funds. Veterans in this position felt rejected and, while it

pained many to admit it, the challenges they faced in the 1920s and 1930s left the war generation increasingly disenchanted.

Questions about whether Canadians were disillusioned have been largely ignored by historians. Moreover, rather than asking how postwar discontent forced the war generation to reconsider the conflict's meaning, studies have instead focused on the veterans' movement and the war's social memory. While both form part of the Great War's legacy, without proper appreciation of the trials endured after 1918, this picture is incomplete.

Efforts to publicly commemorate the war *were* part of its aftermath, but they were not the only way Canadians made sense of the conflict. Nor did all Canadians believe an idealized history of the Canadian Corps, with its record of "co-operation, tolerance, selflessness, and unity," was the answer to the social and economic discord of the 1920s and 1930s.<sup>6</sup> At its heart, the war's constructed memory was a debate about how the conflict should be remembered, not how its memory informed the present. For the war generation, however, commemoration was not an all-encompassing explanation of the conflict. These men lived the war firsthand and did not need ceremonies to understand its meaning. To the veterans who made up the generation's ranks, the war was a matter of personal experience and it could be re-evaluated, especially when postwar life failed to live up to wartime ideals.

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<sup>6</sup> With its example of "co-operation, tolerance, selflessness, and unity" and, according to Vance, if this project worked, the "memory of the war could act as a citizenship primer for children and immigrants ... it could even reconcile the seemingly unreconcilable and forge the basis of unity between Canada's founding peoples." See Vance, *Death So Noble*, 224.

As a highly literate generation, the question of postwar disillusionment became a matter of serious literary debate, particularly in Britain and the United States. Within Canada, however, the generation published little about its discontent. Nonetheless, some veterans, such as George Drew, Robert Manion, and Frank Underhill, did expand on why they were disenchanted with the postwar peace. They were disappointed that disarmament was failing and that Canada risked sliding into another 'futile' slaughter. Their critiques reflected deeply personal positions that did not fit the public discourse of the war's memory.

While few memoirs directly addressed veterans' economic setbacks, concerns over postwar employment began long before the so-called 'war book boom'. In fact, men started to worry about jobs as early as 1917. These soldiers, including Frank Oldacre, Edward Malette, and Stanley Bennett believed that a secure position was a critical part of the 'square deal' they hoped for in postwar Canada. Federal and provincial soldier settlement programs were designed to address the demand for postwar work, but they were never intended to employ all veterans. The failure of Ontario's Kapuskasing colony foreshadowed the wider problems with Canada's settlement schemes and the limitations of state sponsored employment for veterans. While Ottawa and the provincial capitals planned for re-establishing the disabled, the able-bodied were another matter entirely. Postwar recession, combined with widespread and prolonged unemployment undermined their chance at re-integrating into Canadian society. The difficulties these men faced left many veterans feeling 'right up against it'. As the struggle to find work dragged on, they grew increasingly embittered. The

record of this discontent is not part of the war's social memory, but as the letters Ontario's veterans wrote to the province's canteen fund make clear, these men were disillusioned in the war's aftermath.

All the applicants to the Ontario Canteen Fund were 'average' soldiers, a group that remains underrepresented in histories of the conflict's aftermath. Like the war generation more broadly, these men were born in the decade and a half before 1900. They came of age with the conflict and never expected postwar life would be defined by economic strife. The strains they endured after returning home placed a heavy burden on their personal and family lives, trials made worse by the precarious state of their physical and psychological health. While their correspondence with the OCF trustees did not address questions of remembrance or commemoration, the meaning of the war was central to their pleas for assistance. These veterans remained proud of their service, in part because it entitled them to use the canteen fund. Yet, as their appeals to the Fund's trustees reveal, these men continued to re-evaluate belief in the war's value, especially in reaction to severe challenges in the postwar labour market. Far from a memory of purpose, for too many of these veterans, the war's meaning was tainted by dashed hopes.

The Great War ended in November 1918 but its legacy cast a far longer shadow. The worst of its horrors haunted the living for decades and Canada's war generation spent a lifetime trying to understand its impact. For these men, the conflict was a central reference point that defined their understanding of the tragic events that shaped their lives. While men's experiences between 1914 and 1918 are central to any explanation of the war's meaning, postwar disillusionment remains an equally integral part of this

legacy. It was a result not just of war, but of its aftermath and it endured long after the guns fell silent.

## Appendix I

### *The Canteen Fund Act*

## 15-16 GEORGE V.

### CHAP. 34.

An Act respecting the disposal of the Canteen Funds.

[Assented to 27th June, 1925.]

**W**HEREAS certain profits have accumulated from the operation of canteens during the late war and from other sources; and whereas more particularly these profits represent (i) the share allotted to the Canadian Expeditionary Force of the profits made by the operation of canteens under the control of the British War Office, (ii) the profits made by the operation of canteens under the control of various units of the Canadian Expeditionary Force overseas, (iii) the share of profits allotted to the Government of Canada for division among Canadian war charities by the War Office Cinematograph Committee arising from the profits made by such Committee from the exhibition of pictures taken in the area of active operations, (iv) the share allotted to the Royal Canadian Navy by the Admiralty; and whereas, there is now in the hands of the Receiver-General for Canada the sum of \$2,350,000 more or less, representing the said allotments and profits together with interest thereon; and whereas it is desirable that distribution of these amounts be made so that ex-members of the forces and their dependents may benefit thereby: Therefore His Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Senate and House of Commons of Canada, enacts as follows:—

Preamble.

1. This Act may be cited as *The Canteen Funds Act*.

Short title.

2. In this Act "Canteen Funds" shall mean the funds referred to in this Act and "ex-member of the forces" shall mean an ex-member of the Canadian Expeditionary Force who saw service in France or England in the late war, or a member of the Royal Canadian Navy who served overseas.

"Canteen Funds."

"Ex-member of the forces."



**Board of Trustees.** **3.** There may be appointed by the Governor in Council a Board of Trustees for the Yukon Territory consisting of three members who shall serve without remuneration for the period of three years and shall be eligible for reappointment.

**Provincial Boards of Trustees.** **4.** The Lieutenant-Governor in Council of a province may appoint a Board of Trustees for such province consisting of five members in the case of Ontario and three members in the case of each of the other provinces, who shall serve without remuneration for the period of three years and shall be eligible for reappointment.

**Majority to be ex-members of forces.** **5.** A majority of the members of each provincial Board of Trustees shall be ex-members of the forces, who have seen service overseas.

**Allotment of Funds.** **6.** Allotment of the Canteen Funds shall be made in the following manner:—

**Outstanding accounts.** (a) The sum of \$20,000 shall be held by the Receiver-General for Canada for the payment of any outstanding accounts or claims in respect of the units, the funds of which are included in the Canteen Funds, provided that should any portion of this amount remain unexpended on the first day of July, 1929, such unexpended portion shall be disposed of as set forth in paragraph (e) of this section;

**Reimbursement to the Disablement Fund.** (b) The sum of fifteen thousand dollars shall be paid to the Disablement Fund in reimbursement of a loan made by the Trustee of the said Fund to the Dominion Veterans' Alliance;

**United Services Fund.** (c) The sum of \$50,000 shall be allotted and paid to the United Services Fund of Great Britain and the sum of \$50,000 shall be allotted and paid to the American Red Cross Association to be used by the said Fund and Association respectively in such manner from time to time as the said Fund or Association may deem proper for assistance in specially meritorious cases of ex-members of the forces and their dependents, resident in the United Kingdom or the United States of America, as the case may be, and who are in genuine distress, provided that if the said Fund or Association is unable to accept the said allotments on the conditions herein set forth the Governor in Council may make such other disposition thereof as may be deemed advisable;

**High Commissioner for relief of distress.** (d) Any unexpended balance now in the hands of the High Commissioner for Canada in England shall be retained by him and shall be utilized by him for the relief of distressed ex-members of the forces in the United Kingdom;

(e) The residue shall be divided into ten different allotments in the proportion indicated by the following percentages for the provinces or territory hereunder specified:—

	Per cent.
Alberta.....	7.752
British Columbia.....	10.944
Manitoba.....	10.654
New Brunswick.....	4.072
Nova Scotia.....	5.549
Ontario.....	41.237
Prince Edward Island.....	.739
Quebec.....	11.622
Saskatchewan.....	7.162
Yukon Territory.....	.269

Ten  
provincial  
allotments.

and on appointment as herein provided of a provincial Board of Trustees, or of a Board of Trustees for the Yukon Territory, the provincial, or Yukon allotment shall immediately be paid to such Board.

7. The Governor in Council may make such regulations as may be deemed necessary for the guidance and direction of the Board of Trustees for the Yukon Territory, and the Lieutenant-Governor in Council of any province may make such regulations as may be deemed necessary for the guidance and direction of the provincial Board of Trustees, provided that the duties of the provincial Board of Trustees and the Board of Trustees for the Yukon Territory shall be to receive and hold the provincial allotment, or the Yukon allotment, as the case may be, and to ascertain by such method as may appear to them most feasible the wishes of those most interested and residing in the province or in the Yukon Territory, concerning the disposition of such allotment, and following this, to determine the object to which the allotment shall be devoted, and, as far as necessary, to administer same for such object, or provide for such administration by others and to do such other things as may be indicated in the Order in Council appointing them.

Regulations.

Duties of  
provincial  
Board of  
Trustees.

8. The expenses incurred by the Board of Trustees for the Yukon Territory, and any provincial Board of Trustees in connection with the said trust shall be a charge on the allotment.

Expenses  
charged to  
allotment.

9. Any vacancy in the membership of the Board of Trustees for the Yukon Territory, due to death, or resignation may be filled by the Governor in Council, and any vacancy similarly caused in the membership of a provincial Board of Trustees may be filled by the Lieutenant-Governor in Council.

Vacancies.

General  
principles of  
allotment.

**10.** Without limiting the powers hereby conferred on the Governor in Council, or on the Lieutenant-Governors in Council, the following general principles shall govern any distribution or apportionment of the amounts allotted to the Board of Trustees for the Yukon Territory or to the said provincial Boards of Trustees:—

- (a) Any plans formulated should be based on the assumption that there will be prospective beneficiaries for several years to come;
- (b) Any use of the fund for relief purposes should be limited to the class of case for which no relief is then available from governmental sources, and in particular to specially meritorious cases;
- (c) If the provision of scholarships in schools and universities is undertaken for specially promising children of ex-members of the forces or of members of the forces who have died this should not necessarily be confined to the higher grades.

Reports to  
Minister.

**11.** A report shall be made as of the thirty-first day of March in each year to the Minister of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment by the Board of Trustees for the Yukon Territory, by the provincial Boards of Trustees and by any other bodies, or organizations to whom allotment has been made, setting forth the work accomplished during the preceding twelve months, the amount expended and the balance in hand.

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King's Most Excellent Majesty.

## Appendix II

### Canadian War Fiction (1919-1939) – Birth / Death dates of authors

Pub Date	Author	Title	Date of Birth
1919	Beynon, Francis Marion	Aleta Day	1884-1951
1919	Connor, Ralph	<i>The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land</i>	1860-1937
1919	King, Basil	<i>The City of Comrades</i>	1859-1928
1919	King, Basil	<i>Going West</i>	1859-1928
1919	Sinclair, Bertrand	<i>Burned Bridges</i>	1881-1972
1920	Baxter, Arthur Beverly	<i>The Blower of Bubbles</i>	1891-1964
1920	Gibbon, J. Murray	<i>The Conquering Hero</i>	1875-1952
1920	King, Basil	<i>The Thread of Flame</i>	1859-1928
1920	Montgomery, L.M.	<i>Rilla of Ingleside</i>	1874-1942
1922	Roberts, T.G.D.	<i>The Fighting Starkleys</i>	1877-1953
1922	Sinclair, Bertrand	<i>The Hidden Places</i>	1881-1972
1923	Durkin, Douglas	<i>The Maggie</i>	1884-1967
1924	Sinclair, Bertrand	<i>The Inverted Pyramid</i>	1881-1972
1924	Willson, Beckles	<i>Redemption</i>	1869-1942
1925	Connor, Ralph	<i>Treading the Winepress</i>	1860-1937
1926	Stead, Robert	<i>Grain</i>	1880-1959
1926	Steele, H.E.R.	<i>I Shall Arise</i>	1897-1978
1927	Evans, Hubert	<i>The New Front Line</i>	1892-1986
1927	Kimber, Hugh	<i>San Fairy Ann</i>	?

1928	Harrison, Charles Y.	<i>Generals Die in Bed</i>	1898-1954
1929	Acland, Peregrine	<i>All Else Is Folly: A Tale of War and Passion</i>	1891-1963
1929	Dawson, Coningsby	<i>The Unknown Soldier</i>	1883-1959
1930	Beames, John	<i>An Army Without Banners</i>	1889-
1930	Dent, Walter Redvers	<i>Show Me Death!</i>	1900-1963
1930	Godwin, George	<i>Why Stay We Here?</i>	1889-1974
1930	Harrison, Charles Yale	<i>Generals Die in Bed</i>	1898-1954
1930	Roberts, Leslie	<i>When the Gods Laughed</i>	1895-1980
1933	Gray, Archie William	<i>The Towers of Mont. St. Eloi</i>	1896-
1934	Cowen, William Joseph	<i>Man with Four Lives</i>	1886-1964
1934	Neil, Stephen	<i>All the King's Men</i>	1876-1947
1935	Cobb, Humphrey	<i>Paths of Glory</i>	1899-1944
1935	Filion, Laetitia	<i>Yolande, la fiancée</i>	1897-1941
1936	Cowen, William Joseph	<i>They Gave Hime a Gun</i>	1886-1964
1936	Niven, Frederick	<i>Old Soldier</i>	1878-1944
1937	Child, Philip	<i>God's Sparrows</i>	1898-1978
1939	Vinton, V.V.	<i>To the Greater Glory</i>	1850-1921

## Acronyms

AAC	Amputees Association of Canada
ANL	Army and Navy League
ANVC	Army and Navy Veterans of Canada
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
CAMC	Canadian Army Medical Corps
CBC	Canadian Broadcasting Corporation
CEF	Canadian Expeditionary Force
CPR	Canadian Pacific Railway
CPF	Canadian Patriotic Fund
DPNH	Department of Pensions and National Health
DSCR	Department of Soldiers' Civil Re-establishment
DCM	Distinguished Conduct Medal
DVA	Dominion Veterans Alliance
GWVA	Great War Veterans' Association
MHC	Military Hospitals Commission
OCF	Ontario Canteen Fund
SAC	Soldiers' Aid Commission
SSB	Soldier Settlement Board
TCL	Toronto Civic League
UVL	United Veterans League
WVA	War Veterans Allowance

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## Curriculum Vitae

### Degrees

- Ph.D. History, University of Western Ontario (2016)
- M.A. History, University of Western Ontario (2009)
- Honours B.A., University of Toronto (2007), Joint-Specialist History & Political Science

### Languages

- English
- French

### Doctoral Comprehensive Fields

- Canadian History, Confederation-Present
- International Relations, 1850-Present
- American History, Reconstruction-Present

### Publications

- with Edward Soye, *Aviation in Canada, from the Great War to the 1920s*, Fisher Rare Book Library, 2015
- “Royal Flying Corps,” *Canadian Encyclopedia* (May 2015)
- “Broken Promises, or Politics as Usual?,” *ActiveHistory.ca* (27 January 2015)
- “Soldier Suicide and the Great War: A First Look,” *ActiveHistory.ca* (24 March 2014)
- “History in the Shadow of the Great War: The Spadina Museum’s Conversation on War and Myth-Making,” *ActiveHistory.ca* (28 November 2013)
- “New Historical Paradigms: Age and Generation, Where Historians Disagree” in Wardhaugh, Robert. *Destinies: Canadian History Since Confederation*. Toronto: Nelson, 2011.
- “Quiet Revolution: Where Historians Disagree” in Wardhaugh, Robert. *Destinies: Canadian History to Confederation*. Toronto: Nelson, 2011.

## Reviews

- Eysyllt Jones, ed., *Imagining Winnipeg: History Through the Photographs of L.B. Foote* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012) Manitoba History 73 (Fall, 2013).
- Michael Carroll, *Pearson's Peacekeepers: Canada and the United Nations Emergency Force, 1956-67* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009) Canadian Military History Book Review Supplement, vol. 23 (2009).
- Alan Kramer, *Dynamic of Destruction: Culture and Mass Killing in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) Canadian Military History Book Review Supplement, vol. 23 (2009).
- Mark Osborn Humphries, ed., *The Select Papers of Sir Arthur Currie: Diaries, Letters and Report to the Ministry, 1917-1933* (Waterloo: LCMSDS Press, 2008) Canadian Military History Book Review Supplement, vol. 22 (2008).

## Exhibitions

- "Aviation at the University of Toronto" with Edward Soye, UTARM Exhibition, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library (May-September 2015)

## Media

- Interview, "A Nation Soars: Wings of Courage" (December 2015)

## Teaching, Research, & Editorial Employment

- Dictionary of Canadian Biography – July 2015 – Present
  - Researcher, Vol. XVII (1940s)
- Freelance Editor – 2015
  - Manuscript editor for *One-Two-Three The Story of the 123rd Overseas Battalion, Royal Grenadiers, CEF* (2015) – first history of Pioneer Battalion in Canada
- NiCHE (Network in Canadian History & Environment) – 2014-2015
  - Researcher
- Research Assistant – November-December 2012
  - Dr. Michelle Hamilton, Western University
- Researcher and Editorial Assistant – September 2010-April 2012
  - Dr. Robert Wardhaugh, Western University
- Western University, Teaching Assistant – 2008-2014
  - Canadian History, European History, International Relations

- University of Toronto, Editor, *The Attaché, Journal of International Affairs* – 2006-2007
  - Editorial Committee
- G8 Research Group, Analyst and Team leader – 2004-2007
  - Gleneagles & St. Petersburg G8 Summit Teams / Director of Logistics & Treasurer

#### Academic Service

- Graduate Student Representative, 2011-2012
  - Graduate Committee, Department of History, The University of Western Ontario
- Conference Coordinator, 2010-2011
  - “The Great War: From Memory to History, An Interdisciplinary Conference,” University of Western Ontario, November 2011.
- Conference Coordinator, 2010-2011
  - “1st Annual Graduate History Student Conference,” University of Western Ontario, March 2011
- Director, Bruce McCaffrey Memorial Graduate Seminar Series, 2010-2011
  - History Graduate Students’ Association, The University of Western Ontario
- Graduate Teaching Assistant Union Steward, 2009-2011
  - The University of Western Ontario

#### Honours, Grants & Awards

- 2013/14 Ontario Graduate Scholarship
- 2013 Lynne-Lionel Scott Fellowship
- 2013 Ley and Lois Smith Fund Travel Grant
- 2012/13 Social Science and Humanities Doctoral Fellowship
- 2012/13 Ontario Graduate Scholarship (Declined)
- 2011/12 Graduate Student Teaching Award (Nominated)
- 2011/12 Western Graduate Research Scholarship
- 2010/11 Ontario Graduate Scholarship
- 2009/10 Western Graduate Research Scholarship
- 2009/10 Graduate Student Teaching Award (Nominated)
- 2008/09 Western Graduate Research Scholarship

Presentations, Conferences, & Invited talks

- “Returned Men: Toronto’s Veterans in the Great War’s Aftermath,” 2015 Toronto History Lecture (2015)
- “George Drew and *Canada’s Fighting Airmen*,” Canadian Aviation Historical Society (June 2015)
- “Getting it Right? Charles Yale Harrison’s Generals Die in Bed as a Representative Example of Canadian Postwar Disillusion” Canadian Historical Association Annual Conference (June 2015)
- “‘Dirty, Disgusting & ... Demoralizing’? Rethinking Reactions to Charles Yale Harrison’s Generals Die in Bed,” Canadian Military History Colloquium (May 2015)
- “Canada’s Part in the Aerial Campaign During the Great War, 1914-1918,” Richmond Hill Public Library Invited Lecture (November 2014)
- “A Painter’s Pen: A.Y. Jackson’s & the Great War, 1914-1964,” International Festival of Authors, Representing World War I: Perspectives at the Centenary, October, 2014
- “Hagiographic History?” George Drew and the Popularity of Postwar Aviation in Canada, *The Great War’s Shadow: New Perspectives on the First World War*, 27 September 2014.
- “‘Right up against it,’ Returned Men and the Ontario Canteen Fund, 1927-1939: A Case Study in Post-war Disappointment,” Bruce McCaffrey Memorial Graduate History Seminar Series, 7 November 2013.
- “Recording the War on Film,” Guest Lecture, Western University HIS 2179, 31 October 2012
- “The Making of an Indelible Record: Using the CWRO’s Photographic Archive,” Archivists Association of Ontario Conference, June 2012
- “An Indelible Record: The Uses (and Abuses?) of Canada’s Official First World War Photographs,” Canadian Historical Association, June 2012
- “The CWRO Photographic Section and the Picturing of Place after the Great War,” Bruce McCaffrey Memorial Graduate Seminar Series, October 2011
- “Northern Knights? The Myth of Canada’s Great War Airmen,” New Frontiers York Graduate History Conference