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## "For Weariness Cannot but Fill our Men after so long a Period of Hardship and Endurance:" War Weariness in the Canadian Corps in the First World 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 and Keywords

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My project explores war weariness in the First World War, especially as it pertains to the Canadian Corps. My first two chapters on the legal, disciplinary, and medical systems encountered by the Canadians in the war look at the army policies, structures and personnel in place to deal with morale, discipline, endurance, motivation, and medical problems. These structures served to 'measure' the problems facing individual soldiers and their units, and attempted to address these issues before they became more widespread and intractable. Policies were also put in place to mitigate emerging problems and to ensure that sufficient troops were in the line and able to perform their duties adequately. Unfortunately, these systems were often insufficient to deal with these emerging problems, and thus my next two chapters explore how these problems played out for the Canadian Corps in two periods: April-August 1917, and July-November 1918. These periods provide much insight into the contributing factors to the onset, development, and negative consequences of individual and collective war weariness, as well as mitigating factors that helped offset it. These two periods were also chosen to highlight the comparative nature of this project, whereby the experience of the Canadian Corps was juxtaposed with other major armies on the Western Front, as well as with Canadian forces over the course of the second half of the war. Just as other armies were suffering 'wear and tear' and indicating manifestations of incipient breakdown, the Canadians were able to carry on without substantial reductions in fighting effectiveness or large-scale indiscipline. The reasons why the Corps was able to prevail despite the emerging and collective war weariness will be explored in this project.

Keywords: war weariness, morale, discipline, combat motivation, endurance, combat effectiveness, shell shock, psychiatric casualties, PTSD, war neurosis, military medicine, military law, inability, reluctance, unwillingness, Western Front, Canadian Corps, Canadian Expeditionary Force, campaigns, Vimy Ridge, Hundred Days Campaign, mitigation, Western Front

## Epigraph

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“...war isn't worth the sacrifice...no war! It's hell and I often say to myself why does God allow all this?...I hope and trust that He will work wonders before many more weeks have gone, and that the war will end before our brave men who are in the trenches are doomed...We all want to see Germany crushed. That is so, but I hope and trust that something will happen that the struggle will be finished without much more bloodshed.”

-Private Bert Cooke, *First World War Diary*, 159-160

“I can't truthfully say that I felt any great sorrow at leaving the old bunch as there were very few of the old mob left due to casualties, also the food is much better and the quarters more comfortable...besides, in my opinion, I had already put in enough time 'up the line.'”

-Gunner Frank Byron Ferguson, *Diary*, 153

## Dedication

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*This project is dedicated to my grandfather, Arnold James Chase, who was born on 19 March 1927, and passed away on 29 August 2017 while I was still working on this dissertation. It is also dedicated to Dr. Brock Millman - a great educator, historian, and man.*

# Acknowledgments

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A project such as this, which has taken over half a decade to complete, would not be possible without the support and assistance from many different people along the way. It is thus my responsibility to recognise those who have helped me complete this dissertation, in ways both large and small. First of all, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Jonathan Vance. Dr. Vance has been a supportive and inspirational force; he has provided me with guidance, given me confidence in my abilities, and acted as a role model in my years at Western. In a more practical way, he has helped me become a better writer and better able to communicate my (often disjointed) ideas. Dr. Vance is the consummate professional, academic, historian, and teacher. His passion for and expertise in the history of Canada, social memory, and the war and society perspective are unparalleled. Dr. Vance is also a great person, who is very generous with his time, cheery, and good to talk to about junior hockey and music, amongst other topics.

I also need to thank professors and supervisors from my previous institutions. Historical learning is a cumulative process, and I have grown as both an historian and a person from all my years learning from some of the best in the field. From my years at Dalhousie University, I wish to thank: Drs. Jerry Bannister, Gregory Hanlon, Justin Roberts, and Sarah Jane-Corke. From the University of Calgary, I wish to thank: Drs. Ken MacMillan, Betsy Jameson, Holger Herwig, and my former-supervisor Pat Brennan. Some of you might not remember me, but I have taken lasting lessons from all of you in different ways.

I think it also important to recognise the professors who have helped me in myriad ways here at Western. Professor Geoff Stewart helped me with my comprehensive examinations, and was also great to chat about the Leafs with over a beer. Professors Reynard and Nathans helped me become a better TA and better historian in the process. Dr. Nathans also provided valuable and timely advice as I neared the completion of this current project; without his support and encouragement, my despair might have been substantial. Professor McKellar provided important feedback on the medical aspects of my dissertation, especially during my proposal defence, and Dr. Sendzikas gracefully agreed to act as second reader after the sudden passing of Dr. Millman. Professor

Millman was a consummate professional, and helped me develop as an historian in the capacity of course professor, TA supervisor, comprehensive examination supervisor, and ultimately second reader. His final email to me, even while battling cancer, provided valuable feedback, encouraged my work, and reaffirmed his interest in my subject matter, despite his health problems. He will be missed.

I also need to recognise the excellent work of the staff and administration of the history department. Chris Speed, though since retired, was invaluable to me in adjusting to Western. Heidi van Galen and especially Kara Brown have allowed me to concentrate on my own work and kept me organised and on top of things. Thank you for being so patient with my enquiries and annoyances. I could not have done it without you. Thanks also to the staff at the Weldon Library and other services on campus.

And finally, I need to thank and acknowledge my friends, family, and those in my personal life for all their help along the way. My parents, Pat and Vern, are veterinarians, lifelong learners, and just plain good people. They have supported me in myriad ways and encouraged me to follow my dreams. I know it was not always easy, but you helped me get through it and I could never thank you enough. My sisters, Andrea and Vanessa, with their spouses Georges and Ken, have also been crucial in my personal and professional development. Andrea and Georges gave me a place to stay while doing research in Ottawa, and always encouraged my academic development. I will remember the meals and house music, without a doubt. Vanessa and Ken were also very encouraging, gave me a place to stay, engaged me in good conversation, and challenged me to think of the world and my perspectives in new ways. My family has been an inspiration to me. My friends have also helped me maintain my sanity, and were there for me when I needed them. McCurdy, TP, Ayo, Cayley and Jamison, Chris, AT, Jony, Zeid and all the rest – thank you so much. And last but certainly not least, I need to thank my partner and fiancée, Danell. You were and continue to be always there for me, a solid foundation upon which I came to rely. You are such a great woman for putting up with me and my endless ramblings about the First World War. I love you.

It perhaps need not be stated that I would be unable to complete a project such as this without the unfailing support of those acknowledged above. And to paraphrase the

prolific American novelist Stephen King, ‘for the good stuff, credit them, but for the mistakes, blame me.’

Thank you.

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# List of Acronyms and Abbreviations Used in the Text

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ADMS – Assistant Director Medical Services  
ADS – Advanced Dressing Station  
APM – Assistant Provost Marshal  
AT – Anti-tank (guns or shells)  
AWL – Absent without Leave  
BEF – British Expeditionary Force  
CAMC – Canadian Army Medical Corps  
CASC – Canadian Army Service Corps  
CB – Confinement to Barracks  
CC – Confinement to Camp  
CCS – Casualty Clearing Station  
CEF – Canadian Expeditionary Force  
CIB – Canadian Infantry Brigade  
CMRs – Canadian Mounted Rifles  
CO – Commanding Officer  
CWM – Canadian War Museum  
C.W.R.O. – Canadian War Records Office  
DMS – Director of Medical Services  
DQ – Drocourt-Quéant, as in the DQ Line or DQ Switch  
DUASC – Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections  
FA – Field Ambulance  
FGCM – Field General Court Martial  
GOC – General Officer Commanding (a unit or military facility, like an army hospital)  
HE – High Explosive shells, as opposed to gas or shrapnel shells  
HMHS – His Majesty’s Hospital Ship  
HQ – Headquarters  
I.O.D.E. – Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire  
KIA – Killed in Action  
KRO – King’s Regulations and Orders  
LAC – Library and Archives Canada  
L.O.B. – Left out of Battle (group)  
MDS – Main Dressing Station  
MG – Machine Gun  
MIA – Missing in Action  
MO – Medical Officer  
MP – Military Police  
MSA – Military Service Act, the legal apparatus for conscription in Canada

NCO – Non-Commissioned Officer  
NWAC – National War Aims Committee  
N.Y.D.N. – Not Yet Diagnosed, Nervous  
OC – Officer Commanding  
OMFC – Overseas Military Forces of Canada  
ORs – Other Ranks  
PM – Prime Minister  
POW – Prisoner of War  
PPCLI – Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry  
PTSD – Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder  
RAF – Royal Air Force  
RAMC – Royal Army Medical Corps  
RAP – Regimental Aid Post  
RCR – Royal Canadian Regiment  
RFC – Royal Flying Corps  
RNAS – Royal Naval Air Service  
SBR – Small Box Respirator  
SIW – Self-Inflicted Wound  
TM – Trench Mortar  
US or USA – United States of America  
VD – Venereal Disease  
WD – War Diary  
YMCA – Young Men’s Christian Association

## Introduction

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The Canadian Corps and the larger Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) of which it was a part played an important role in the First World War. Some have argued that the Canadian Corps, the fighting branch of the CEF which by mid-1916 was composed of four infantry divisions plus affiliated units, arms, and services, played an outsized role for its relatively small size and strength. The Canadians were of course merely a constituent part of the larger British Expeditionary Force (BEF), and the British Army itself was but one of the major Entente powers in the war. The British Army also expanded rapidly during the course of the war, but there were growing pains related to this massive expansion. This was also a world war that had global implications and amounted to perhaps the first truly modern, industrial war. Numerous surveys and general histories of the war<sup>1</sup> attest to the developments both prior to and during the war itself, and the impact this had on the combatants and armies between 1914 and 1919. This was an exceedingly complex and multifaceted war, and entire volumes have been written, and continue to be published, on relatively narrow aspects of the conflict.

The industrialised nature of the war, the intersection of old and new military ideas coupled with the enormous wealth and technological prowess of the combatants, ensured a particularly bloody war. Furthermore, the recent military experience of the colonial powers and the atrophying of tactical thinking on the part of the Entente also played a role in the duration of the conflict. The advantages of the defensive over the offensive, aided by the use of quick-firing rifles and artillery with smokeless powder, barbed wire,

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<sup>1</sup> General histories of the war include: Ian F.W. Beckett, *The Great War: 1914-1918 – Second Edition* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2007); Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Peter Hart, *The Great War: A Combat History of the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Holger H. Herwig, *The First World War: Germany and Austria-Hungary 1914-1918 – Second Edition* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014); John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000); John H. Morrow Jr., *The Great War: An Imperial History – Centenary Edition* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014); Michael A. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War: A Global History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006); G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Dunhamel, 1962); William Philpott, *War of Attrition: Fighting the First World War* (New York: The Overlook Press, 2014); Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The First World War* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2004); G.D. Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory – The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Review, 2002); David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2012); Hew Strachan, ed., *World War I: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998) and John Terraine, *The Western Front: 1914-1918* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1964).

machine guns (MGs), trenches, and other defensive features, ensured this was a long, drawn-out attritional war. Millions would lose their lives before a decision was forced. Advances in communications and logistics allowed enormous concentrations of troops to be well-supplied with all the accoutrements of modern war. Vast improvements in the ability to wage, finance, and sustain war, however, were not matched by improvements in the ability of human beings to withstand war.

Combat on the Western Front put enormous pressures on the individuals and units expected to carry out orders and maintain cohesion in the face of trauma and mortal danger. This reality was a far cry from colonial skirmishes against mismatched and technologically inferior enemies. Because of the new reality of modern war and especially combat, soldiers were driven to, and beyond, the breaking point in unprecedented numbers. Psychiatric casualties and the detrimental impact of traumatic events had been noted in the past, such as railway and industrial accidents in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and war neuroses in the American Civil War. But this was on an entirely different scale. For the soldiers who did not succumb to shell shock and become debilitated in the long-term, many became war weary. War weariness can be said to have affected many of those very soldiers who were pushed to, but not yet beyond, the breaking point. It is these soldiers, primarily, that this project will assess.

The infantry at the front, especially, were exposed to several forces that constantly undermined their powers of resistance, and compromised their health and well-being. Trauma and terror, lice and vermin, the claustrophobia and privation of the trenches, explosions, snipers, gas, MGs and artillery, aerial bombardment, deprivation and hardship, the lack of proper sleep and food, and witnessing and participating in traumatic events all served to attack the morale and discipline of the soldiers. Individual soldiers as well as entire military units – and indeed, even whole armies and nations – could be described as war weary. War weariness is a concept that several historians discuss and secondary sources make use of,<sup>2</sup> but they seem to take for granted what this phenomenon

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<sup>2</sup> One historian, for instance, made reference to the “war weariness and despondency” of the French nation which spread to its troops during the mutinies. Another referred to the “war-weary veterans” of the PPCLI, and another to British troops as “war-weary” in the Hundred Days. References to “general war-weariness” in the German Army and

was and how it impacted the individuals and military units. Other historians sidestep the issue entirely, or only discuss it in passing. But what exactly is war weariness, and how did it impact the soldiers on the battlefield? Moreover, did war weariness look the same for every unit and every army that participated in the war? How did the war weariness of combatant soldiers at the front differ from the phenomenon as it developed behind the lines and on the lines of communication, if at all?<sup>3</sup>

## War Weariness in the First World War – Definitions and Parameters

War weariness at its most general and most basic can be understood as a negative reaction to the war, combat, and its effects. It might also be interpreted as a growing reluctance and unwillingness to continue, despite all the practical, legal, and social forces keeping soldiers with their units and at duty. Many soldiers at the time made use of particular expressions which reflected the erosion of strength and commitment to the war, even if they had been volunteers and formerly dedicated and keen. Some soldiers, for instance, stated that they were sick or tired of the war, that they were burnt-out,<sup>4</sup> or that their nerves were at the breaking point. Others suggested that they were fed up<sup>5</sup> and unwilling to continue. One infantry subaltern recalled General Haig's address in March

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the increase in desertion rates in the Russian Army “under the twin impacts of war weariness and excessive casualties suffered to little or no avail” were also made. See Anthony Babington, *For the Sake of Example: Capital Courts-Martial 1914-1920* (London: Leo Cooper, 1983), 117; David J. Bercuson, *The Patricians: The Proud History of a Fighting Regiment* (Don Mills: Stoddart Publishing Co. Ltd., 2001), 68; Jonathan Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany in 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 15, 93, 113; Dennis Showalter, “World War I,” in *The Reader's Companion to Military History* edited by Robert Cowley and Geoffrey Parker (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company and The Society for Military History, 1996), 521-526 and Hart, *The Great War*, 247.

<sup>3</sup> This dissertation will focus primarily upon the combat infantry and other soldiers at the front, but examples and comparisons with other forces, arms, and services can also be instructive.

<sup>4</sup> Many soldiers also made reference to weariness as exhaustion and physical fatigue, especially as it negatively affected attitude, behaviour, and decision-making. See, for example, Cate, ed., *A Soldier's Memoir of World War I*, 48, 64.

<sup>5</sup> A soldier of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion said that during the final months of the war “everybody was fed up of course” by that point in the war. Another recalled that “I was getting pretty fed up and thinking that I'd sooner be going to the rear than [back] to the front.” And one wrote in the final months that “the war is lasting too long...we're fed up! Everybody! All fed up!” LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume 9, Interview with W.P. Dodds of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, page 15; Ibid, Volume 7, Interview with Guy Mills of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 2, and LAC, MG 30 E 113, ‘Back to Blighty,’ George V. Bell Diary, 112.

1918 to his “battle-worn troops in the darkest hour of the war.”<sup>6</sup> And a civilian observer in Berlin made reference to the German Army as “tired and worn-out,”<sup>7</sup> reflecting the fact that collective war weariness caused problems by the final months of the war. Still another soldier admitted that the troops of the 20<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion were “weary and depressed by the losses sustained” at Cambrai, and that the troops were experiencing “combat-weary disillusionment” in the latter stages of the war.<sup>8</sup> And even before 1918, soldiers were expressing discontent and a desire to an end to the war,<sup>9</sup> or at least their own participation in it. Duncan MacDonald, for example, wrote on 8 September 1917 to his daughter Margaret that “I feel particularly ‘fed up’ with this job today and wish the war was over, or that I was going to Canada for furlough.” A little over a fortnight later he wrote that “I would like to see peace and get home safe again, as well as anybody, but I would hate to quit without beating the Germans decisively,”<sup>10</sup> highlighting this tension facing most soldiers. Despite the war weariness of the troops, many were still committed to the cause, even if they no longer personally wanted to participate in the war.<sup>11</sup> And archival sources and firsthand accounts also made reference to “war worn officers,” a “war-sick army,” “battle wearied troops” in the Hundred Days, and the “weariness of

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<sup>6</sup> Charles Douie, *The Weary Road: Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry* (Stevenage: The Strong Oak Press Ltd., 1988), 3. Another soldier wrote of “battle-weary French and British” units which limited the success at Amiens in August 1918. Walsh, *The First World War Diary of Private Bert Cooke*, 154.

<sup>7</sup> Princess Evelyn Blücher, *An English Wife in Berlin: A Private Memoir of Events, Politics, and Daily Life in Germany throughout the War and the Social Revolution of 1918* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1920), 277. This phrase was also found in archival sources pertaining to Canadian troops. See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4675, Extracts from Chaplains’ Reports, ‘Work of Chaplains in France, R.C.’

<sup>8</sup> Major D.J. Corrigall, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment): Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Stone & Cox Limited, 1935), 265 and Audrey and Paul Grescoe, eds., *The Book of War Letters: 100 Years of Private Canadian Correspondence* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2003), 6. See also Scott, *The Great War as I Saw It* for expressions of “weary” men.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, McGrath, *World War I Diary of William Hannaford Ball*, 108, 148. And when he finally left Liverpool for home, he wrote “we are realizing what we have looked forward to for many a long day.”

<sup>10</sup> On 31 July MacDonald also wrote that “I wish that I was home to pay a visit.” Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections [hereafter DUASC], Duncan Chisholm MacDonald Fonds, Collection No. MS-2-520, Box 1, Folder 1-3, Letters of 31 July 1917, 8 September 1917, and 24 September 1917.

<sup>11</sup> This was a view also reflected by the Canadian Corps Commander Sir Arthur Currie after the war. He stated that “you cannot understand how sick we all were of the war, nor our anxiety of finishing it as soon as possible, if there was any chance of success. Your sons and brothers wanted to see it out. They wanted to be done with this cursed thing. They never want to see any more war.” John Robert Colombo, ed., *Colombo’s Canadian Quotations* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, n.d.), 135. Private James Brown of the 89<sup>th</sup> Battalion also wrote that “the more we see of war and its results the less a man wants to see of it and the more he feels that we have got to win and put an end to the idiotic delusion that war is a method of settling disputes.” Grescoe, *The Book of War Letters*, 187.



war.”<sup>12</sup> Many euphemisms suggested war weariness, without actually making use of the term itself.<sup>13</sup> War weariness might also include physical elements, such as exhaustion and fatigue, but was more a state of mind, reflecting emotional, mental, or psychological exhaustion. And of course all soldiers grumbled, grouched, and complained, which partly acted as an outlet for stress, but it was sustained criticism of the war and its prosecution, continued ill-feeling toward the army or its officers, a lack of enthusiasm, and cumulative stress that wore down even the most committed volunteers which reflected war weariness.

It must also be understood that not all those individuals who were war weary necessarily desired an end to the war. Revolutionary agitation and pacifism affected some soldiers, to be sure, but certainly not the majority. Many of these war-weary soldiers remained committed to the cause and loyal to their governments, but were realistic about their own abilities to continue at the front. In a sense, then, the personal acknowledgment of war weariness and its negative implications was actually an act of patriotism and loyalty, as these soldiers understood that increasingly war-weary troops were a liability to others in the unit – and to themselves. This individual expression of war weariness, moreover, was often more about their own participation in the war, not opposition to the war itself, though it did sometimes transmute into an anti-war or pacifist attitude.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Another document instructed chaplains of the need to “cheer and hearten the soldiers in their privations and perils,” as “this will be the most critical period of the war. For weariness cannot but fill our men after so long a period of hardship and endurance.” Moreover, “weariness can best be combated by garrisoning the soul of the Army. The war has now become a combat of endurance...[and the men need] strength of will to endure to the end.” See LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 3, Volume 941, E-72-3, Establishment Canadian Corps Reinforcement Camp, ‘Canadian Corps M.G. 9-2/304, 15 June 1918;’ LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4666, Chaplain Service, Last 100 Days, ‘The Final Advance (7<sup>th</sup> October to 11<sup>th</sup> November);’ Ibid, Volume 4648, England 1917-1919, ‘Administration’ and Ibid, Volume 4663, Publicity, various newspaper clippings; Cate, ed., *A Soldier’s Memoir of World War I*, 61, and Steward, *An Infantryman on the Western Front*, 166.

<sup>13</sup> For primary source references see Rogers, ed., *Gunner Ferguson’s Diary*, 126. Secondary source references to war weariness, without actually using the term, are found in John Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage – The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle 1915* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1967), 101; Rachel Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 220, 233; Martin Gilbert, *The Battle of the Somme: The Heroism and Horror of War* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 246; Richard Holmes, *Firing Line* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1985), 215, 325 and Maj.-Gen. F.M. Richardson, *Fighting Spirit: A Study of Psychological Factors in War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1978), 34, 75-77, 121-122.

<sup>14</sup> One soldier, for instance, wrote of “the ghastly senselessness of ‘civilized’ warfare.” Another admitted that “I for one think war is an awful thing in these enlightened days,” and wondered why disputes cannot be settled without bloodshed. Another admitted in late 1917 that he became “a confirmed pacifist from this time on.” And another wrote “damn this dirty, lousy, stinking bloody war” in his diary. See Charles C. Cate, ed., *Notes: A Soldier’s Memoir of World War I* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2005), 40; Milly Walsh and John Callan, *We’re Not Dead Yet: The First World War*

Private Bert Cooke, for instance, wrote during the final months of the war that “war isn’t worth the sacrifice,” and hoped the war would “end before our brave men who are in the trenches are doomed.” He reaffirmed his belief in the cause, however, writing that “we all want to see Germany crushed...but I hope and trust that something will happen that the struggle will be finished without much more bloodshed.”<sup>15</sup> Protests and collective indiscipline could have a political or revolutionary element, but more often than not were based on mundane issues such as the inadequacy of leave, poor rations, ineffective leadership, unsuccessful tactics, and the like.

War weariness was also related to the impact of the war on individuals, whether that manifested itself in medical, political, disciplinary/legal, or social problems. Most soldiers and civilians existed on a spectrum, whether in the war zone, along the lines of communication, or on the home front far from combat. Historians often examine the soldiers on the extreme ends of the spectrum, but this project seeks to interrogate the experiences of those in the middle but perhaps approaching breakdown. This not only constituted the majority of soldiers during the war, it also seems to be a group that has heretofore been largely ignored. On the one extreme end of the spectrum were the soldiers best described as ideal warriors or happy soldiers: those who were able to endure war and combat for extended periods of time without undue health problems, and perhaps even came to *enjoy* killing and combat.<sup>16</sup> The other extreme end of the spectrum included the soldiers who were debilitated by combat, made useless by acute exposure to intense stimuli or the cumulative impact of the stresses and strains of war.<sup>17</sup> In many cases, war-

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*Diary of Private Bert Cooke* (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2004), 157; Rogers, ed., *Gunner Ferguson's Diary*, 128 and LAC, MG 30, Volume E 113, 'Back to Blighty,' George V. Bell Diary, 135.

<sup>15</sup> Walsh, *The First World War Diary of Private Bert Cooke*, 159-160.

<sup>16</sup> One researcher argued that only around 2% of soldiers were able to stand sustained combat, and these were those who were predisposed toward “aggressive psychopathic personalities.” Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society – Revised Edition* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2009), 44. Another historian defines the ‘Happy Warrior’ as those soldiers who were confident and cheery “despite the grim ordeals of battle.” Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 114.

<sup>17</sup> Some works on shell shock include: Richard A. Gabriel, *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987); Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Paul Lerner, *Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003); Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-1930* (London: Continuum Books, 2010); Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001) and Alexander

weariness were at a point prior to shell shock debilitation, were being worn down and becoming less effective soldiers, but had not yet reached the point of complete futility. In this sense, war weariness was the penultimate step before complete breakdown.

Another way to look at this spectrum is to identify the healthy, committed, 'fresh' troops on the one extreme end, and total shell shock debilitation and uselessness as a soldier on the other. Those suffering from war weariness, however, fell somewhere in between, but likely closer to breakdown.<sup>18</sup> War-weary troops could carry on and continue to be effective soldiers, but might be less committed, were reluctant, or unwilling to follow orders as closely as in the past. Perhaps the main distinction was that war-weary soldiers were mostly *able* to carry on with duty, though they might be increasingly *reluctant* and *unwilling*, whereas debilitated shell-shocked soldiers were largely *unable* to continue at the front. In my estimation, this is the best way to approach the concept of war weariness and the impact of combat, and the war more generally, on the individual; it is also the main definition or understanding of war weariness that I will use throughout. One of the main issues addressed in this project thus examines when willingness to continue became the unwillingness to endure. This was of course different for every individual, but general trends and patterns can be discerned.

It is also important to understand that there were both contributing factors and preconditions for war weariness, as well as manifestations and its effects. The context and situation was crucial. To provide but one example, heavy casualties could both contribute to, and mitigate the worst effects of war weariness. In terms of contributing to the onset of war weariness, heavy casualties could have an enormous psychological impact on the surviving troops who perhaps witnessed the death of close friends and comrades, but also put more pressure on the remaining soldiers of the unit. But heavy casualties also had the effect of removing the most war-weary and worn-down soldiers, leaving more space for younger or less-experienced, and thus less worn, troops.

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Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). See the bibliography for journal articles and other sources as well.

<sup>18</sup> Historian Joanna Bourke suggested that there was a fine line between war weariness (apathy, indifference, and fatalism) and shell shock. Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (Emeryville: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006), 216.

War weariness could affect individuals, combat soldiers and non-combatants, and entire military units. Moreover, although it is largely outside the scope of this project, war weariness impacted both soldiers in uniform, and civilians on the home front.<sup>19</sup> The phenomenon played out somewhat differently on the home front, but soldiers and civilians faced hardships and pressures due to the war which undermined commitment and morale. The prospect of ultimate victory and tangible successes on the battlefield, however, helped the Entente sustain support longer than their Central Power opponents. War weariness also afflicted the other national armies in the war. In the Russian army, for example, there was an enormous gap between officers and other ranks and the harsh conditions facing the regular Russian infantryman eroded confidence in the officer corps. These issues were also compounded by other deep-rooted problems in the Russian army and wider society. The Belgian army experienced the negative long-term effects of war and occupation, and the Italian and Austro-Hungarian<sup>20</sup> armies also exhibited growing signs of war weariness by the final years of the war. Indeed, as historian William Philpott argued in *War of Attrition: Fighting the First World War*, despite perceptions of relative strength “the reality was that all armies were on their last legs come 1918, with the exception of the slowly growing and green American army and the small Belgian army.”<sup>21</sup>

Individual war weariness could lead to or contribute to numerous problems amongst soldiers at the front. Long-term service in the army, and especially at the front, contributed to issues such as apathy; loss of will, commitment, or endurance; psychological breakdown; undue caution or recklessness; fatalism;<sup>22</sup> health problems such as psychiatric injuries, and other aspects that undermined the effectiveness of the

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<sup>19</sup> See Haste, *Keep the Home Fires Burning*, 2-4, 141. Rationing, censorship, endless casualty lists, food and fuel shortages began to take their toll on civilians, and entire societies and nations became war weary. Ultimately, the commitment toward the war effort and the ruling regime began to become more tenuous and provisional. Unions and other groups exploited this situation to extract concessions from the government, though most civilians continued to remain largely loyal and only refused further support after the failure and futility of the war became evident.

<sup>20</sup> Fiona Reid and Christine Van Everbroeck, “Shell Shock and the Kloppe: War Neuroses amongst British and Belgian Troops during and after the First World War,” *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 30, 4 (2014): 252-275.

See also Herwig, *The First World War*, especially chapter 9 for the Habsburg forces.

<sup>21</sup> Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 311.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage: The Classic WWI Account of the Psychological Effects of War* (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2007), 31, 44, 51, 119 and Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 125.

soldier. A contemporary poem on apathy provides a good glimpse into some of the negative implications of this attitude and emotion at the front:

In lies in the valley of what's-the-use,  
 In the province of Let-er-slide,  
 That tired feeling is native there,  
 It's the home of the listless I-don't-care  
 Where the Put-it-offs abide.<sup>23</sup>

This lack of concern and commitment on the part of apathetic and disinterested soldiers, worn down by years of service, could be detrimental to his unit, even compromising the ability to follow orders and do one's duty. Apathy and exhaustion could also undermine commitment, with a soldier of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion commenting that "I lost all interest in the war...I just wanted to sit down and be allowed to rest awhile."<sup>24</sup>

Collective war weariness had similar attributes, but could be even more dangerous as large numbers of troops decided that their commitment to the war was increasingly uncertain. This collective war weariness could thus lead to large-scale collapse, manifesting in voluntary surrenders or disciplinary problems, or poor performance on the battlefield. More dangerously, however, collective war weariness could contribute to the adoption of apathetic, anti-war, anti-government, or even revolutionary attitudes. Some soldiers came to question the war itself, as well as its purpose, prosecution, cost, and implications. The case of Germany and the German Army in the final months of the war is an example, as is the Russian disintegration and slide into revolution which were both directly and indirectly related to the war effort.

War weariness was also directly and indirectly related to the morale, discipline, combat motivation, battlefield effectiveness and efficiency, and endurance of the soldiers. War weariness can be understood broadly as the erosion of strength, endurance, and commitment of the soldiers afflicted, and the increasingly tenuous support for the war and

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<sup>23</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4555, Folder 4, File 3, Poems, 'In Flanders Fields, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, CAMC.' John Becker also expressed apathy in the late stages of the war. He also wrote that he was "fed up." See Norm Christie, ed., *Silhouettes of the Great War: The Memoir of John Harold Becker 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2001), 196-197.

<sup>24</sup> LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume 9, Interview with K.G. Blackader of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, page 14.

one's own continued participation in it. The factors contributing to this phenomenon were various, and included heavy casualties; exhaustion and the lack of proper rest and insufficient leave and rotation policies; the mental and psychological state of the soldiers; the nature, pace, and intensity of combat on the Western Front; and the rhetoric employed, expectations, and orders issued by superiors and the High Command. War weariness also manifested itself in numerous ways, including disciplinary and legal problems, such as insubordination and indiscipline, cowardice, desertion, self-inflicted wounds (SIWs); collective decline; heavy casualties; poor performance on the battlefield; medical problems; apathy, the lack of enthusiasm or vigour of the troops;<sup>25</sup> the words, actions, and attitudes of the soldiers; increasing caution and reluctance to perform regular duties; unwillingness and the reduction of participation; the desire to evade duty or escape the trenches;<sup>26</sup> morale issues; and eventual breakdown. If war-weary soldiers were forced to remain at the front and pushed beyond the breaking point, it seems that shell shock debilitation and serious health and medical problems were all but inevitable. This was just one reason why the medical and military authorities needed to be cognizant of these problems, and to monitor and if necessary intervene to prevent war weariness from transmuting into serious shell shock and other problems.

War weariness also affected entire armies, nations, and societies after a certain period of time. There was of course no definite amount of time that needed to pass before large groups of people became war weary; each case was different, and each army and nation faced unique and general challenges pertaining to the war. In Russia, for instance, by 1917 and certainly early 1918, the people were suffering from exhaustion, bankruptcy,

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<sup>25</sup> Prior to going into the line for the first time, James Adams of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion was nervous but excited. By mid-September 1918, however, he wrote that since arriving in France "I have not always been in the best of spirits," but still did not regret being sent to the front. And in late September he wrote that any "spark I brought to this adventure [was] all but gone...[and] some rest will surely send it roaring again. But for now it is a struggle to merely keeping it lit." Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 127, 134.

<sup>26</sup> The evasion of duty and the desire to escape the trenches and continued service at the front could take various forms. One soldier wrote that during a period of action some soldiers "ran about bewildered, and some 'just naturally' disappeared, to be rounded up later covered in mud and dirt." Cate, ed., *A Soldier's Memoir of World War I*, 39. Soldiers could desert, go AWL, or refuse to participate in action, for example, or could remove themselves from combat through SIWs or self-inflicted illnesses. Other soldiers sought to willingly surrender to the enemy, or feign sickness or illness. Some war weary and shell shocked troops, moreover, decided on a permanent solution and took their own lives.

and starvation,<sup>27</sup> all contributing factors toward war weariness and the defeat of its Army on the Eastern Front. Other indicators and manifestations of war weariness amongst the Russian civilian and soldier population were evident as well. The development of war weariness in the Russian Army was based on internal difficulties, but also as a response to external realities and the wider war situation. The Russians were seriously outclassed by the German Army, and when the latter launched *Operation Albion* in October 1917 it “promote[d] war weariness and despair amidst the Russian ranks.”<sup>28</sup> And another historian argued that the mutiny in the 223<sup>rd</sup> Odoevskii Regiment in the autumn of 1916 was “caused primarily by battle fatigue and war weariness rather than revolutionary agitation” amongst the troops.<sup>29</sup> This ‘revolutionary agitation’ would come later, and also affected rear-echelon units and army administrative personnel. The Russians were the first to collapse because of the cumulative stresses and strains on the people, its army, economy, and social institutions, but they were not the last. General Erich Ludendorff, the de facto ruler of Germany’s army by 1918, also wrote of problems on the home front<sup>30</sup> and amongst his troops. Further fighting relied heavily on the maintenance of morale and discipline, and the soldiers needed strength and determination to counter increasing Allied (material) strength. The problem, however, was that “the armistice offer had had an unfavourable effect on the men’s spirits, and war weariness had increased”

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<sup>27</sup> Charles F. Horne and Walter F. Austin, eds., *Source Records of the Great War: Volume VI 1918* (Unknown Place of Publication: National Alumni, 1923), xiv.

<sup>28</sup> Hart, *The Great War*, 302.

<sup>29</sup> Beckett, *The Great War*, 522.

<sup>30</sup> This is an issue discussed by historians in secondary sources as well. Herwig, for instance, wrote that hunger, “war weariness,” and uneven food distribution hurt the ‘public mood’ in Germany over time. He wrote, moreover, that industrial strikes in 1918 were caused by hunger, cold, and war weariness. Herwig, *The First World War*, 287, 366. Another historian noted that the German nation will was undermined after the acceptance of the justice of the war “transmuted” into war weariness. Furthermore, because of hardships on the home front, support for the war became increasingly conditional, with casualty lists, food shortages, “war-weary” civilians in bread queues, and people asking if it was all worth it. There was “war weariness and the longing for peace that went with it...[it] reached epidemic proportions during 1917 now that peace was mooted.” Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 8, 287.

significantly.<sup>31</sup> Other historians have also made references to war weariness in the nations and armies of Italy, France,<sup>32</sup> Bulgaria, Austria-Hungary,<sup>33</sup> and Great Britain.

The experience of war weariness in the British Army is particularly instructive, as the Canadians were part of the British Army and there were substantial cultural, historical, and social connections between the two countries. Canada at the time was also legally and culturally a part of the wider British Empire. The Canadian forces were modelled on the British Army, and shared much of the same equipment and weapons. Much of Canada's First Contingent, moreover, was British-born and British-led. The English-speaking soldiers in the Corps included many Anglophiles; many still had family or friends in the UK. Some of the lessons for the British Army could also be applied to the Canadian forces. Historian David Englander, for instance, argued that leave was more "than just a respite for war-weary troops," as it also reaffirmed their humanity and individuality.<sup>34</sup> Another historian noted the connections between the home front and battle front. Soldier morale and the will to continue fighting, for example, could be eroded by war weariness and "flagging support at home." And despite the hardships and growing war weariness on the British home front, the pro-war consensus was maintained

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<sup>31</sup> General Ludendorff, *My War Memories 1914-1918 – Volume II* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1919), 745. Historian Nick Lloyd also wrote that after the failure of the German Spring Offensives to end the war, confidence and high morale gave way to "extremely widespread war-weariness, glumness and despondency." And by October 1918 German POWs were 'war-weary and war-sick.' Nick Lloyd, *Hundred Days: The Campaign That Ended World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 2014), 91, 203.

<sup>32</sup> For war weariness in France and the French Army, see Hart, *The Great War*, 339 and Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 291, who argued that the French mutinies were "one manifestation of the general war weariness that gripped Europe during 1917." Regarding Italian war weariness, one researcher noted that propaganda targeted "war-weary" Italian conscripts to great effect. Charles Roetter, *The Art of Psychological Warfare 1914-1945* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974), 76.

<sup>33</sup> War weariness in Austria-Hungary and its armies has also been noted by historians. Mark Cornwall, for example, referred to "general war-weariness" and the "rigours of army life" as combining with problems on the home front to hurt the morale and discipline of the Habsburg forces. War weariness and food crises hurt morale, and troop morale was also compromised by war weariness, nationalist agitation, food and clothing shortages, and nurtured by enemy propaganda. Mark Cornwall, "Morale and Patriotism in the Austro-Hungarian Army, 1914-1918," in *State, Society and Mobilization in Europe during the First World War* edited by John Horne (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 177, 181, 188. Another historian noted that people on the home front, especially amongst the Central Powers, were "war weary," and that there was growing war weariness "within the European belligerents' populations" by the end of 1917. A decline in the support for the war and a general strike was "inspired by" war weariness. There was also a naval mutiny in February 1918 and industrial strikes in the heartland. Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 253, 281, 317. The Bulgarian collapse in late 1918 has also been attributed to "war-weariness, poor morale and a shortage of food and clothing," but there were other factors as well. G.D. Sheppard, "Aleksander Stamboliski and the Bulgarian Contract," *History Today*, 65, 9 (September 2015): 28-30.

<sup>34</sup> David Englander, "Discipline and Morale in the British Army, 1917-1918," in *State, Society and Mobilization* ed. by Horne, 137.



by censorship, propaganda, and war prosperity. Furthermore, despite a “considerable degree of war-weariness” late in the war, fighting spirit was preserved at sufficient levels at least until the cessation of hostilities.<sup>35</sup>

The onset of war weariness in the British Army was also acknowledged by medical and military authorities. A December 1917 report on the British armies in France concluded that “war-weariness there is, and an almost universal longing for peace but there is a strong current of feeling that only one kind of peace is possible and that the time is not yet come” to end the war.<sup>36</sup> Therefore despite war weariness, some troops found the inner strength, coping mechanisms, and moral props to carry on with duty, even if their performance was compromised. And as more soldiers became war weary and the war continued into 1918, there was increasing evidence of poor performance on the battlefield. Historian Alexander Watson argued that the poor performance of the BEF in the spring of 1918 was based on “the legacy of despondency and war weariness”<sup>37</sup> from Third Ypres and other pyrrhic victories.

The experience of war weariness illustrates another important point regarding the phenomenon, namely that it affected both victorious and defeated armies. Success certainly helped mitigate the worst effects of war weariness on both an individual and collective level, but it was no panacea. The prospect of ultimate victory in the war and evidence of success on the battlefield helped sustain some soldiers, but the stresses and strains of combat wore them down nonetheless. In many ways, the Canadian soldiers and the Corps itself was successful and ultimately victorious *despite* the onset and negative consequences of war weariness. Indeed, by 1918 all armies were worn out, perhaps save the American forces.<sup>38</sup> The comparison between the worn-out Entente forces and their new American allies was made by other historians as well. Anthony Kellett argued that

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<sup>35</sup> Anthony Kellett, *Combat Motivation: The Behaviour of Soldiers in Battle* (Boston: Kluwer Nijhoff Publishing, 1982), 177, 180, 265. Another historian also wrote of “times of profound war-weariness in the British Army” throughout the war. Gerard Christopher Oram, *Military Executions During World War I* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 169.

<sup>36</sup> Oram, *Military Executions*, 95.

<sup>37</sup> Watson, *Enduring the Great War*.

<sup>38</sup> It should also be noted that the US forces were no more effective than the others on the Western Front, and perhaps less so than the Canadians. Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 311.

US troops in mid-1918 were “markedly enthusiastic compared with their war-weary allies,” and Canadian soldier Coningsby Dawson stated that the troops at the front looked to the US for firmness and resolve “for the reason that she is not [yet] war-weary,” unlike the Entente forces and their soldiers.<sup>39</sup>

The study of war weariness is aided by recognition that this phenomenon also affected the Canadian home front and had an impact into the post-Armistice period. After years of war and with no end in sight, the Canadian home front became increasingly affected by war weariness. As historian Jack Granatstein argued, “Canadians at home were weary of war” by 1917.<sup>40</sup> The seemingly endless casualty lists, shortages, prohibition, corruption, and profiteering were all contributing factors. Following the cessation of hostilities with the signing of the Armistice in November 1918, moreover, evidence of war weariness continued, despite the fact that the war was all but over. The soldiers, however, were experiencing the inevitable reaction from years of combat and were still in khaki, far from home, and still subject to military discipline. As a member of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion explained, by March of 1919 he was “fed up” with army life and just wanted to be demobilised and return home.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, disciplinary problems and ‘disturbances’ in the post-Armistice period involving Canadian troops, such as that at Witley and Rhyl Camp in the UK, suggest lingering discontent coupled with the absence of a cause to fight for. One officer explained the problems:

In dealing with troops at the present stage, the psychological factor enters very materially into the proper control of the men, i.e. it is essential to understand the man’s peculiar attitude of mind produced by *the relaxation of war strain and his desire for his home and work*.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 297 and Coningsby Dawson, *Living Bayonets: A Record of the Last Push* (New York: John Lane Company, 1919), 215-216.

<sup>40</sup> Jack Granatstein, *The Greatest Victory: Canada’s One Hundred Days* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2014), 76.

<sup>41</sup> Marjorie Barron Norris, ed., *Medicine and Duty: The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill, Medical Officer, 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion CEF* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 341. Another soldier remembered that by the end of the war “I had had about enough by that time” and just wanted to return home. LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume 12, Interview with F.W. Kirkland of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, page 8.

<sup>42</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-18-14, Discipline Generally, A.D.M.S., England, Report dated 27 February 1919.

This war-weary attitude seemed to be based on the fact that the war was won, but not yet over. The soldiers were expected to remain at duty well into the new year, and they were still far from their homes and loved ones. In this period, prior to demobilisation and transport back to Canada, the soldiers “simply wanted to go home” as soon as possible.<sup>43</sup>

The problems that affected Canadian troops following the Armistice also affected the other victorious powers as well. The British, for instance, were unwilling to commit too heavily to the Western intervention in Russia on behalf of the White Army. According to one historian, by 1919 Britain “was weary of war,” as the “carnage and privation of the First World War had drained all enthusiasm for large-scale military ventures” and operations.<sup>44</sup> Because war weariness affected both victorious and defeated armies, and was present on multiple home fronts, it is safe to conclude that it also affected the Canadian Corps, despite claims to Canadian exceptionalism and the fact that they were ultimately victorious. These concepts are not mutually exclusive, and it seems the Canadians were successful despite war weariness. This dissertation will explore war weariness in the Corps and how this impacted both individuals and military units.

## The Important Connections between the Home and Battle Fronts

In addition to the impact of war weariness on combat soldiers, the phenomenon was also experienced by non-soldiers and civilians on various home fronts affiliated with the war effort. All troops were exposed to the stresses and strains of war, and thus faced the impact of war weariness, but this also affected the collective. An examination of war weariness in other armies allows for a comparison with the experiences of the Canadians. Indeed, as the other main combatants on the Western Front, the British, French, and German armies – having been in the field in substantial strength since 1914 – could be said to have experienced substantial and widespread war weariness amongst its troops prior to the extensive development of the same phenomenon amongst Canadians. And as the Canadian Corps and the wider CEF was but a constituent component of the British

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<sup>43</sup> Granatstein, *Canada's One Hundred Days*.

<sup>44</sup> David Greentree, “The Kronstadt Raid, 1919,” *Military History Monthly*, Issue 79, April 2017: 50-52.

Army, one can also interrogate the experiences facing the British armies to get a better understanding of specific members of those armies, such as the Canadian troops. And though a majority of Canada's First Contingent were British-born,<sup>45</sup> over time the proportion of Canadian-born troops increased, and throughout the war there was certainly a perceptible increase in awareness of a unique (or at least distinct) Canadian identity and nationality.

An examination of the various home fronts also provides the historian with the opportunity to chart the growth and increasing impact of war weariness on these fronts, as well as identify the important connections between the home front and battle front. Censorship documents and reports on civilian morale allow the researcher to gauge the level of motivation and commitment to the war effort amongst civilians and others at home. The opinions and well-being of serving soldiers, and essential war workers and others, was crucial for the maintenance of the pro-war consensus. This evidence, suggestive and anecdotal but likely never comprehensive, provides a window into the negative effect of war weariness on the home front, and the erosion of endurance and the real, tangible impact of the war on the civilians at home. And though there have been arguments and debates as to whether the war was a genuine total war, it is undeniable that this conflict placed unprecedented demands on regular members of society back home. The frequent casualty lists, the loss of loved ones, the disruption of regular life, the shortages and hardships, the suspicions and anxiety, the rationing, and sense of uncertainty wore on even the strongest members of society.

The various links between the home fronts and battle fronts is also an important aspect in assessing the impact, extent, and implications of war weariness. An increase of war weariness on the home front, manifested for instance in an outbreak of food riots or worker grievances (sometimes political in nature), could also have a negative impact on

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<sup>45</sup> The majority of the First Canadian Contingent of 30,617 were British-born (18,495), or around 60% of the total. There were 9,159 Canadian-born men (or just under 30%), with the balance being born in other British colonies, the United States, or did not provide a country of birth. By the war's end, "the total number of Canadian enlistees had risen to just over fifty percent." Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916 – Volume I* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2007), 28-29, citing LAC, RG 24, Volume 1810, GAQ 2-1, v. 1, Enlistment 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Contingent.

the troops of that nation stationed at the front, or in even in the armed forces more generally. After the *Treaty of Brest-Litovsk* in 1918, for example, German and other Central Power troops in transit from the Eastern to the Western Front were exposed to the increasingly tough conditions facing civilians and even military personnel in the Reich. Moreover, despite the best efforts of censorship officials and political indoctrination<sup>46</sup> or propaganda, the curtailing of leave, and the increasing armed forces control over the civilian population, discontent on the battle fronts came to be known on the home fronts as well. The fall of commitment and worsening of conditions on one front could not have failed to impact the other front, in myriad and increasingly disruptive ways. In this sense, war weariness on the home front could induce, encourage, or reinforce that same development on the battle front, and vice-versa. And as the First World War was a global, total war, these links had an increased importance compared with earlier, limited, localised, or rapidly-concluding conflicts. The importance of the links between the home and the battle fronts was articulated elegantly in the words of historian Brock Millman,

...modern warfare is not a conflict of armies so much as a contest of societies. Defeat can come as much from the collapse of the home front as from military failure. The maintenance of a nation's *will* to fight is as important as its physical *ability* to continue the struggle. Total war...broadens the scope of the conflict and links aspects of the contest in an organic manner, to the point where weakness anywhere can become weakness everywhere. Lack of military success can easily give rise to dissent on the home front, which, taking the form of industrial unrest, may deprive the army of those things it requires to prevent new and greater defeats. Failure on the home front is therefore as likely to produce total disaster as is defeat at the battle front.<sup>47</sup>

And historians M.L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor argued that the reality of total war ensured that large segments of the population now had a direct interest in, and direct

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<sup>46</sup> Even by the summer and autumn of 1917 German Quartermaster General Erich Ludendorff wrote in his memoirs of the need to focus on the morale of the troops, especially those on the lines of communication. He worried that their endurance was faltering, and that there was an increased need for 'patriotic instruction' for the troops, a euphemism for political indoctrination and propaganda. See General Ludendorff, *My War Memories 1914-1918 – Volume II* (London: Hutchison & Co., 1919), 461.

<sup>47</sup> My italics. Brock Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent in First World War Britain* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2000), 1.

impact on, the fighting and combat on the Western Front. The fighting in Europe now came to affect these civilians on the home front in unprecedented ways as well. They asserted that “during the war, sections of the community which had previously remained uninvolved in the exigencies of national survival had found themselves directly affected by events at the front line,” and that in a total war the gap between soldier and civilian “narrowed substantially.”<sup>48</sup>

And as the war was also a modern, industrial war, requiring the mobilization of the entire resources of the state, the importance of the home front for the fighting forces only increased. As British historian Bernard Waites argued in *A Class Society at War: England 1914-1918*, the attritional strategy of the war guaranteed much loss of life and increased stress on the population and resources of the home front. This was crucial to the overall development of the war, as “the elusiveness of a resolution to the war on the battlefield meant that the home fronts acquired ever greater significance as the stalemate was prolonged.”<sup>49</sup> The nature and extent of the conflict ensured an increased importance of the home front on the soldiers in the line and on the lines of communication. The links between the home fronts and battle fronts can only be taken so far, however. Civilians back home in Germany, for example, faced some different problems than their soldier counterparts fighting at the front. Moreover, the nature of military service and the practical realities of soldiering meant that war weariness was partly manifested in different ways on the battle front as opposed to the home front. The political tools used to mitigate or attempt to neutralise the worst effects of war weariness on the home front might also have differed from the institutional methods of the nation’s military leaders to deal with the similar problems at the front. Additionally, the powers and extent of military authority were partly different from those of political or national authority in Germany, though it could be argued the militaristic nature of German society and the increasing sway of military leaders over the political realm nullified this distinction over time.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> M.L. Sanders and Philip M. Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1982), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Bernard Waites, *A Class Society at War: England 1914-1918* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987), 273.

<sup>50</sup> On 13 July 1917 Paul von Hindenburg and Erich Ludendorff forced the resignation of Theobald Bethmann-Hollweg as German Chancellor, who were displeased with his approach to the war effort. This has sometimes been referred to as

The war weariness on the home fronts and in each national context provide some insights into the phenomenon of war weariness itself, especially its contributing factors, examples and instances, consequences of its onset and development, and some lessons for the Canadian Corps and the historian. War weariness was noted by both contemporaries and historians in the context of Russia,<sup>51</sup> France,<sup>52</sup> Italy, Austria-Hungary, Great Britain, and Germany. It should also be noted that at times it can be difficult to distinguish between the causes of war weariness, and its symptoms. To take but one example, it seems that food shortages, rationing, and labour strikes on the home front could be a cause or contributing factor to the onset of war weariness, as it could lead to discontent among regular civilians and act as a disruptive force. Conversely, however, labour militancy or industrial strikes could also be a manifestation or example of widespread war weariness, as workers and others expressed their dissatisfaction with the war or how it was being prosecuted.<sup>53</sup> Contemporary records and subsequent historical analysis suggest that this civilian and home-front war weariness affected all the major European combatant

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the 'Ludendorff Coup.' And even prior to the war, historians have identified Germany as a more militaristic society, especially compared with Canada, though the latter did have militia units, and eventually adopted compulsory high school cadet corps. The Canadians, many have argued since, were largely an "unmilitary people." Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers' Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 1-11, 33.

<sup>51</sup> Jonathan Daly and Leonid Trofimov, eds., *Russia in War and Revolution, 1914-1922: A Documentary History* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 2009); Robert Paul Browder and Alexander Kerensky, eds., *The Russian Provisional Government, 1917: Documents – 3 Volumes* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1961); Jane Degras, ed., *Soviet Documents on Foreign Policy: Volume I 1917-1924* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951); Frank Alfred Golder, *Documents of Russian History: 1914-1917 – Translated by Emanuel Aronsberg* (Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1964); Horne and Walter F. Austin, eds., *Source Records of the Great War: Volume V 1917* (Unknown Place of Publication: National Alumni, 1923); V.I. Lenin, *Collected Works: Volume 24 – April-June 1917* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1964); N.N. Sukhanov, *The Russian Revolution, 1917: A Personal Record* (London: Oxford University Press, 1955) and Ronald Grigor Suny, ed., *The Structure of Soviet History: Essays and Documents* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). For secondary sources, see the Bibliography.

<sup>52</sup> For French home front problems and war weariness, see casualty statistics found in *Journal Officiel, Documents parlementaires, Session Extradorinaire 1920, Annexe 633, Séance du 29 Mars, 1920, proposition de résolution Marin*, in Winston S. Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918: Abridged and Revised Edition* (New York: Free Press, 2005), 846. Regarding French casualties, there were: 1,398,000 revised deaths; 446,300 held as prisoners at the end of the war; 2,000,000 wounded; and 3,844,300 total casualties, Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 295. See also LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 6, 'Address by L'Abbe O. Podvin, Cure Doyen of Denain, at the Church of St. Martin, 27 October 1918, during the solemn mass on the occasion of the deliverance of DENAIN by the Canadian Corps;' Leonard V. Smith, "Remobilizing the Citizen-Soldier through the French Army Mutinies of 1917," in *State, Society and Mobilization* ed. by Horne; Hart, *The Great War; Neiberg, Fighting the Great War; Philpott, War of Attrition*, and Morrow Jr., *The Great War*.

<sup>53</sup> See, for example, Rogers, ed., *Gunner Ferguson's Diary*, 76.

nations and their societies by mid-1917, and certainly by 1918. This was true for Russia, France, Great Britain,<sup>54</sup> and perhaps most importantly, Germany.<sup>55</sup>

The experience of civilian and home-front war weariness allows the historian to draw some general lessons from these various national contexts. First of all, these different home-front experiences illustrate that there were general and specific, short-term and long-term, and internal and external contributing factors to the onset and development of war weariness. These causes could be either material, such as a lack of food or medical supplies, or non-material, such as a rise in pacifist or defeatist attitudes. France and Belgium had to endure German occupation as well as the general strains of the war effort, whereas all combatant nations suffered through rationing, shortages, food, and supply issues. How the nation's military and political leaders reacted to these problems and addressed the grievances of the population was an important consideration in assessing the endurance of each nation at war. This was especially true as national service, whether that be in uniform or as a productive member of society, was based on the idea of a 'contract' or reciprocity. There were limits to duty and loyalty, and governments would be wise to appease members of society to ensure loyalty and economic production. Civilians and soldiers were expected to do their duty, but in exchange the powers of the state, particularly the government, were to provide for the needs of the people, including but not limited to, protection from enemy attack, adequate food and housing, and sufficient supplies and consumer goods. Hunger, uncertainty, and malnutrition in Germany made both soldiers and civilians susceptible to disease and demoralisation, and compromised the ability and willingness to endure.<sup>56</sup> As was the case

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<sup>54</sup> For secondary sources, see Millman, *Managing Domestic Dissent*; Arthur Marwick, *The Deluge: British Society and the First World War* (London: The Bodley Head, 1965); Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008) and Waites, *England 1914-1918*.

<sup>55</sup> Princess Evelyn Blücher, *An English Wife in Berlin: A Private Memoir of Events, Politics, and Daily Life in Germany throughout the War and the Social Revolution of 1918* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1920); General Ludendorff, *My War Memories 1914-1918* – 2 Volumes (London: Hutchison & Co., 1919); Horne and Austin, eds., *Source Records of the Great War: Volume V and Volume VI*; George G. Bruntz, *Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938); Lothar Burchardt, "The Impact of the War Economy on the Civilian Population of Germany during the First and Second World Wars," in *The German Military in the Age of Total War* edited by Wilhelm Deist (Leamington Spa: Berg Publishers Ltd., 1985) and Holger H. Herwig "Blockade," in *Reader's Companion to Military History* ed. by Cowley and Parker.

<sup>56</sup> There seemed to be a direct connection between hunger, malnutrition, shortages, and the attendant health problems and (a desire for) peace. See Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 117; Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 8, 247, 253; Herwig, *The First*



with Russia, the inability of the government to provide for the people's needs shattered the pro-war consensus and unleashed discontent that had been boiling below the surface for decades, but was then exacerbated by the stresses and strains of the war.

The second main lesson to be drawn from these case studies is the important and complex connections between the home and battle fronts during the war. Each nation's armed forces were drawn from their parent society, ensuring that these connections remained paramount throughout the conflict. The home front was vital to the war effort, ensuring social, political, and economic support for the soldiers on the battle front. Moreover, the armed forces relied upon the industrial and economic output of the home front, and the lack of supplies at home could directly hamper the prosecution of military goals and the wider war effort. The problems at the home front could also reinforce, reflect, or initiate problems on the battle front, and this also went both ways; it was a dynamic process, and despite the muzzling of opposition groups, counter-espionage efforts, censorship, and propaganda, these problems on the home front could not be contained or kept quiet indefinitely. The links between the home and battle fronts are also evident in the complex and at times adversarial relationship between the nation's political and military leaders. In some cases, such as in Britain, the military leaders were legally subordinate to political oversight, which caused problems, especially related to questions over the best way to prosecute the war effort. In Germany, on the other hand, the military leadership of the country was in ascendency, which caused problems of its own.

The third and final lesson to be drawn from these home-front experiences is that any combatant nation's political and military leaders needed to be cognizant of these developing problems and address them as soon as possible. The government, in conjunction with military and other leaders, thus had to be prepared to intervene to protect its own interests, often at the expense of individual or civil rights. It was

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*World War*, 294-295, 419, 285, 364; Max Arthur, *Forgotten Voices of the Great War: A New History of World War I in the Words of the Men and Women who were there* (London: Ebury Press, 2003), 199; Blücher, *An English Wife in Berlin*, 118; The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and J.E. Child Archives, TMM F0038, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, Box/Volume 1, Folder 1, Booklet entitled 'Canada's Triumph: Amiens, Arras, Cambrai' and Rachel Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 131.

important, for instance, to deal with growing dissent and the emergence of anti-war or anti-government groups and ideas. In Britain, the government established and then made use of the National War Aims Committee (NWAC) to address war weariness,<sup>57</sup> silence dissent and portray anti-war voices, or even those seeking a negotiated settlement, as dangerous and even treasonous. Both civilians and soldiers needed outlets and ‘safety valves,’ and without proper ways of dealing with both acute and cumulative stresses and strains of war, these problems could develop into more serious expressions of dissent.

## Difficulties of the Project and Problems Facing the Historian

Assessments of military actions and individual conduct on the battlefield are difficult at the best of times, but for events that took place a century ago, these problems were substantial. All armies and military forces are composed of both material and non-material forces. The latter included myriad factors like doctrine, strategy, morale,<sup>58</sup> public opinion, attitude, commitment, and other intangible forces. Material, or physical forces and factors included transport arrangements, weapon systems, and the men (and women) who wielded these weapons. Historians can examine systems, as well as structures and contingencies, but we cannot ignore the individuals who compose these systems and drive historical change. As a wealth of primary<sup>59</sup> and secondary literature<sup>60</sup> has made clear, the human, individual factor in war and combat will always be crucial, if not decisive. In addition to this, these human factors have enormous explanatory power and potential. Even with the increasing sophistication and automation of the battlefield in today’s world, the human factor still plays an important role throughout the process of military preparation and activity.

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<sup>57</sup> Sanders and Taylor, *British Propaganda during the First World War*, 149-150.

<sup>58</sup> Morale itself can be divided up into material (or physical) versus non-material forces and factors.

<sup>59</sup> Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*; Frederic Manning, *Her Privates We* (London: The Hogarth Press, 1986); J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew, 1914-1919: A Chronicle of Service in France and Belgium* (London: Jane’s Publishing Company Limited, 1987), and Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*.

<sup>60</sup> The wealth of literature on this subject matter can seem overwhelming, but some good secondary accounts on the human factor(s) in war include: John Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage – The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle 1915* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1967); Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front*; John Dollard and Donald Horton, *Fear in Battle* (New York: AMS Press, 1976); Richard Holmes, *Firing Line* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1985), and Kellett, *Combat Motivation*.

Comparisons between different armies and military forces and an appraisal of combat performance is also useful when considering the experience of the Canadians. Long-serving soldiers, military units, and armies in the field help illuminate the increasing problems facing the Canadian Corps over time, especially as the reality of manpower problems set in for Entente high commands and the Corps was used in an increasingly important role.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, the other military forces provide some lessons for the historian, and provide contemporary lessons for the Corps itself in the final years of the war, in a process that came to be known as the ‘learning curve’ coupled with doctrinal and tactical development.<sup>62</sup> And though the Canadians were largely successful militarily in their various engagements, the experience of success *and* defeat in other military forces allows for insight into the nature and impact of morale, discipline, combat motivation, endurance, and ultimately war weariness. Official government and army reports, eyewitness and firsthand accounts, and other contemporary material provides extensive examples and evidence of the negative effects of war weariness, the erosion of endurance, breakdown in combat, and the impact of cumulative and/or acute exposure to war and battle. It should also be noted that there are various levels of assessment we can attempt to access, to determine how combat impacted individuals, military units, and the war situation more broadly.

Historical inquiry always includes some measure of difficulty; there are always certain gaps and distances between those writing about historical events and processes, and those who lived through them. Furthermore, personal views on experiences never remain static. Veterans and participants viewed the past through the lens of their own experiences but also through the realities of the time in which they are recalling. This is especially true of a subject that occurred a century ago. Moreover, there are some

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<sup>61</sup> Shane Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (Westport: CT, 1997) and Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 – Volume II* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008).

<sup>62</sup> The best single volume on the tactical and technological development of the Canadian Corps over time might be Bill Rawling’s *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). A similar monograph on the British evolution of tactics is Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army’s Art of Attack 1916-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Tim Cook also provides an informative case study on the development of tactics and other lessons learnt regarding gas warfare in Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

differences between those who actually witnessed or participated in an event, and those who were merely alive at the time. Historians and researchers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century will never be able to truly experience what happened and *what it was like* to experience it. The past, moreover, is also manipulated for our own various ends.<sup>63</sup> There are both general and specific difficulties with a project such as this, and especially related to source material,<sup>64</sup> memory, the candour and representativeness of the soldiers, perspective,<sup>65</sup> the intangibles of war and the human experience, and the nature of historical study itself. As historian Robert Engen argued, it is difficult for historians to evaluate “what takes place on the battlefield at the personal level,”<sup>66</sup> regarding those who were actually and physically there.

And yet not all historical analysis rests upon official accounts and institutional – such as government or army – sources. There is certainly use for non-traditional sources,

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<sup>63</sup> Ledden, *The No. 7 Canadian Stationary Hospital*, 5. For the manipulation of the past, see Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997) and David Lowenthal, *The Past is a Foreign Country* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985). In the latter, Lowenthal argues that “memory, history, and relics of earlier times shed light on the past. But the past they reveal is not simply what happened; it is in large measure a past of our own creation, moulded by selective erosion, oblivion, and invention.” Moreover, the “past has become more and more a foreign country distinct from the present, yet at the same time increasingly manipulated by present-day aims.” He refers, furthermore, to the role of “widespread cultural amnesia... a cult of preservation, a mania for roots, and a pervasive nostalgia.”

<sup>64</sup> Both primary and secondary sources are useful in historical analysis, and complement each other in important ways. Contemporary reports, documents, and firsthand accounts provide the foundation upon which further analysis can be built. The historiography allows for contextualisation and scrutiny of multiple sources, comparisons, and case studies, and can also point the way to obscure, foreign-language, little-known, or out of print sources. Secondary sources allow for a broader view of any given topic, whereas primary sources exude a more authentic, personal understanding of the past. There are issues with both types of sources, but nevertheless they remain invaluable to any historian’s toolkit.

<sup>65</sup> No historian approaches any subject in a truly objective, unbiased, or dispassionate way. All historical writing and perspectives are shaped, at least in part, by memory and the events in which the historian is writing. This affects both modern and ancient writers, including Thucydides and Herodotus, who were shaped by the momentous events in which they wrote. Furthermore, historians, unless they actually participated in the events in which they are describing, are several steps removed from the past. For example, those who take photographs or compile after-action reports make decisions as to what to include, and what to exclude – these are issues of selection and emphasis. And the more hands that these accounts pass through and the longer the period of time following the event, the greater the chance for distortion. Historians are therefore limited in what they can understand about the past. An historian of the 21st Century can never fully understand the war and combat of the early 20th Century as the participants did, but does that make all assessments on the past hopeless? Can a military historian, or one trained in the war and society approach, every truly grasp the complexities and camaraderie of the armed forces if they have never personally served? Can a modern researcher appreciate and comprehend the hardships endured by First World War soldiers, and indeed, by wider society? Mark Cornwall, “Introduction” in *The Last Years of Austria-Hungary: A Multinational Experiment in Early Twentieth Century Europe – Revised and Expanded Edition*, ed. by Mark Cornwall (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2002), 6 and Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War – Edited and Translated by Sir Richard Livingstone* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960).

<sup>66</sup> Robert Engen, *Canadians Under Fire: Infantry Effectiveness in the Second World War* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2009), 11.

as well as ephemera and sources which go beyond the written word. My research, for instance, has made use of some personal and very narrow perspectives and accounts, which examine how individuals experienced and reacted to vast historical processes and important events. Soldier memoirs, diaries, letters, and journals,<sup>67</sup> for example, provide unique insight into how a single person and their immediate primary group viewed and dealt with the stresses and strains of war. Home-front studies,<sup>68</sup> more private and personal accounts,<sup>69</sup> and plays and novels<sup>70</sup> also help our understanding of the war and its impact on individuals. As one historian has noted, many war stories are not fully ‘evidence-based,’ but are still useful, as they tell us about ourselves and how we understand war.<sup>71</sup>

One of the main difficulties of this project surrounds the candour of source material. Some authors of official accounts were unable or unwilling to fully recognise the realities of combat on the Western Front, and its impact on those who had to endure such experiences. Historian Rachel Duffett in *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War*, for example, argued that it is “difficult to locate references to food shortages in the army’s contemporaneous records,” especially as “this would have been a subject unhelpful both at home and abroad.” Anecdotal and suggestive evidence,

<sup>67</sup> Some useful accounts are: Captain Ralph W. Bell, *Canada in War-Paint* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1917); Will R. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands: A Memoir of the Great War 1916-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1968); Ernest G. Black, *I Want One Volunteer* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965); Norm Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997); Dawson, *Living Bayonets*; Mark Osborne Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie: Diaries, Letters and Report to the Ministry, 1917-1933* (Waterloo: LCMSDS Press of Wilfrid Laurier University, 2008); Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*; Norris, ed., *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold McGill* and Victor W. Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land: 50<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion (Alberta Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000).

<sup>68</sup> Thomas P. Socknat, *Witness Against War: Pacifism in Canada, 1900-1945* (Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Amy Shaw, *Crisis of Conscience: Conscientious Objectors in Canada during the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2009); James M. Pitsula, *For All We Have and Are: Regina and the Experience of the Great War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2008); Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario For War* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2001); Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers’ Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004) and Ian Hugh Maclean Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002). For British and other studies, see the bibliography.

<sup>69</sup> For example Sandra Gwyn, *Tapestry of War: A Private View of Canadians in the Great War* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., 1992).

<sup>70</sup> For plays and theatre productions, see Gail Bowen and Ron Marken, *Dancing in Poppies* (The Playwrights Guild of Canada, 1992); R.C. Sherriff, *Journey’s End: A Play in Three Acts* (New York: Brentano’s Publishers, 1929) and John Fray, *Billy Bishop Goes to War* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 1981). For fiction and novels, see Pat Barker, *Regeneration* (New York: Plume/Penguin Books, 1991); Timothy Findley, *The Wars* (New York: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978); Charles Yale Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed: A Story from the Trenches* (Toronto: Annick Press, 2002) and Frederic Manning, *Her Privates We* (London: Hogarth, 1986).

<sup>71</sup> John E. Talbott, “War in History and Memory,” *History Today*, 67, 3 (March 2017): 18-24 and Messinger, *British Propaganda and the State in the First World War*, 3.

combined with firsthand accounts and other archival sources, however, suggest that there were shortages and food problems. There were gaps between army policy and practice, and “failures in feeding were glossed over in the official army statistics,” lest an “acknowledgment of the military’s inability to provide for the most basic of human needs” prove embarrassing for authorities.<sup>72</sup> Another historian argued that “whether from patriotic or professional motives, military writers have been reticent about discussing panic” on the battlefield.<sup>73</sup> There was a reluctance to draw attention to medical or disciplinary problems, or to those soldiers who were unable to endure at the front. Clear and candid appraisals of the developments in combat and the reactions of individuals helps with the post-battle assessment of historians, but the confusion and ‘fog of uncertainty’ present in armed conflict militated against such complete and tidy understandings.

To this end, it is important to read between the lines of source material and identify gaps in the literature,<sup>74</sup> as well as to assess the euphemisms and indirect references to problems encountered on the battlefield. It is difficult to uncover clear and candid appraisals of individual war experience, in part because the soldiers at the front practiced a form of self-censorship<sup>75</sup> and likely did not want to worry loved ones at home. Dwelling on the stresses and strains of wartime service would concern those at home, and remind the soldiers themselves of the problems they encountered on a daily basis. Frederic Manning in *Her Privates We* even argued that there was a soldier “conspiracy of silence” which lasted into the 1920s. Because of this, historians have to “dig deep between the lines of everyday banalities of letters from the front to find a hint of the fearsomeness of the fighting,” the trauma and terror. The use of euphemisms to downplay the realities at the front also complicates the job of the historian. Manning, for instance, remarked that “my mates have gone West” to denote their deaths, or that “we had a

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<sup>72</sup> Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting*, 124, 230.

<sup>73</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 104.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 235.

<sup>75</sup> Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 21 and Owen’s poem ‘The Letter’ in Fuller, ed., *The Poetry of War*, 16. And though soldiers might have been careful what they wrote in letters home, diaries were more explicit. Andrew Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 12.

roughish time” to indicate heavy casualties.<sup>76</sup> And historians Chris Bell and Bruce Elleman argued in *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century* that contemporary military authorities made use of euphemisms “in order to downplay the significance of these episodes.”<sup>77</sup> And thus in this process mutinies became strikes, incidents, protests, unrest, or disaffection.

Another difficulty pertains to the problems of memory and firsthand accounts. Not all soldiers captured their thoughts and feelings on any given subject. Moreover, for those who did want to capture their own personal viewpoint, would they always be able and willing to do so? Memory and firsthand accounts are necessarily limited and subjective, and some soldiers were inhibited and unwilling to express their own perceptions.<sup>78</sup> There were also limitations based on literacy, opportunity, materials available, preservation,<sup>79</sup> lack of education or ability to articulate one’s views,<sup>80</sup> and similar issues. Some soldiers captured their feelings on a subject at the time, whereas others only sat down to capture them in the months or even years following the event in question. As one British soldier argued, there were limitations to his memory, “which has become blurred and unreliable owing to the lapse of time and the crowded events of the last few years”<sup>81</sup> which obscure and confuse. Over time, memory and the ability to properly recall past events gets

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<sup>76</sup> Manning, *Her Privates We*, n.p.

<sup>77</sup> Christopher M. Bell and Bruce A. Elleman, eds., *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century: An International Perspective* (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), 2-3.

<sup>78</sup> One diary editor noted her subject felt that “silence was the appropriate balm.” Mann, ed., *The War Diary of Clare Gass*, xxxv. One historian noted that motivation must also be taken into account. Were personal recollections being used for profit or propaganda, for example? See John Laffin, *World War I in Postcards* (Gloucester: Alan Sutton Publishing, 1985), 4.

<sup>79</sup> Some letters and other accounts do not survive the decades between storage and subsequent interest. In one case, only five original letters survived, and the rest only survived in typescript, which created its own difficulties. Moreover, there were “the difficulties inherent in writing within the sound and even range of an artillery bombardment.” Joseph Pope, ed., *Letters from the Front: 1914-1919 by Lt.-Gen. Maurice A. Pope, C.B., M.C.* (Toronto: Pope & Company, 1993), ii.

<sup>80</sup> For soldiers undergoing artillery bombardments or trying to recall events tainted by trauma and terror, it was difficult to get a solid account of the event or experience. There were also very few “direct accounts of personal mental breakdown,” especially as it was difficult for individuals to express “complex emotional reactions” to war. Furthermore, some subjects were deemed taboo and thus would not be discussed. Fiona Reid, *Broken Men: Shell Shock, Treatment and Recovery in Britain 1914-1930* (London: Continuum Books, 2010), 5. Other historians have also argued that many soldiers likely had a hard time putting terrifying, disorienting, confusing experiences into words, even if they had wanted to. There was, moreover, little psychological or emotional analysis in first person accounts. See Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (Emeryville: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006) and Rachel Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), 4.

<sup>81</sup> Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1921), vii.

distorted and weakened, and for veterans in Legion halls across the country, perhaps a rehearsed or theatrical element to stories developed over time as well.<sup>82</sup> Certain aspects of stories got polished, exaggerated, left out entirely. One historian has noted that two people could interpret the same event or experience in quite different ways. Moreover, the time between the event in question and its recollection could distort memories, even at the subconscious level.<sup>83</sup>

Another problem with memory and firsthand accounts is the question of representativeness. Not all recollections and views of the soldiers survived, and some were against recording their opinions for posterity or publication, happy with personal letters and diaries. Other soldiers, however, actively sought to publish their views on the war, and this necessarily involved some measure of selection and editing. In a time of substantial letter and printed correspondence, it would be impractical to publish all the letters of any given soldier. It is certainly problematic that a smaller group of former soldiers now speaks for those who “have neither the ability nor the desire to impart to others” their own personal experiences.<sup>84</sup> And as historians we must also be wary of those seeking personal profit in exchange for their war experiences.

It was and remains important to capture and preserve as many personal and authentic views as possible, but the question of representativeness of these accounts poses particular problems for the historian. Were the war poets,<sup>85</sup> famous in the interwar years for their stark presentation of the war and their anti-war or pacifist poetry and prose, really representative of all the lower-class (and lower-ranking) soldiers? The evidence

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<sup>82</sup> One editor of First World War memoirs argued that there were problems with memory, and “their stories may have become a little coloured or tarnished with time, but the general, overall vivid picture of it is still very real to them.” See Gordon Reid, ed., *Poor Bloody Murder: Personal Memoirs of the First World War* (Oakville: Mosaic Press, 1980), 3.

<sup>83</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 13. This was also a problem with oral history and interviews. As one historian put it, “postwar oral testimony from veterans must also be treated carefully, as years of reflection and Legion-hall storytelling invariably reshaped memories decades after the fact.” Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers*, 12. Other problems with oral history included ignorant interviewers, leading questions, poor recording or transcription, etc.

<sup>84</sup> One infantry subaltern seemed to understand “the temperament and mentality of the soldiers,” including their “reactions to the war as a whole and to the immediate dreadful circumstances in which they found themselves.” Moreover, he “voices the feelings and sentiments which the great majority have neither the ability nor the desire to impart to others.” Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*, xviii-xix.

<sup>85</sup> In the years following the First World War, debates raged surrounding the interpretation, motivation, and reputation of those involved in the war. For the war poets, see Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber & Faber, 1965); Robert Graves, *Goodbye to all That: New Edition, with a Prologue and Epilogue* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1957) and the works of Wilfred Owen and Edmund Blunden.



does not support the war poets as being representative, and there were literally millions of different viewpoints<sup>86</sup> to emerge from the war. We as historians should try not to privilege certain accounts because they are more articulate or resonate better with our current social and cultural understandings. Unfortunately, historians sometimes have to extrapolate to the many the views of the few,<sup>87</sup> and this is another problem pertaining to source material and firsthand accounts.

As Winston Churchill also wondered, was it possible to trust the opinions of the ‘chateau generals?’<sup>88</sup> Everyone has certain motivations in writing, and it is thus important to understand the background and context to any first-person account of the period. Nevertheless, was it still possible to trust military history written by former officers which tended to be “highly biased”<sup>89</sup> accounts? These sources and interpretations are still important, as they provide a unique and inside view of the inner functioning of a military unit, from one who was actually there. Furthermore, these accounts provide insight into how someone in a leadership position understood things and responded to developments in the unit, and at the front. And finally, these highly subjective accounts can be balanced with other viewpoints, and with secondary source material. It is for these reasons that historians need to be wary of official histories and highly hagiographical accounts.<sup>90</sup>

Another problem inherent in this type of historical inquiry surrounds the intangibles of war and the difficulty of understanding certain concepts and ideas. How could the soldiers themselves find “the right words to portray the indescribable?”<sup>91</sup> And

<sup>86</sup> The problem is how to organise these numerous individual accounts into a ‘cohesive narrative.’ This is where theory, methodology, historiography, comparisons, and case studies prove useful. Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 12.

<sup>87</sup> Although most soldiers obeyed army authority, there were some who did not. One book explores “that fraction – a dozen here, a hundred there, and ultimately many, many thousands – who at one time or another, laid some challenges to authority.” Douglas Gill and Gloden Dallas, *The Unknown Army* (London: Verso, 1985), 10. And the soldiers who do write their experiences might not be representative. Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 13. It was also problematic to paint a “broad-brush picture” with a limited source base, but this could not always be avoided. Nic Clark, *Unwanted Warriors: The Rejected Volunteers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), 12.

<sup>88</sup> Churchill referred to these chateau generals as “uniformed functionaries who in the seclusion of their offices had complacently presided over this awful process,” and the victory they presented to their political masters “proved only [slightly] less ruinous to the victor than to the vanquished.” Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 546.

<sup>89</sup> Gunther E. Rothenberg, *The Army of Francis Joseph* (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 1976), x.

<sup>90</sup> For the problems pertaining to official histories, see Tim Cook, *Clio’s Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World War* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2006). For a hagiographical biography, see A.M.J. Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in Collaboration with the Canadian War Museum, 1987), ix.

<sup>91</sup> Walsh, *The First World War Diary of Private Bert Cooke*, ix.

as historian George Bruntz argued in *Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918*, how can historians quantify and measure contributions to victory? How can we “weigh imponderables” and certain contributions with other, yet equally important, contributions? Can we say, for example, that air power was responsible for 40% of the victory over Germany in 1918?<sup>92</sup> Furthermore, how can historians understand the intangible aspects of war such as morale and other ideas? Morale is an elusive notion, and is “all too frequently defined through generalities,”<sup>93</sup> or meant different things to different people at different times. It is thus important for historians to be clear with their working definitions and to place their work into the wider context of the pre-existing historiography. It is also important to acknowledge that there are some aspects of the battlefield and the impact of combat on the individual that will always be unknowable to the historian. The confusion and complexity and the ‘fog of uncertainty,’ coupled with the fact that soldiers on the lower end of the military hierarchy rarely understood the ‘big picture,’<sup>94</sup> ensured some ignorance of those trying to make sense of a battle or engagement long after the smoke had cleared.

The nature of historical study itself also presents difficulties to historians tackling topics such as war weariness. As historians, the desire is to understand and present the past in a comprehensible way. The problem is that it can be “dangerous and [is] usually simplistic to seek general causes” to complex historical events and concepts.<sup>95</sup> The causes of war weariness, for example, are complex and multifaceted, just as war weariness itself is complex, dynamic, difficult to pin down, and contextually contingent. Though certain trends, common elements, and patterns emerge, each historical case was different, and should be treated as such. This also points to the importance of comparative studies,<sup>96</sup> and

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<sup>92</sup> George G. Bruntz, *Allied Propaganda and the Collapse of the German Empire in 1918* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1938), 217.

<sup>93</sup> Gill and Dallas, *The Unknown Army*, 77. Another historian noted the difficulties in understanding other intangibles of war, including cohesion. Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers*, 272.

<sup>94</sup> Engen, *Canadians Under Fire*, 12. The ‘fog of uncertainty,’ often erroneously referred to as the ‘fog of war,’ is a concept taken from Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* - Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

<sup>95</sup> Geoffrey Till, “Preface” in *Naval Mutinies of the Twentieth Century: An International Perspective* edited by Christopher M. Bell and Bruce A. Elleman (London: Frank Cass Publishers, 2003), xviii.

<sup>96</sup> One historian questioned, for instance, whether the experience of the British Army was unique. This only raises the importance of comparative studies and an understanding of context. As Travers wrote, to be valid, conclusions

to look at events or concepts over time. In many cases, historical analyses are too simplistic, eschew complexity, or fail to take into account all the factors at play.<sup>97</sup> One historian noted that history and hindsight can obscure the difficult realities that decision-makers at the time faced. The officers and commanders, and the units themselves, were affected by “the strategic imperatives of the moment”<sup>98</sup> and other considerations we cannot now understand, let alone fully appreciate.

## Research Questions, Outline, and Theses

This project will focus on the development and impact of war weariness on both an individual and collective level. To this end, some questions guided my research. What was war weariness, and how did both contemporaries and later historians ‘measure’ it? How did it affect individuals and how did they come to terms with this phenomenon? How did the collective, in this case the military unit, deal with the problems associated with war weariness? What was the Canadian experience of war weariness? Did war weariness play out differently based on nationality, culture, or other considerations? Did medical and military authorities recognise war weariness as a distinct issue that undermined the dedication and morale of soldiers? Or did these same authorities simply subsume this concept into already-existing understandings of health and discipline? How did culture and social reality impact how soldiers understood and dealt with war weariness? Did war weariness impact infantry and combat soldiers at the front differently than non-combatants or those on the lines of communication? How has our understanding of war weariness changed over the years and decades since the end of the war? How did the experience of the Second World War shape our understanding of war weariness, but also affiliated concepts such as battle exhaustion, combat fatigue, and shell shock? The

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regarding British Army performance “must themselves be put in context by comparison with French and German military reactions to the same problems faced by the British army. In short, the key question is, was the British experience unique?” And if so, how and to what extent was it unique? Tim Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front and the Emergence of Modern Warfare 1900-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 243.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, this criticism made in Andrew Godefroy, “The 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division: ‘Trenches Should Never be Saved,’” in *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment* edited by Geoff Hayes, et al. (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 213.

<sup>98</sup> Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers*, 233.

pages that follow will attempt to address these questions and others that emerged throughout the research, reflection, and writing for this project.

At this point it would be prudent to comment on why I have organised this project the way it is, and why I have chosen to analyse two non-contiguous time periods, April-August 1917 and July-November 1918. The first two chapters explore the administrative, legal, disciplinary, and medical structures in place to identify, measure, and address problems such as war weariness and ultimately shell shock. These were the institutional and army structures designed to deal with problems in a preventative manner, but also as they emerged over time; they were of varying success, and were not always able to properly address the problems facing both individuals and military units on the Western Front. These systems also suggest that the medical and military authorities were aware of these problems, even if they were not always able or willing to address them appropriately. There were, however, some policies in place to help mitigate the negative effects of war weariness and attendant problems. It became evident to these authorities that it was best to preserve the fighting strength of the soldiers, despite the negative effects of long-term service.

The next two chapters explore how these systems and structures actually played out in two periods important to the Canadian experience in the war. The original plan was to examine the final twenty months of the war, between April 1917 and November 1918, which included the Third Battle of Ypres and the German Spring Offensives, as well as the operations actually covered below. But the two selected time periods took precedence due to space limitations, the important comparative power of the chosen periods, and for what these periods represent to the armies involved – namely, a certain amount of time in the field from which we can assess decline. An examination of these time periods also allows for an assessment of war weariness, its contributors and manifestations, as an historical problem, and not just an administrative, legal, or medical one. By 1917, the large continental armies and the British Army had been fighting for 30 plus months which provided ample time for the decline and destruction of each nation's professional forces, and coupled with inconclusive fighting and terrible casualties wore down these armies on the Western Front. The Canadian Corps, on the other hand, by 1917 had been in the field

for a rather shorter period of time compared to their Entente and Central Power counterparts; the large victory at Vimy – a rather short campaign compared with operations of 1918 – also helped offset embryonic war weariness in the Corps in 1917, just as other armies were suffering from collective war weariness, wear and tear, and beginning to break down. But by 1918, when the Corps had been in the field for over 30 months (dating back to April 1915), it was largely able to avoid the most pernicious effects of general and collective war weariness. This can be explained in part by the effective operations of the latter half of 1918 and the surprise victories therein. The Corps was able to take advantage of German decline and implement important organisational, tactical, and technological changes that helped overcome defensive positions and enemy action. Luckily for the soldiers of the Corps, things went well on the battlefield and the authorities were able to check war weariness right when it was needed most. The sense of progress, the prospect of ultimate victory in the war, the fact that battlefield operations were successful (liberation of civilians and inhabited areas), the capture of enemy POWs and equipment, and the fortunate timing of the Armistice also help explain how war weariness was kept at bay in the Canadian forces. I also felt it useful to compare the Vimy period with the Hundred Days, which is less well known. Moreover, Vimy was an intense battle, and the Hundred Days was a period of sustained combat, making them fertile ground for the study of war weariness. And furthermore, this project is not, nor does it claim to be, a comprehensive account of war weariness in the Canadian Corps. Rather, it is a foray into the field, using two time periods as case studies.

The first part of the dissertation, Chapters 1 and 2, will outline the most important structures in place in the British Army and Canadian forces designed to deal with the health and disciplinary problems of the troops. In chapter 1, the legal and disciplinary regimes of the Canadians will be assessed, and in Chapter 2 the military medical system of the period will be explored. War weariness and shell shock were serious problems for the medical and military authorities, and how these structures dealt with these problems is an integral part of the story. Chapter 3 begins the second part of the dissertation, and will provide the reader with the first of two chronological sections. In this first one, the period of April to August 1917 will be assessed, including the battles and engagements

pertaining to Vimy Ridge. This chapter will identify some of the contributing factors toward, as well as manifestations of, war weariness amongst the Canadian soldiers. Chapter 4 will provide the reader with a similar discussion for the July to November 1918 period, when the factors and forces contributing to war weariness were arguably even greater than in earlier periods. This is interesting because by August of 1918 there were tangible indicators of battlefield success and the prospect for ultimate victory had never been higher in the war. And yet, discontent and war weariness continued, despite these positive developments.

War weariness on the home fronts also illustrate how this affected soldiers, civilians, and war workers. Even in the civilian realm, military matters played an important role, especially in this industrialised, total war. The importance of the connections between the home and battle fronts must therefore be taken into account. Those at home had loved ones in uniform, and despite censorship and propaganda, information was passed between the two fronts regularly. And each army was drawn from and tied to its parent society. The problems on the home front, for instance, served to both reflect and reinforce the problems at the battle front for the soldiers. I argue that for armies to be successful in the long-term, they needed a robust civilian home front and society *able and willing* to endure the long years of suffering and uncertainty. Furthermore, the army and armed forces themselves needed strength and a measure of flexibility to identify and adapt to these problems inherent to 20<sup>th</sup> century warfare.

And though beyond the scope of this project, evidence of discontent and collective and individual indiscipline in the months following the Armistice also suggest the continued importance of assessments of behaviour, attitude, leadership, and officer-soldier relations. Even after the cessation of hostilities, soldier grievances continued, but without the mollifying impact of ‘the cause’ and appeals to duty and service. Moreover, the slight but insufficient relaxation of army discipline allowed problems that had been simmering below the surface for months or years to boil over into mutiny, strikes, and indiscipline following the Armistice.

In the chapters on the legal, disciplinary, and medical aspects of First World War service I argue that these systems were unable to properly deal with the enormous number

of discipline and health problems as a result of wartime service, though many attempts were made. Moreover, the structure and priorities of the legal/disciplinary and medical system of the British and Canadian forces both contributed to, and helped deal with, war weariness. Ultimately, the courts martial system and medical arrangements were unable to prevent war weariness, and its limited means to react to these increasing problems actually alienated many and exacerbated the condition of those worn down by frontline existence – in some ways, army policies could actually backfire and make matters worse. Those pushed to, and subsequently beyond, the breaking point were not always treated with sympathy and understanding; they were sometimes depicted as criminals, slackers, or malingerers. It was crucial that chaplains, commanding officers, and medical personnel be well-acquainted with their subordinates so they could intervene successfully on their behalf before general war weariness transmuted into shell shock debilitation.

Unfortunately for the soldiers caught up in the war's maelstrom and unable to carry on despite their best efforts, the collective was prioritised over the need for recovery of the individual soldiers. The medical chapter illustrates the stresses and strains imposed on the soldier's mind and body, and that the often-rigid army medical system had difficulty distinguishing between war-weary and shell-shocked troops, let alone dealing with them appropriately. A one-size-fits-all model of military medicine and notions of duty were insufficient to deal with these 'problem' cases. Some war-weary soldiers fell through the cracks of army medicine and became more of a problem down the road as a result.

In the two chronological chapters presented here, it will be argued that the operations of the Canadian Corps, and what happened between them, contributed to war weariness and in many cases shell shock debilitation. There were, however, also various forces designed to address and mitigate the worst effects of war weariness. Psychiatric casualties and shell-shock cases did not always begin as war weariness, but there was overlap in the causes and contributing factors in both phenomena. Moreover, the nature and intensity of the war ensured that there was little genuine respite from the stresses and strains of war. Leave and rotation out of the line proved insufficient, and other ranks at the front were expected to carry on until seriously wounded or killed. In the First World War there were no 'tours of duty;' a soldier signed up for the duration of the conflict, plus

another six months, and was expected to do his duty unto death or victory. The heavy casualties suffered, and the added pressure this placed on survivors, wore down the soldiers to the point of medical and disciplinary problems. The reality of combat on the Western Front, and the experience of witnessing or participating in horrific and traumatic events, wore down even the hardest volunteers. The strategic and tactical considerations of the time, moreover, put added pressure on the soldiers, especially in the final months of the war when it was decided to give the enemy no respite from Entente attacks. This meant, of course, very little respite for the attacking soldiers as well.

Ultimately, war weariness is a useful and effective way of understanding the experiences of those in the First World War. This concept can be applied also to non-combatant but vital soldiers on the lines of communication, as well as to all manner of combatant troops. War weariness affected every soldier who spent any significant amount of time in combat or the army generally, to varying degrees. War weariness was also not confined to infantry. Artillery troops, machine gunners, tank crews, pilots, miners, engineers, and those of the gas service all faced different risks and sources of danger, but they had things in common as well. The physical, but also emotional and psychological exhaustion affected those experiencing hardship and privation. The inability to legally escape the sources of danger on a regular basis drove some soldiers to go AWL, desert, voluntarily surrender, or administer a SIW. Most soldiers, however, remained committed to the war effort and did not want to let their comrades, their family, their unit, their superiors, or their nation down. Many of these soldiers found the inner strength to carry on, and relied upon fortifying forces to keep going; these soldiers were willing, but increasingly unable to continue with duty because of the development of health problems. Other troops, however, were physically (though perhaps not otherwise) able to carry on in combat, but were increasingly reluctant to do so, even if they did not always act on this reluctance, for various reasons. It is this dynamic between inability and reluctance that will be explored in the following pages.



## Chapter 1 - The Legal and Disciplinary Systems and Aspects of Service for the Canadian Corps in the First World War

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One of the ways in which military authorities controlled and shaped the behaviour of the troops under their command was through the legal and disciplinary organisation in the forces. These systems were an important aspect of army control, and played a role in maintaining the health and fighting prowess of the soldiers during the war. It seems that legal and medical aspects are only interpreted as an issue when they are problematized. Much has been written about the miscarriage of justice and the problems of the legal and disciplinary system facing British (and Dominion) forces in the years since the First World War,<sup>99</sup> but it is important to remember that counterfactuals and anachronistic judgments are less than helpful in current historical inquiry. Things *could* have been done differently, and the British could have modelled their legal apparatus and disciplinary regime in other ways, but this did not happen. The German Army, for instance, officially executed far fewer of its soldiers than did the British Army, though historians generally agree the Germans were more likely to make use of summary executions without trial. And the Australian government refused to apply the death penalty to its soldiers at all. These cases are instructive in terms of comparison, but each system must also be judged

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<sup>99</sup> There is a substantial historiography on the legal and disciplinary elements of the European armies during the war, as well as primary sources and firsthand accounts. See, for example, Babington, *Capital Courts-Martial*; David Englander, "Mutinies and Military Morale," in *World War I: A History* ed. by Hew Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); A.B. Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour? The Story of the 25 Canadian Volunteers Executed in the First World War* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1998); Thaddeus Holt, "Military Justice," in *Reader's Companion to Military History* ed. by Cowley and Parker; Nico Keijzer, *Military Obedience* (Alphen aan den Rijn: Sijthoff & Noordhoff, 1978); Chris Madsen, *Another Kind of Justice: Canadian Military Law from Confederation to Somalia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999); Craig Leslie Mantle, ed., *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience* (Kingston and Toronto: Canadian Defence Academy Press and the Dundurn Group, 2007); Gerard Christopher Oram, *Military Executions during World War I* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003); Julian Putkowski and Julian Sykes, *Shot at Dawn: Executions in World War One by Authority of the British Army Act* (London: Leo Cooper, 1992); Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); R.A.J. Tyler, *Bloody Provost: An Account of the Provost Service of the British Army, and the Early Years of the Corps of Royal Military Police* (London: Phillimore & Co. Ltd., 1980); Desmond Morton, "The Supreme Penalty: Canadian Deaths by Firing Squad in the First World War," *Queen's Quarterly* 79, 3 (Autumn 1972): 345-352; Clare Rhoden, "Another Perspective on Australian Discipline in the Great War: The Egalitarian Bargain," *War in History* 19, 4 (2012): 445-463 and Captain David Schlueter "The Court-Martial: An Historical Survey," *Military Law Review*, 87, 129 (1980): 129-166.

in its own right. The British system of control, discipline, and legal structures developed in its own way, and was historically contingent upon the experience of colonial wars and naval discipline. Moreover, applying our modern sensibilities to a conflict that began over a century ago is inappropriate, to say the least. The legal and disciplinary, as well as the military medical systems, usually functioned adequately behind the scenes or in the background. After all, hundreds of thousands of soldiers were ‘processed’ through the legal and medical systems during the war, though there were some problems.

The legal, disciplinary, and medical systems and structures pertaining to the Canadian forces in the war were complex and incorporated many different elements. These were multifaceted systems, which had some flexibility and dynamism, with some changes taking place during the war itself. Adaptations were based on the reality of warfare generally, and combat specifically. Lessons learned from other armies were also incorporated into the systems, though less thoroughly. Pre-war ideas and preconceived notions played a large role in how these systems were organised and justified after the start of the war in August 1914. These were not static, unchanging systems, but prejudice and personalities, politics and propaganda, prevented the rapid alteration of these systems during the war itself.<sup>100</sup>

There are different ways to understand and assess the legal/disciplinary and medical aspects pertaining to the Canadian forces during the war. For example, how did the medical and military authorities and structures react to problems amongst their subordinates *after* the mobilization and enlistment phase? One such way to understand these responses is to present a series of binaries. Were these reactions largely proactive, or reactive? Were these responses primarily individual/personal in nature, or more structural? How often were these reactions informal – such as when a commanding

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<sup>100</sup> These systems also incorporated norms and structures, were shaped by individuals, personalities, and contingencies, and included doctrine, laws, precedents, and the like. And even following the war there were disagreements over the nature of the war and the level of government culpability and responsibility to veterans. The debates over the awarding of pensions in Britain are but one example of the importance of these issues well after the guns fell silent on the Western Front. See Ted Bogacz, “War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-1922: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock,’” *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1989): 227-256; Fiona Reid and Christine Van Everbroeck, “Shell Shock and the Kloppe: War Neuroses amongst British and Belgian Troops during and after the First World War,” *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 30, 4 (2014): 445-463 and Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers’ Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004).

officer (CO) or medical officer (MO) used sympathy and discretion – or institutional, making use of the formal army disciplinary system and courts martial? Were these responses dealt with internally, at the local level, by the CO or MO, for example, or more externally, beyond this level, by the larger army system as a whole? It is clear, moreover, that the military hierarchy in general tended to view specific behaviours as leaning towards a more medial issue; on the other hand, some authorities interpreted these same behaviours as more legal or disciplinary issues.<sup>101</sup> How much overlap was there?

It is my contention that there *was* indeed much overlap between these legal/disciplinary and medical aspects and responses to the problems facing Canadian soldiers in the war. These systems and structures, in large measure, were designed with the same goals in mind, namely the close control of the soldiers under command to ensure the maximum number remained at duty for the maximum amount of time.<sup>102</sup> Though on the surface it seems that these two military systems – the legal/disciplinary and the medical – had seemingly opposite goals (the former to punish, shape behaviour, and remove troublesome soldiers, and the latter to heal and ensure soldiers stayed healthy and fighting fit), these two systems had much overlap too. The legal/disciplinary system was also designed to ‘heal’ soldiers from their misdeeds and their issues which undermined their abilities as a soldier, and the medical system often took the form of punishment, and was also designed to shape behaviour and thinking. The medical and legal/disciplinary distinction made by historians is perhaps a false dichotomy.

This chapter will examine the control of soldiers in relation to the military legal and disciplinary systems and structures. The legal and disciplinary regimes worked in tandem with the medical system, with both seeking ultimate military victory and hoping to ensure the soldiers remained fighting fit, and obedient. Both these structures were also systems of man-management, to reinforce army (and government) authority. And

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<sup>101</sup> In this understanding, it seems that factors a, b, and c were deemed legal and disciplinary, but factors x, y, and z as medical. I argue, however, that there was substantial overlap between these two structures.

<sup>102</sup> Other overlapping goals included the desire for victory, the need to preserve unit cohesion and fighting strength, the hope to bring as many soldiers home as possible consistent with military requirements, the maintenance of army authority, and to keep the troops fighting fit. Moreover, both battalion, company, and smaller unit COs and MOs were in (relatively) close proximity to the soldiers under their command and care.

regardless of officer training, upbringing, or attendance at medical school, these MOs, officers, and leaders of the military units were largely the same people. These COs and MOs, and the officers who sat on courts martial, had similar class backgrounds. These similarities ensured that the reactions to a war-weary or shell-shocked soldier were also similar.

When the legal/disciplinary system was working properly and efficiently, officers were able to apply discipline and punishment to the units under their command. These punishments could be informal, summary, and short-term, or more substantial like a month of field punishment. Moreover, the courts martial system was used to deal with more serious cases, such as desertion and absence without leave, though there were some irregularities at times. If a unit had performed especially poorly, if there had been an increase in disciplinary problems, or if a new or particularly exacting CO sought to send a message or make an example of a soldier or unit, some soldiers might be sent for a court martial for crimes committed. The CO had some discretion on how to deal with these breaches of discipline, but only had so much leeway when it came to enforcing discipline on subordinates. However, when things were not functioning as smoothly, such as when there was a backlog of cases, too many crimes at key times (such as a major offensive), too many issues in a single unit, or a loss of trust in the officers or the system generally, this system could break down. A lack of faith in a unit's officers or in the legal/disciplinary structure could contribute to the onset of war weariness, undermine morale and combat motivation, negatively affect discipline, and compromise the performance of both individuals and military units. The same was true for the military medical system.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> There were problems, for instance, with the reality of shell shock, war neurosis, and psychiatric casualties. One major problem from these casualties was the difficulty in adapting and coping with them. There was also substantial difficulty in reconciling competing views of major stakeholders. The term 'shell shock' eventually became proscribed in the BEF, and was only to be used under very particular circumstances, if at all. These casualties became a burden on the existing medical system, and at first these cases were simply imposed on old categories (such as Hysteria and Neurasthenia). The need for a new way of thinking was essential. The problem was that there were different views on the origins/causes, development, and required treatment for shell shock casualties. Compare, for example, the views of Lord Moran with that of Sir Andrew Macphail, both MOs. The former felt that every soldier had their breaking point, and men could overdraw their account of 'courage,' whereas Macphail took a much more traditional and unsympathetic view, arguing that shell shock "is a manifestation of childishness and femininity...against which there is no remedy." This view suggests that only certain people succumbed to shell shock, and that nothing could be done for them. Moran,

This chapter will provide a foundational structure for the chronological chapters below. This and the following chapter will outline some of the key army and military structures and systems operative during the war, and which had a direct impact on the experiences of regular soldiers in the military hierarchy. They will sketch how these army systems reacted to, and dealt with, legal, disciplinary, and medical problems during the war. The use of field punishment, as well as courts martial, medical classification boards, and the medical system more generally, were also aspects of these structures and their responses to a complex war that lasted years. And finally, this chapter will allow for an understanding of how these structures and systems play out in the chronological time periods below.

## Legal and Disciplinary Aspects of the BEF and CEF in the First World War

The legal and disciplinary system facing Canadian soldiers in the war sought to ensure that those under army command followed orders and were obedient to authority. These structures dealt with discipline – and indiscipline – in certain ways, and addressed military crimes and breaches of conduct within the context of the war effort. The general definition of discipline I use constitutes three main aspects: punishment, the threat of punishment (often used as a deterrent), and a system of man management. The Oxford English Dictionary presents discipline as both a noun and verb, with the noun being “the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behaviour, using punishment to correct disobedience,” and “a system of rules and conduct.” When used as a verb, discipline involved “train[ing] (someone) to obey rules or a code of behaviour, using punishment to correct disobedience” and also to “punish or rebuke formally for an offence.”<sup>104</sup> These definitions are appropriate to our purposes here.

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*The Anatomy of Courage* and Sir Andrew Macphail, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919: The Medical Services* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland – Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1925), 278.

<sup>104</sup> These definitions were found online at <https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/discipline>. See also Victor Hanson, “Discipline,” in *Reader’s Companion to Military History* ed. by Cowley and Parker, 134-136.

Discipline was part of a system to control behaviour and thinking. Lord Moran interpreted discipline as an important aspect of military service, but was also a means to an end – the end presumably being the solid performance of the soldier, and ultimate victory. Moreover, discipline was depicted as “control from without,” which could only be relaxed if it was replaced by control or discipline from within.<sup>105</sup> Discipline could also take the form of either punishment or persuasion,<sup>106</sup> and drill and training could contribute to the development of discipline, but this only prepared the troops to a certain point.<sup>107</sup> Army discipline was part of the system of both control and punishment, and the even application of discipline was more effective, and more humane, than its uneven application.<sup>108</sup> This discipline could also be tailored and applied to local circumstances,<sup>109</sup> and take into account the needs of the unit and other factors that fell outside official discipline.

And just as discipline needed to be tailored to local circumstances and military units, there were different types of discipline employed to further the army’s goals. Discipline could be more informal, for example, allowing the CO, officers, and NCOs to adjust policies to make them compatible to the needs of the individuals and the unit as a whole. This informal discipline allowed authority figures to use discretion and even act in a sympathetic way toward the troops, understanding what they had been through and what they still had to endure. The MO of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion stated that despite his shortcomings

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<sup>105</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 172-182.

<sup>106</sup> This is often referred to as carrots and sticks, or the use of inducements or the promise of rewards and using the threat of punishment and punishment itself to shape behaviour and thinking. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 2, volume 662, D-106-2, ‘Discipline, Generally.’

<sup>107</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 172-182.

<sup>108</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 26, Volume 2180, Folder D-2-26 Volume 5, ‘Discipline: Generally,’ and Folder D-2-26, Volume 6, ‘Dress – Officers (Discipline), File 54/General No./3829 (Q.M.G.7).’ Training documents for 1917 also stated that officers must be taught that “enforcing strict discipline at all times” will help gain the confidence of the men, and “this must be a willing discipline, not a sulky one. Be just, but do not be soft – men despise softness.” LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, File 10, ‘Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917.’

<sup>109</sup> Army rules and procedures were often about man-management, a system to control the soldiers under their command. In one such case, the local canteens frequented by the troops would only be closed if the medical authorities deemed it necessary to control the spread of meningitis. Leaving the canteen open, however, allowed for closer control of the troops and to keep them content (and hopefully law abiding). Had this canteen been closed, the troops would have travelled to other pubs and estaminets, further increasing the chances of spreading the contagious strain. Keeping it open was deemed “necessary if the men... are to be kept away from the neighbouring public houses or from buying whisky from illicit peddlers.” In this case, the local authorities deemed keeping the canteen open the lesser of two evils, allowing the troops to drink in army-sanctioned establishments. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 392, C-22-1, document dated 20 January 1915.

as a military leader, General Richard Turner was well liked by the men of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, as he did not insist on the formal discipline so common in the British forces at the time.<sup>110</sup> This informal discipline and demeanor allowed for a closer working relationship between officers, NCOs, and ORs, and the formal discipline<sup>111</sup> expected of the men was often interpreted as demeaning, difficult, and impractical (especially in the trenches). This emphasis upon formal discipline often took the form of demanding “smartness, punctuality, thoroughness, avoidance of waste, general conduct and appearance of officers” and NCOs.<sup>112</sup> The problem with this emphasis, of course, was that in many cases the authorities came to believe that ‘smartness’ would directly translate into, and ensure, success on the battlefield and fighting prowess. Using unit discipline as a direct proxy for military performance, however, was problematic.

Informal discipline was also an important part of the officers’ toolkit, as formal discipline could be a rather blunt instrument. In addition to this, the imposition and insistence on formal discipline could remove members of the unit from duty when they were most needed – and this was especially true when units were in the line or engaged in operations. Colonel Cy Peck of the 16<sup>th</sup> Canadian (Scottish) Battalion, for instance, used

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<sup>110</sup> Norris, ed., *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold McGill*, 75. Moreover, this tendency to rely on informal discipline in some of the Canadian (and other Dominion, such as Australian) units, and the casual relationship between ORs and superiors, was looked down on by the British in the field. Canadians seemed to have a reputation for “indiscipline” during the war. DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 103.

<sup>111</sup> This formal discipline imposed by the army often took the form of ‘smartness’ and cleanliness. According to training documents, “it is of the greatest importance that a high standard of discipline is maintained. Strictness on the part of officers and N.C.Os is necessary on such points as cleanliness, falling out on the march, straggling.” Moreover, the document indicated that “the secret of success in the present war is discipline” and that units that were the “smartest” on parade, and on and off duty, had “the best discipline in all other respects.” Another officer noted his men were becoming “smarter under the training...and the condition of the billets reflected this improvement.” PPCLI Archives, 34(1) – 8, Infantry Battalion Training Notes, November-December 1914, and ‘Hints from France’ and Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 250.

<sup>112</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, File 1, ‘1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Divisional Training School.’ See also Ibid, Folder 109, File 3, ‘Training in Reserve Area,’ 10 March 1918 and ‘Training while in Reserve,’ 26 May 1917. This emphasis on the appearance and conduct of the officers could be detrimental in other ways as well. One document of 1917 stated that officers should not drink in the same establishment as their subordinate NCOs (to say nothing of drinking with the ORs). This seemed to be a carry-over from the rigid (British) class system, and there were also cultural and social elements to this strict military hierarchy. Instead of fostering cohesion and mutual trust, it seems that these rules and distinctions could cause resentment. One artillery officer acknowledged this gulf between regular soldiers and officers, accepting that it was necessary for military discipline, but “was arbitrary and in a sense a sham.” Other training documents suggested that “discipline can only be maintained when the ‘chain of command’ is properly organized and kept up.” LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 26, Volume 2180, Folder D-2-26 Volume 6, File ‘Confidential Memorandum,’ February 1917, Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 77 and LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, File ‘Training while in Reserve Area – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division G. 33/54.’

discretion while his unit was fighting at the Canal du Nord and Hindenburg Line, in the autumn of 1918. Instead of sending all the unit stragglers up for courts martial, and thus removing them from combat, he rounded them up and established an emergency reserve force.<sup>113</sup> This ensured that there were some soldiers on hand to deal with military emergencies and to help reconstitute the unit after heavy casualties, and giving these soldiers the opportunity to redeem themselves. In another instance of avoiding formal discipline, a Canadian artillery officer used physical violence on a subordinate soldier, explaining that that “was better than getting him a court martial for refusing to obey an order.”<sup>114</sup> The use of the formal disciplinary and legal system was time-consuming, removed the offending soldier from the unit, and could be a drain on army resources.

The disciplinary system and the legal structures in place were designed, in part, to *prevent* war weariness – including dissent and reluctance – from spreading and reaching collective proportions. This system, however, was better placed to *react* to war weariness, its occurrences, and manifestations. The phenomenon was not fully understood at the time, hence the original focus on discipline and punishments, rather than positive inducements to behaviour and especially behaviour in combat. These structures, moreover, did not adequately address those who were fed up and war weary, but found the strength to carry on; rather, they focussed on those who evaded duty and exhibited disciplinary problems.

## A System of Discipline and Control

Both informal and formal discipline were used to punish,<sup>115</sup> deter, and as part of the man-management system to control the troops. These were deemed crucial to the proper functioning of any unit, both on the parade ground and in combat itself. Moreover,

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<sup>113</sup> René Chartrand, *The Canadian Corps in World War I* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2007), 14 and H.M. Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion (The Canadian Scottish) Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1932), 309-310.

<sup>114</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 26.

<sup>115</sup> One report from a Canadian Convalescent Hospital, for example, illustrated that sometimes the CO of units not in the field would send or transfer soldiers under their command to another unit when they felt that the current punishment was insufficient. This was the case because hospital COs were limited in authority and in what they could award as punishments. COs of infantry units in the field, however, had much more leeway when it came to issuing punishments. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 2, Volume 661, D-97-2, Discipline, Granville Canadian Convalescent Hospital.



many of these views on discipline emerged from the pre-war Canadian forces, namely the (non-permanent active) militia in Canada. These policies were then adapted to the current war conditions. A 1915 training manual, for instance, instructed that officers and ORs:

will adopt towards each other and their subordinates such methods of command and treatment as will ensure prompt obedience, respect for authority, a deep sense of self-respect, a high sense of duty. [Furthermore] bullying, swearing or intemperate language must be avoided. It is the duty of a soldier to obey all lawful orders given by superior authority.<sup>116</sup>

The problem with this automatic obedience to authority, however, was that it served to undermine independence of thought,<sup>117</sup> which could prove devastating in the event of casualties during an attack or defensive operation. When officers and NCOs were killed or wounded during operations, subordinates had to take their place during the heat of battle. Without guidance from above and with the inability to make spontaneous decisions for the good of the group, the operation could fail. This could have mortal consequences, or even imperil the wider military situation.

The justifications for army authority and discipline were multifaceted, and were an integral part of army life. The British society from which many of the Canadian soldiers emerged was much more class-conscious and deferential than ours today. And though Canadian society in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century was less class-based than its British counterpart, respect for elders and social superiors was well ingrained; this made the transition to army life easier for some. Army discipline was predicated on the need for obedience and maintaining the chain of command. This deference to authority entailed the “immediate and implicit obedience of orders, both on and off parade,” and respect for and adherence to the orders and rank of superiors and the military hierarchy.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and J.E. Child Archives, TMM F0038, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, Folder 1, booklet: ‘Infantry Training for use of Canadian Militia, 1915.’ Moreover, what if the CO gave an unlawful order? Certainly soldiers were under no (legal) obligation to obey, but to disobey orders, even unlawful or unpopular ones, could undermine the entire system of military authority and compromise unit cohesion, trust in leaders and comrades, lead to even worse consequences, etc.

<sup>117</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 208.

<sup>118</sup> Officers and superiors were also to insist on “the thorough performance of all duties.” Part of this insistence on the unquestioning obedience to orders was based on the idea that soldiers needed to be ‘programmed’ to obey orders automatically, even for seemingly trivial things like saluting. If a soldier was good on the parade ground and while not in combat, it would increase the chances that they would be obedient in combat as well, when it truly counted. This also

Some soldiers took to this top-down authority and discipline rather easily, whereas others chafed at the idea of this control but still accepted the need for discipline, however problematic it could be. Still other soldiers were not thoroughly convinced of the need for the type and severity of discipline as practiced by the British and Canadian armies during the war. Coningsby Dawson who served on the Western Front, for instance, wrote in April of 1918 that “army discipline is in many ways silly and old-maidish.” He then recounted a story of a soldier punished for asking a colonel to hold his horse while he mounted it; he wondered what the sense was in punishing this “chap who’s faithful, well-conducted and honest.”<sup>119</sup> And yet, it was a widespread belief that army orders needed to be obeyed, and it was not the prerogative of the soldier to question these orders. Important mediators and intermediaries like NCOs, MOs, and chaplains, who helped connect the upper echelons of the military hierarchy with the rank and file, also played an important role in ensuring obedience to proper military authority. Chaplains, for example, assisted with army discipline and the man-management system in part by helping ease tensions and reinforcing that orders needed to be followed, especially unpopular ones. As one chaplain explained in a report:

I would discuss the matter [of discipline] with them in my talks at the Sunday services and do all in my power to change their hostile attitude to one of ready acceptance and obedience to the order...I don’t believe in discussing or explaining orders to the men, but in obeying them. Orders are orders and must be obeyed...my love and sympathy with my lads are boundless, but my influence is always exerted in maintaining obedience to those in authority.<sup>120</sup>

This paternalistic chaplain helped reinforce and legitimise army discipline, and made use of the ideas of self-sacrifice and self-control to help in this task. Some officers and unit leaders, though, were hesitant to discipline their men to the extent that the army desired. This discipline, however, was depicted as an integral step “in the process of converting

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helps explain the emphasis on obedience, deference to authority, the army hierarchy, and army rules and discipline. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, File 3, ‘Canadian Corps G. 439 – Adv. First Army’ and file ‘Training – Division.’ LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 5663, Folder 2, File 2, Miscellaneous, ‘G.R. Orders No. 3 and 81,’ former dated 18 August 1914.

<sup>119</sup> Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 112, letter from France, dated 26 April 1918.

<sup>120</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4669, Chaplains Reports, Historical 1.

other ranks into soldiers,”<sup>121</sup> and was important for the proper functioning of the unit. And it was with these soldiers that the war would be fought, and either won or lost.

The legal and disciplinary system of the Canadian forces in the war relied upon certain soldiers to uphold these policies and regulations. The Corps of Military Police (MP), for instance, had myriad duties, including enforcing march discipline and directing traffic, tracking down offenders, and working with COs, assistant provost marshals (APMs), and courts martial in the application of military justice itself and to ensure that punishments were laid down and enforced.<sup>122</sup> All of these duties helped ensure that army discipline was carried out on the troops. Medical officers, COs, sergeants and NCOs, chaplains,<sup>123</sup> and other authority figures and intermediaries all played a role in ensuring the troops were familiar with all the army orders, military laws, and regulations, and that these were enforced.

All levels of the military hierarchy had a role to play in the application and enforcement of discipline and military law. Indeed, the system could not function without it. All soldiers in uniform were subject to military discipline, but accepted it more readily than others. One British soldier, for instance, was horrified with the firing squad he was involved in, and found that his sleep was disturbed as a result.<sup>124</sup> He accepted the need for discipline, even if it was distasteful at times. This acceptance was made easier when the officers of each unit prepared the soldiers for it. As an officer of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion explained, while in barracks his troops took to discipline rather easily “for the men were quite prepared for it, understood its necessity, and conformed to the requirements of [the]

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<sup>121</sup> DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 39.

<sup>122</sup> At Vimy, MPs established advanced battle straggler stops and battle straggler collecting posts, and worked in conjunction with the APM there. Battle stragglers were to be “collected at the straggler collecting station, fed, re-armed from casualties, if unarmed, and marched back to their units in parties.” Wounded stragglers, on the other hand, would be sent to the dressing station. The APM (and military police) were to have 200 rations and “will take names of all stragglers.” See Andrew Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War* (New York: Marble Arch Press, 2013), 88; LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, ‘Discipline;’ Volume 3471, 10-4-4, ‘ORs, Absentees, etc.;’ LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3865, Folder 101, File 1, Organisation and Establishment Canadian Mounted Troops and Ibid, Volume 3845, Folder 49, File 4, Vimy Operations, “X” Division (1<sup>st</sup> Canadian), ‘Instructions.’

<sup>123</sup> All chaplains were expected to be familiar with army orders, rules, and discipline. They were encouraged to become familiar and friendly with their troops, and become known by them, and also to be “acquainted” with the KRO. They would also be expected to be familiar with the British Army Act, guidelines for soldiers, etc. LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4651, Education 1, ‘Notes on Service in the Army Chaplains Department.’

<sup>124</sup> Arthur, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, 277-278.

situation more readily and with less friction than could have been reasonably expected.”<sup>125</sup> Adherence to discipline while in barracks, however, would have to survive the shock of battle and the stresses and strains associated with combat and its aftermath.

Officers and NCOs played an important role in ensuring the legal and disciplinary regimes were upheld both in barracks, and while on active service. The discipline of the unit was overseen by its CO, who set the tone for the unit’s training and morale;<sup>126</sup> the other officers and unit NCOs proceeded accordingly. The unit’s officers played a key role in the system of man-management, set examples for their troops, especially in terms of dress and deportment, enforced the rules of service, held inspections and parades, oversaw discipline, and upheld censorship regulations,<sup>127</sup> amongst other duties. Competent leadership and drill were but two ways in which officers could instil their views on discipline to their subordinates. Drill, for instance, was important as “a means to an end,” training the troops to follow commands and trust authority.<sup>128</sup> Discipline was closely related to leadership and command, which highlighted the “necessity of [a] system of command so as to ensure continuity”<sup>129</sup> in the unit. This also meant that heavy casualties could disrupt this continuity, and thus undermine the unit’s cohesion and connection between leadership and the led.

Aside from training, drill, and good leadership practices, there were other ways in which to convince the troops of the need to obey authority and follow orders implicitly. Lectures, training courses, and the use of route marches (to stress march discipline), for

<sup>125</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold McGill*, 33-35.

<sup>126</sup> Lt.-General E.L.M. Burns, *General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars* (Toronto/Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1970), 65.

<sup>127</sup> Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 48; LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 26, Volume 2180, Folder D-2-26 Volume 5, ‘Discipline: Generally;’ LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4533, File 1, ‘Correspondence,’ 16-1-15 to 29-1-19, ‘Dishonoured Cheques,’ and ‘Instructions for Railhead Supply Officers – Second Army’ and LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 2, Volume 662, D-102-2, Discipline, ‘Canadian Postal Corps.’ Regarding censorship regulations, picture postcards, newspapers, and books could not be sent to neutral or enemy nations. Moreover, any of a military nature, including photos or postcards, could not be sent within or outside the British Empire. Contravening orders could mean that important information fell into enemy hands, which could also endanger one’s comrades. One report on censorship stated that anyone who “discloses information which he knows is in contravention of the regulations is absolutely devoid of any code of honour, and may also be impairing the good name of the regiment.” LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4574, Folder 2, File 5, Routine Orders, 1916-1917 and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 1, File 12, ‘Censorship.’

<sup>128</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, File 10, ‘Instructions for the Training of Platoons for Offensive Action, 1917.’

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*

example, served to reinforce these lessons, and “every effort [was] made to ensure that they [the other ranks] realise the seriousness of the situation.”<sup>130</sup> If simple explanations and discussions failed to properly motivate the troops, there were always more practical means of shaping behaviour and thought. Promises of leave, or conversely threats to cancel upcoming leave, could certainly act as a powerful way to shape behaviour. Threats of punishment could be made to the entire unit,<sup>131</sup> a collective approach to the enforcement of army discipline and standards of behaviour, or could be done in a more personal, individual way. At times these personal approaches to discipline entailed actually threatening the soldier with physical harm if orders were not obeyed. Deward Barnes of Toronto, for example, wrote in his journal that during an attack in August of 1918 “one or two of the draftees [conscripted soldiers or MSA men]...refused and I threatened to shoot them if they didn’t dig” during the operation.<sup>132</sup> These types of threats seemed to work most of the time. Some soldiers, however, were unwilling to conform to these rules and regulations, whatever the cost.

## Military Laws and Expectations

The system of army discipline was based on military laws, expectations, and procedures. There were, of course, problems and limitations to this system, which were identified by both contemporaries and by subsequent historians, legal experts, and other researchers. After a soldier signed his declaration and took his oath upon attestation, he was subject to army law and military discipline. Special rules applied to soldiers actually in the war zone and at the front, but all soldiers, whether in Canada, the UK, or on the lines of communication in France and Flanders were subject to army discipline and law.

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<sup>130</sup> March discipline was deemed important while on active service, and thus was stressed by officers and training instructors. There was insistence upon “the strictest march discipline” while on the move, and certain policies were to be followed, such as no halts to be made in villages. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, ‘Training of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> C.M.R. Brigades,’ ‘Confidential – Canadian Corps – G. 478 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Army,’ by C.H. Harrington, 16-12-15 and LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3862, Folder 94, File 5, ‘2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division Operational Order No. 175.’

<sup>131</sup> For ‘green’ formations, for instance, threatening to *not* allow these units into the line might be effective. In 1915 the state of training for one Canadian unit ensured that “these troops will not be entrusted with a portion of the line until they are thoroughly efficient” as soldiers. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, ‘Training of 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> C.M.R. Brigades,’ ‘Confidential – Canadian Corps – G. 478 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Army,’ by C.H. Harrington, 16-12-15.

<sup>132</sup> Bruce Cane, ed., *It Made You Think of Home: The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1916-1919* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2004), 245.

During wartime and while on active service, the troops were under the authority of the British Army Act, the British Manual of Military Law,<sup>133</sup> the King's Regulations and Orders (KRO),<sup>134</sup> and other statutes, orders, and even civilian legal structures. Canadian soldiers were also subject to Canadian laws, aspects of the Militia Act, and regulations specific to their own branch of service,<sup>135</sup> provided they did not conflict with other legal norms.

The Army Act outlined the military crimes and breaches of conduct under which soldiers were charged, punished, and brought before a court martial.<sup>136</sup> For example, the crime of cowardice fell under Section 4 (7) of the Army Act, which stated that a soldier was guilty of cowardice when he showed "an unsoldierlike [sic] regard for his personal safety in the presence of the enemy,"<sup>137</sup> such as by deserting his post, casting aside or laying down his arms. And there were different definitions and understandings of what constituted desertion, especially while on active service. The Army Act covered all conceivable military crimes, including those pertaining to refusing orders (section 11), theft and looting (section 6),<sup>138</sup> desertion, including participating in, assisting, or failure to inform the CO of (section 14), and AWL (section 15).<sup>139</sup> And to give COs, officers, and

<sup>133</sup> In this chapter I make use of the 1907 British Manual of Military Law, the last version published prior to the outbreak of war in 1914. British War Office, *Manual of Military Law* (London: Printed for His Majesty's Stationary Office, by Harrison and Sons, 1907). This version was found online at <https://archive.org/details/manualofmilitary00greauoft>.

<sup>134</sup> Under the KRO, for example, Section 4 covered cowardice, Section 7 related to mutiny, and Section 12 covered desertion. PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, Part II, File #: 30 (22) – 5, Memorandum – Desertion.

<sup>135</sup> Railway troops, for instance, were subject to both the British Army Act and the Railway Regulations Act. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 2179, Folder D-2-26 Volume 3, 'Discipline – Generally.'

<sup>136</sup> It seemed that COs could send any soldier on active service up for a courts martial and "they should do so, if in their opinion a case merits more than a punishment of 28 days Field Punishment No. 1." LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, report of 16 February 1918. It seems that COs often had the choice of whether to impose field punishment, or send the soldier for a courts martial. Bell, *Canada in War-Paint*, 33.

<sup>137</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 20 and PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, Part II, File #: 30 (22) – 5.

<sup>138</sup> Section 6 (1a) covered 'leaving his CO in search of plunder,' 6 (1g) was 'breaking into a house in search of plunder,' and 6 (1j) covered 'irregularly appropriating to his own unit provisions and supplies.' The MO of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, moreover, wrote of soldiers seen scrounging for turnips in No Man's Land. Moreover, McGill wrote that food was crucial for morale, and referred to "a tremendously strong appetite the looting instinct is, and how well disciplined troops must be to refrain from falling to plundering at critical junctures in military operations." He noted, also, that some soldiers looted Lee Enfield rifles from the dead after giving up on their Ross rifles. Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold McGill*, 111, 271, and 150. See also Cate, ed., *A Soldier's Memoir of World War I*, 45, 75 and William Hesler, ed., *War Interlude: 1916-1919* (Bloomington: iUniverse Inc., 2011), 31.

<sup>139</sup> For each charge/crime there were different aspects to it. Section 8 (1), for instance, covered 'offering violence to his superior officer,' whereas section 8 (2b) covered 'using insubordinate or threatening language to his superior officer.' There were also different understandings of desertion. "Constructive desertion," for example, was applied "where the absence of the accused soldier resulted in his avoiding any special or dangerous duty." Other important Army Act

other authority figures some leeway when it came to charging soldiers, there were also more ‘catch-all’ charges under which soldiers could be tried and punished. Section 40 of the Army Act, for example, covered ‘conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline,’ giving COs some flexibility in punishing soldiers for breaches of conduct that were not necessarily covered by pre-existing laws.<sup>140</sup> This charge, aside from the flexibility it afforded COs, also gave authorities some assurance that undisciplined soldiers could be punished, even if their ‘crime’ or breach of conduct fell outside more specific military laws found in the Army Act and other documents.

The legal and disciplinary regime facing Canadian soldiers during the war was composed of both official and unofficial policies and procedures, as well as certain documents that formalised these policies and monitored soldier behaviour.<sup>141</sup> Generally speaking, these were all designed to deal with those who experienced war weariness, but also those whose war weariness reached into outright refusal and evasion of duty. In many ways war weariness is a difficult concept to pin down; it describes those soldiers who were fed up, worn down, and increasingly questioning their role, but did not necessarily cross over into refusals and serious disciplinary problems. There was a fine line between war weariness and rejections of legitimate army authority, and there were

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sections included: section 7 (crimes related to mutiny), section 19 (drunkenness), section 18 (malingering, pretending to be ill, or deliberately injuring yourself), and section 18 (disgraceful conduct of the soldier). The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and J.E. Child Archives, TMM F00 81, John Cummer Fonds, Volume 2, Series 4-6, 9-3-4, Folder 1, Notebook: ‘Notes taken during a Course at Harrowby Camp’ and PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, Part II, File #: 30 (22) – 5, ‘Memorandum – Desertion.’

<sup>140</sup> In one case of September 1916, for instance, a soldier was reprimanded for breaching censorship regulations, though he was actually charged under Section 40, “an act to the prejudice of good order and military discipline.” LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4574, Folder 1, File 4, Routine Orders of 1916 and LAC, RG 150, Volume 243, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisional Supply Column (1), 1914-1915. This also allowed for stragglers, shirkers, and anyone exhibiting the slightest symptom of ‘cold feet’ to be punished by authorities, even if there was no formal charge or crime. PPCLI Archives, 34 (1) – 8, Infantry Battalion Training Notes, November – December 1914, and ‘Hints from France.’

<sup>141</sup> Important paperwork pertaining to military discipline and army law included APM charge reports and sheets, which identified the crime (ex. “Drunk”), place and date, name of witnesses, punishment, and ‘by whom awarded.’ When a soldier was charged with a crime, there emerged correspondence and instructions regarding his care, confinement, outlined the punishment, and included requests for routes and warrants for the offender and his escort. Army Form B. 252, moreover, was the standard charge sheet under the King’s Regulations, and was sent to the APM when a soldier committed a crime. And a soldier’s conduct sheet, service history, and disciplinary record were also used at times to call for either greater leniency, or as justification for a harsher sentence based on past experience/performance. All documents, including the charge sheets, accompanied the soldier in transfer/transit. For courts martial members, moreover, the ‘Notes for Guidance of Presidents’ (of courts martial) was also crucial. See LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 392, C-26-1, Volume 1, Charge Sheets and Volume 2; LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 2, Volume 661, D-79-2, Discipline, ‘14<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion;’ Volume 662, D-102-2. Discipline, Canadian Postal Corps; Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, Discipline and PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, Part II, File #: 30 (22) – 5.

many forces that could push any individual soldiers from war weariness into more serious problems. These policies and procedures were intended to prevent war weariness from transmuting into more serious and collective disciplinary issues.

Army Form B. 2069, for instance, was the ‘Offence Report,’ for use in field service only. This document outlined the regimental number, name, and rank of the offending soldier, the particulars of the crime, including place and date, the crime itself, by whom it was reported, and witnesses; the CO needed to initial it, a punishment levied, and signed by an officer.<sup>142</sup> In terms of procedures, the courts martial, particularly the field general courts martial (FGCM), was the main body used to settle military legal issues. These issues could be settled locally and summarily, within the military unit itself, or for more serious crimes a court martial would be convened. Recidivist soldiers and repeat offenders, moreover, might also be sentenced under a court martial, even if their crimes were relatively minor. These military courts included officers, called witnesses to testify, gathered evidence, investigated crimes, examined documents and the soldier’s service record, and ultimately decided upon the guilt or innocence of the accused, as well as the recommended punishment.<sup>143</sup> These courts martial, and courts of inquiry, had clear rules and procedures to be followed.<sup>144</sup> Policies were in place to ensure these courts proceeded efficiently, and in conformity to military law and justice, but also to ensure there was some protection for the accused soldier; the latter included, for instance, the provision for a legal assistant or ‘soldier’s friend’ to help in his defence.<sup>145</sup> And it was

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<sup>142</sup> The soldier’s charge sheet would also have to be updated to include this information, and any remarks also provided. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, ‘Discipline.’

<sup>143</sup> LAC, RG 150, Volume 242, No. 1 Canadian Field Bakery, Canadian Army Service Corps, 13/6/17.

<sup>144</sup> For example, the army sought to dispose of courts martial cases as quickly as possible, but only if it did not negatively affect or interfere with “active operations.” There were attempts to stamp out “irregularities regarding discipline,” and ensure that proper punishments were awarded, as “illegalities in this respect” were “subversive to discipline.” Another procedure to be followed was that witnesses needed at the trial were not to be “allowed to proceed on leave before [the] trial.” And there were also rules regarding the distinction between AWL and Desertion. See PPCLI Archives, Sub-Series 30, Nominal rolls, Courts Martial and Discipline, Parts I and II, File #: 30 (21) – 5; LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4554, Folder 2, File 12, Routine Order No. 302 and Volume 4563, Folder 1, File 3, ‘Circular Memorandum 26,’ dated 30 October.

<sup>145</sup> Those going to trial for capital crimes were not always given a fair chance at defending themselves. A ‘friend of the accused’ would be provided, but only “whenever practicable.” This suggests that this was not always the case, or that the military situation or military expediency could further disadvantage the accused. Rules also outlined certain procedures that had to be followed in order to bring a charge against a soldier through a court martial. Reports and letters of the PPCLI, for example, lamented that sometimes convictions were quashed because “charges were laid under the wrong section, or the prosecution failed to produce sufficient evidence.” It seemed, moreover, that the author of



British Army policy to publish the results of courts martial in brigade, battalion, and other units' daily or routine orders.<sup>146</sup> This was done, in part, to act as a deterrent to others, to stigmatise and embarrass the offending soldier, and to reinforce military discipline and army authority.

The legal and disciplinary system did not always run smoothly, however, and at times it may have actually caused more harm than it prevented. There were problems related to the courts martial system,<sup>147</sup> for instance, and also regarding the unequal application of discipline and punishment. An inequitable or overly harsh disciplinary regime may have actually undermined the soldier's confidence in the military hierarchy and system, rather than work as a contributor to unit cohesion and fortitude.<sup>148</sup> And some of the policies reflected in the disciplinary system, though not officially enshrined in it, also served to compromise unit cohesion and solidarity. An infantry training manual for the Canadian Militia, and also used during the war, stipulated that

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these reports worried that men were failing through the cracks and going unpunished. These documents suggest that if a soldier could not be charged with desertion for lack of evidence, then they should be at least charged with cowardice or AWL. See LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, 'Circular Memorandum;' Volume 390, B-11-1 and LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4669, Chaplains Reports, Hospitals 1 and PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, Part II, File #: 30 (22) – 5, 'Circular Memorandum A.8.,' 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division, Scale of Punishments, dated 23 November 1915 and 30 (21) – 5.

<sup>146</sup> See, for instance, LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4530, File 14F, 'Orders: Daily Part I (2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Divisional Train),' 1-1-18 to 30-4-18. Moreover, it seems the army authorities made a concerted effort to ensure that all pertinent orders, instructions, rules, policies, and procedures were published regularly, and clear for all troops to see and be made aware of. This meant, for example, that orders that had been published in the past were often re-published, as the issue was deemed pertinent again or to remedy recent problems. Documents from Shorncliffe Hospital, for instance, make it clear that important orders, rules, and instructions were often repeated to the troops, both verbally and in writing, multiple times. In one example, the orders were repeated three times in one month. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 2, Volume 662, D-107-2, Discipline, Hospitals Generally and D-100-2, Discipline, Princess Patricia's Red Cross Hospital and LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4537, File 3, Routine Orders, 25 September 1916.

<sup>147</sup> The accused was allowed to make statements and call witnesses, but it seems it would be hard to defend yourself because of the army hierarchy, presence of superior officers, and the shame/stigma associated with indiscipline. And when the accused was provided with a soldier's friend, the latter often had little time to prepare or familiarise themselves with the case. One officer admitted that "this principle is absolutely wrong." Another document is quite telling in this regard: "the attendance of a friend of the accused in no way relieves the court of its responsibility for safeguarding the interests of the accused, and eliciting all facts which may tell in his favour," suggesting that there were abuses. PPCLI Archives, Sub-Series 30, Nominal Rolls, Courts Martial and Discipline, Parts I and II, File #: 30 (21) – 5 and LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, 'Circular Memorandum.'

<sup>148</sup> One soldier wrote about misguided discipline and priorities, complaining that his punishment for having an extra webbing belt should have been overlooked, especially "with all the shells and bullets flying around" and other more pressing concerns. Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 112.

a soldier having a complaint to make will make it to his company commander through his company sergeant major. He must not go direct to an officer to complain or request indulgences.<sup>149</sup>

Though part of the justification for this policy was practicality, it also served to reinforce the army hierarchy as sacrosanct. Some of these measures, however, seemed to run counter to harmonious relations between all ranks. An officer from No. 6 Canadian General Hospital, for instance, stated that “any man who addresses an officer without being accompanied by an N.C.O. will be severely dealt with,”<sup>150</sup> further reinforcing this chain of command.

Military discipline and the army legal system were problematic in other ways as well. Though it is clear that military law and civilian law differed in fundamental respects,<sup>151</sup> it seems that those in charge of overseeing military law did not have the time, resources, or even inclination to give all cases – especially those concerning ORs – a fair assessment.<sup>152</sup> The military situation, the state of discipline in the soldier’s unit, the soldier’s own history,<sup>153</sup> and the need to uphold morale could all take priority over the particulars of a case. In one situation, for example, a soldier of the 5<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion was punished for going AWL, but subsequent reports made it clear that the officer commanding (OC) *did not* have the authority to punish the soldier in this way.<sup>154</sup> And even if the CO lacked the authority to apply sentences to certain crimes, these sentences

<sup>149</sup> The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and J.E. Child Archives, TMM F0038, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, Folder 1, Booklet: ‘Infantry Training for use of Canadian Militia, 1915.’

<sup>150</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4574, Folder 1, No. 6 Canadian General Hospital, Daily Orders, May 1916 – September 1917, File 4.

<sup>151</sup> Soldiers were governed by different laws and priorities. Moreover, military law was more about upholding the edifice and authority of the military hierarchy and chain of command, and about manpower and morale, than about justice and due process as in civilian courts.

<sup>152</sup> Officers were treated more leniently than ORs, as evidenced by the conviction rates for both general and field general courts martial. 74.02% of officers were convicted in general courts martial, whereas ORs faced a conviction rate of 82.25%. The disparity in field general courts martial were even greater. Officers were convicted in 75.92% of cases, but ORs faced a conviction rate of 86.90%. See Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour*, 77, citing Putkowski and Sykes, *Shot at Dawn* and Oram, *Military Executions during World War I*.

<sup>153</sup> This could work both for and against the accused soldier. If the soldier had a clean record, had been loyal and dedicated, and if the courts martial officers were aware of the stresses and strains facing this individual and his unit, they might take this into account and offer some leniency in judgment and deciding punishment. On some occasions, the soldier might even be given the benefit of the doubt. If, on the other hand, the soldier had a questionable conduct history, was in a unit renowned for indiscipline, or if examples needed to be made, this might all act against the soldier.

<sup>154</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 1, Volume 661, D-85-2, Discipline, 5<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion.

could remain. As one officer of the 12<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion explained, “unless it would appear that an injustice had been done to the accused, it is not considered that the sentence should be interfered with,” and thus should remain. The author then requested to superior authorities that in this particular case “please grant the necessary authority to the officer commanding 12<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion to make this award a legal one.”<sup>155</sup> And though reserve units were not subject to field general courts martial – as they were not actively serving in the field – they could still be punished with other types of court martial.

The mistreatment of accused soldiers and legal irregularities occurred in other ways as well. One chaplain, for instance, visited the APM compound to check on some prisoners, and “found the most serious abuses and ill-treatment taking place to[ward] Canadians and others” in detention there. The chaplain spoke up on their behalf, disgusted that the men were “suffering from a sense of injustice” and harsh treatment.<sup>156</sup> Some officers and courts martial members, moreover, went into these trials with preconceived notions of military law and discipline. It must also be emphasised that military law was not really about justice; it was always about maintaining discipline and upholding the needs of the armed forces above that of the individual. To a certain extent this could not be helped, but when dealing with capital cases where a soldier’s life was on the line, this was problematic. One such traditional view, especially prevalent early in the war and amongst disciplinarians, was that good soldiers simply did not commit crimes or breakdown. These soldiers, the view went, did their duty to the utmost, and suffered the stresses of war stoically and silently.<sup>157</sup> One such contemporary view stated that malingering was a crime, and was not committed by “those governed by higher ethical conceptions,”<sup>158</sup> suggesting that only certain types of soldiers committed such actions. These views on predisposition were problematic, as was relying too heavily on the past

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<sup>155</sup> Ibid, Series 2, Volume 661, D-88-2, Discipline, 12<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion.

<sup>156</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4674, DCS London, Correspondence with No. 1 Canadian Infantry Base Depot.

<sup>157</sup> Joanna Bourke wrote of racial, national, or cultural explanations for enduring. For the British, there was the notion of the stiff upper lip’ mentality, “bulldog endurance,” or ‘British phlegm.’ Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, 217.

<sup>158</sup> Thomas W. Salmon, *The Care and Treatment of Mental Diseases and War Neuroses (“Shell Shock”) in the British Army* (New York: War Work Committee of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene, 1917), 30.

service record of an accused soldier to judge current culpability in crime. After all, warfare is an evolving and dynamic process; there was certainly room for individual improvement, especially as new soldiers became acclimated to army life and discipline, and there were extenuating circumstances as well that needed to be taken into account.

### Breaches of Conduct, Punishments, and Courts Martial

Crimes and breaches of discipline came in all varieties.<sup>159</sup> Breaches of discipline, for instance, included both those pertaining to omission and commission,<sup>160</sup> so soldiers could be charged for committing unlawful behaviour, or for failing to do something that was expected of them. Moreover, the refusal to obey an order was distinguished from neglect to obey an order, though it is not clear just where the distinction lay.<sup>161</sup> There were also more general and flexible charges that could be used to discipline soldiers, especially when their conduct fell outside clearly-defined crimes and parameters. One Canadian soldier was disciplined, for example, who while on active service was in “contravention of routine orders; appearing at exercise outside company lines improperly dress[ed].”<sup>162</sup> A similar charge covered “disobeying a lawful command given by his superior officer,”<sup>163</sup> which gave COs some measure of flexibility in punishing subordinates.

Of the more serious and clearly-defined crimes, absence without leave and drunkenness were common. However, reports, daily orders, and other documents suggest that the punishment could vary widely, based in part on whether the soldier was on active duty while the crime was committed, and whether the unit was in the battle zone.<sup>164</sup> AWL

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<sup>159</sup> Canadian artillery officer Ernest Black noted in his memoir all the different crimes and breaches of conduct he observed. He noted, for example, the disregard of orders, theft, scavenging, looting, including of corpses, the playing of Crown and Anchor, though it was forbidden, disobedience, and insubordinate language. Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 19, 52, 99, 100, 148, and 166-171.

<sup>160</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold McGill*, 36.

<sup>161</sup> See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 2179, D-2-26 Volume 1, ‘Headquarters, Canadians, Bramshott.’

<sup>162</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4530, Folder 14E, ‘Daily Orders No. 178.’

<sup>163</sup> LAC, RG 150, Volume 242, No. 1 Canadian Field Bakery, C.A.S.C., 13/6/17.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, Volume 241, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Field Butchery, 18 February 1915 and 10 May 1917. One soldier charged with AWL was given four days CC [confined to camp] and forfeited two day’s pay. Another soldier was absent for approximately 12 hours, and was given Field Punishment No. 1 for two weeks, and forfeited one day’s pay.

and desertion were considered especially serious crimes, as they represented a breakdown of authority, could compromise the cohesion and fighting prowess of the unit, and could even imperil the military situation more generally if units became unreliable in the line. These crimes were also particularly despised because they seemed to privilege the individual over the collective, a serious problem when trying to manage masses of soldiers. This meant that courts martial officers were often keen on punishing soldiers for AWL and desertion to the utmost. And even if there was no evidence that the soldier absented himself to avoid a specific duty, one officer stated that the court was “bound to assume that an accused intended the natural and probable consequence of his actions,” namely to avoid a certain duty. If there was, however, proof that the soldier’s absence led to the avoidance of (a particular) duty, the court would presume he “absented himself with that object in view.”<sup>165</sup> This is troublesome, if only because the court was adding intention to a soldier who might not have had such forethought. But again, military law was distinct from civilian legal systems in that there was no belief in innocence prior to conviction, and it was the duty of each accused individual soldier to prove that he was not guilty. AWL and desertion were taken especially seriously prior to large offensives, and soldier claims that they were unaware of any upcoming operation were often dismissed.<sup>166</sup> It was important prior to attacks that all units were up to strength and available for service; absent or deserting soldiers not only undermined the strength of these units, but also offered the enemy a valuable source of intelligence if they were apprehended by the Germans.

Military punishments related to army discipline could take various forms, and often had different goals as well. Some punishments were simply about removing the troublesome soldier from his unit or the front lines, lest he negatively affect the morale, discipline, and combat motivation of others. Other punishments, however, were designed

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<sup>165</sup> PPCLI Archives, Sub-Series 30, Nominal rolls, Courts Martial and Discipline, Part II, File #: 30 (22) – 5.

<sup>166</sup> Courts martial charges of AWL in March of 1917, for instance, were not inclined to believe an accused’s testimony that they were unaware of any future operations. The court argued that any soldier near the front would have been well aware that there was a big ‘show’ coming up. The months of preparations, the constant movement, and increase in activity were dead giveaways. Being aware of upcoming operations and then leaving one’s comrades anyhow was deemed particularly reprehensible, and was therefore often punished more severely. PPCLI Archives, 34 (1) - 6, Battalion Orders, Daily Orders Part II, 1 January – 31 December 1917.

to humiliate or even inflict pain on the accused.<sup>167</sup> Field Punishment (FP) No. 1, for example, certainly fell into this category. According to the *British Manual of Military Law*, Field Punishment No. 1 and 2 could be awarded by courts martial and COs. The latter punishment included “extra fatigue duties,” and the soldier “may be subjected to the like labour, employment, and restraint, and dealt with in like manner as if he were under a sentence of imprisonment with hard labour.”<sup>168</sup> Field Punishment No. 1, moreover, included these extra duties, as well as the added humiliation and discomfort of being kept in irons, “in fetters or handcuffs,” and “may be attached for a period or periods not exceeding two hours in any one day to a fixed object,”<sup>169</sup> like fence, post, wagon or gun wheel. The *Manual* stipulated that “every portion of a field punishment shall be inflicted in such a manner as is calculated not to cause injury or to leave any permanent mark on the soldier,”<sup>170</sup> and yet this was not always avoided.

Other punishments had a more deterrent effect, and were designed to make an impression on the accused’s comrades and unit. There were concerns, for instance, that the application of insufficient punishment on soldiers would have a deleterious effect on unit discipline. One report noted that “the army commander considers that if field punishment were more rigorously carried out, it would act as a greater deterrent to crime than is the case at present.”<sup>171</sup> Without this ‘rigorous’ application of punishment, soldiers might take liberties if they felt that their actions had no negative consequences. The author of another report on discipline stated that COs must “do their utmost to prevent looting,” and that any soldier caught in this act must be severely dealt with as a deterrent

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<sup>167</sup> The use of Pill No. 9, for example, might fall under this category. British MO Andrew Davidson referred to this as a colocynth extract that purged the system. It was basically a laxative that was given as punishment to ‘clear’ hangers and the like. Martin Pegler, moreover, stated that the ‘No. 9’ was “the universal purgative pill for soldiers on sick duty. A universal laxative pill, given when no other remedy seemed suitable.” See Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 56, Bell, *Canada in War-Paint*, 57 and Martin Pegler, *Soldiers’ Songs and Slang of the Great War* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing, 2014), 135.

<sup>168</sup> British War Office, *Manual of Military Law* (London: Printed for His Majesty’s Stationary Office, by Harrison and Sons, 1907), 598-599. This version was found online at <https://archive.org/details/manualofmilitary00greauoft>.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid. The cover of Craig Leslie Mantle, ed., *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience* contains an illustration of a soldier undergoing Field Punishment No. 1. One British MO remembered FP No. 1 as ‘in fetters,’ and FP No. 2 as ‘in fetters and tied to a gun wheel.’ Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 33.

<sup>170</sup> British War Office, *Manual of Military Law*, 599.

<sup>171</sup> PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, Part II, File #: 30 (22) – 5.

to others,”<sup>172</sup> which suggested that punishment and deterrence were the emphasis, not justice or reform. The deterrence factor was one reason why charges and punishments were published in daily orders for all soldiers of the unit to see.<sup>173</sup> Whether this directly affected future discipline and incidence of crime, however, is another matter entirely.

The emphasis on deterrence and the effect of discipline on the unit also helps explain critiques about sentences being too lenient,<sup>174</sup> suggested punishments, and army policies on minimum sentences. An army memorandum issued in February 1917 reflected this concern for supposed leniency, and instructed COs not to dismiss charges laid by other authorities, such as MPs. This “mistaken leniency” was problematic, especially as it meant duplication of orders and undermined the efforts of MPs to enforce discipline.<sup>175</sup> Indeed, one subaltern recalled that as a member of a court martial, he was reprimanded by superior officers for recommending two years imprisonment for the accused, rather than execution.<sup>176</sup> The military authorities also provided officers and courts martial members with suggested punishments for specific crimes. These were guidelines and were meant to apply to first offences only. For example, for the crime of ‘absence when warned for duty in camp or billet,’ the soldier should receive two years imprisonment with hard labour; for cowardice, and desertion, when warned for duty in the trenches, the punishment

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<sup>172</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, Discipline. This might also explain why seemingly innocuous crimes, like very short-term AWL, were punished so severely. One soldier, for example, was sentenced to 10 days Field Punishment No. 1, and forfeited one day’s pay, for being absent from duty for about three hours. In another case a Private was given 14 days F.P. No. 1 and forfeited 28 days’ pay, for being AWL while on active service for roughly 25 minutes. LAC, RG 150, Volume 243, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division Supply Column (2), ‘Part II Daily Orders’ and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division Supply Column (1917-18), ‘Daily Orders Part II,’ 24 April 1917.

<sup>173</sup> LAC, RG 150, Volume 243, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Divisional Train (3), ‘Daily Orders.’

<sup>174</sup> It must be acknowledged here that there were also many examples of critiques of army discipline and punishments being too harsh and disproportionate.

<sup>175</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 26, Volume 2180, Folder D-2-26 Volume 6, ‘Confidential: Circular Memorandum,’ February 1917. In other cases, it seems that certain punishments were deemed of little value. Brig-Gen. G.J. Farmer, for instance, considered that CB (confinement to barracks) and CC (confinement to camp) to be “of practically no disciplinary value,” and these punishments should therefore be discontinued, or at least reserved for “the most trivial offences.” Awarding these punishments might reinforce the idea that soldiers could nearly get away with indiscipline and poor behaviour. These punishments of CC and CB, and placing areas out of bounds, were punishments designed to restrict the movement of soldiers, for various reasons. Granting or withholding leave also acted as a powerful way to shape behaviour; all soldiers looked forward to leave, and therefore might be inclined to behave so as not to lose their privileges. The use of leave privileges could be used as inducement to good behaviour (carrot). LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4530, Folder 4, ‘Canadian Corps A.19-0-17;’ DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 49; LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4533, File 1 ‘Correspondence,’ 16-1-15 to 29-1-19, ‘Dishonoured Cheques,’ and LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 2, Volume 661, D-93-2, Discipline, Canadian Ordnance Corps, 5 September 1917.

<sup>176</sup> Reid, ed., *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 204.

recommended was death; and for disobedience, or ‘showing a wilful defiance of authority,’ three years penal servitude was suggested.<sup>177</sup> For recidivists, or “in subsequent or aggravated cases the sentences might be proportionally increased”<sup>178</sup> in an effort to maintain discipline. Brigadier-General G.F. Farmar of the Canadian Corps headquarters explained it:

As a general rule, in fairness to a man and in order to maintain discipline as a unit, it will be found more beneficial in every way, to inflict a substantial punishment in cases where a man has been given every chance to reform, but persists in rebelling against discipline.<sup>179</sup>

The previous conduct of the soldier, his service and disciplinary record, were but one factor in deciding the punishment applied to troops. Past behaviour at times meant the difference between a capital sentence and lesser punishments. In theory, at least, the CO and courts martial officers should have taken into account: the accused’s character, “from a fighting point of view as well as from that of behaviour;” his previous conduct in action; the opinion of his superiors; and the state of discipline in his unit.<sup>180</sup> This last point was especially important, as even soldiers with good service records could be sentenced to death if it was deemed important to make an example of the accused and send a message to his unit. In this case, as in so many others related to army life, the collective trumped the individual.

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<sup>177</sup> PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, ‘Circular Memorandum A.8.,’ 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division, Scale of Punishments, 23 November 1915. Another list of offences and recommended punishments suggested that for soldiers contravening orders regarding alcohol prohibition, they should receive five days F.P. No. 1 for the first offence, and 10 days for the second offence. And for soldiers in hospital for VD, it was recommended that the soldier forfeits his field allowance, and placed under stoppage of pay at the rate of \$.50 per diem while in hospital undergoing treatment. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, Discipline and LAC, RG 150, Volume 199, C.M.P. Shorncliffe, ‘C.M.P. In the Field.’ See also Morton, *Fight or Pay*, 40.

<sup>178</sup> PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, ‘Circular Memorandum A.8.,’ 36<sup>th</sup> (Ulster) Division, Scale of Punishments, 23 November 1915.

<sup>179</sup> PPCLI Archives, Sub-Series 30, Courts Martial and Discipline, Parts I and II, File #: 30 (21) – 5, report of G.F. Farmar and LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, Discipline, 16 February 1918.

<sup>180</sup> PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, Part II, File #: 30 (22) -5, ‘Memorandum – Desertion.’ The soldier’s past and conduct sheet could determine the level of punishment. The CO could increase the days of pay forfeiture, for example, based on previous convictions and the man’s “character.” It was suggested that each case should be judged on its own merits, taking into account: length of service, previous record, the “excuse the offender may have to offer,” and “the present circumstances which prevail.” Attempts were made to acknowledge and factor in mitigating aspects, but this was not always possible. In one case, an officer claimed that the accused should receive only an ‘Admonishment,’ “in view of the fact that Piper McLean bears a very good reputation...[and] there did not seem to be any wilful deviance of authority.” Intention thus was taken into account. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, Discipline, A.W.L. Charges and Series 2, Volume 661, D-79-2, Discipline, 14<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion.



Some COs and courts martial officers were more lenient and sympathetic, and sought to acknowledge mitigating factors and the reality of the situation on the ground. One officer of the 8<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion, for instance, explained in February of 1918 why he let a soldier off with only a warning. He explained that the accused “has done splendid work both in France [in the army zone] and here,” his CO spoke highly of him, he had a clean conduct sheet, and was usually very good at saluting.<sup>181</sup> Other COs and officers, however, seemed more concerned with their own reputation, or that of the regiment (battalion or other unit). Having high rates of crime and indiscipline might reflect poorly on the leadership and effectiveness of these officers. Captain Ralph Bell, for instance, recalled that one officer threatened a subordinate with a FGCM, adding “then you would be shot!” The officer, however, ended up dealing with the soldier at the local level, explaining that “I shall not permit the name of this battalion to be besmirched by you” by sending him up for a court martial.<sup>182</sup> Ultimately, the army itself and the officers who upheld it were concerned about the ‘big picture,’ and ensuring that sufficient troops were in the line to achieve military goals. Discipline policies and courts martial were concerned about this wider view of the situation, about optics, about the collective over the individual and what was in the best “interests of discipline,”<sup>183</sup> rather than what was best for the soldier himself.

Other punishments were designed to permanently remove soldiers from their units and from the forces, and from society more generally. In the most serious cases, the punishment was death - execution by firing squad. Of course, not all those who were charged under a capital offence or who were sentenced to death had their punishment actually carried out. In the BEF during the First World War, 3,080 soldiers were formally condemned to death; of these 346 (or 11.23%) were actually shot by firing squad.<sup>184</sup> The

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<sup>181</sup> Saluting and ‘smartness’ were often used as proxies for discipline. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 1, Volume 661, D-86-2, Discipline, 8<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion.

<sup>182</sup> Bell, *Canada in War-Paint*, 36.

<sup>183</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4563, Folder 1, File 3, ‘Circular Memorandum 26,’ 30 October. Another report, moreover, explained why sick leave was cancelled: “the reason given for remanding this man to his commanding officer is that it was considered in the best interest of discipline that he should be deprived of sick furlough and brought before his commanding officer to receive adequate punishment.” LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 2, Volume 662, D-100-2, Discipline, Princess Patricia’s Red Cross Hospital.

<sup>184</sup> Babington, *Capital Courts-Martial*, 189.

fact that a soldier failed to do his duty to the utmost could result in execution was one that all ranks were cognizant of. One infantry subaltern, for instance, wrote that the troops became adept at following orders without qualm, and the soldiers

dropped naturally into the habit of implicit and unquestioning obedience. He might grumble, but the job was done. The consequences of hesitation or disobedience [in the field] were serious, *they were death*.<sup>185</sup>

Aside from hesitating or failing to follow orders, acts deemed cowardly or ‘unsoldierlike’ were also punished severely. As Charles Harrison in *Generals Die in Bed: A Story from the Trenches* explained, if the soldiers ran or deserted, they would be greeted by the firing squad.<sup>186</sup> Another soldier wrote bluntly that “in the First World War you either went forward [in battle] or got shot.”<sup>187</sup> Though not every soldier who ran or deserted was executed, let alone apprehended, the fear of death and of the shame associated with execution could act as a deterrent. It need hardly be said that few wanted to be executed, though as with suicide there were some who saw that any way out was preferable to the trauma and pain they were experiencing. Few, moreover, wanted to participate in these firing squads, though it must be admitted that some soldiers relished the opportunity to take part in these executions, believing that cowardly or deserting soldiers needed to be punished for their behaviour whilst their comrades managed to carry on. And in the army’s desire to make the greatest impression on the accused’s unit, the soldier’s own comrades often made up the firing squad.<sup>188</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> My italics, added for emphasis. Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*, 40. Another soldier felt sick thinking about executing his own comrades. He seemed to justify it by writing “but there you are, we had to have discipline.” Arthur, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, 204.

<sup>186</sup> Charles Yale Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed: A Story from the Trenches* (Toronto: Annick Press, 2002), 56.

<sup>187</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 172.

<sup>188</sup> Barnes recalled participating in a firing squad for a soldier executed for desertion. This was not something he wanted to participate in, and he stated “it was a job I never wanted.” Feelings of bitterness in his journal are evident. Cane, ed., *The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes*, 15, 20.

## Morale, Combat Motivation, Endurance, and Military Effectiveness

The legal system and disciplinary regime used by the British Army had both direct and indirect impacts on the morale, combat motivation, endurance, and the military effectiveness of the soldiers. Regarding morale, the traditional army opinion, which survived to some degree throughout the war, was that units with good morale would not face extensive disciplinary problems, and those with good discipline would also have solid morale. The two concepts reinforced one another. An army memorandum of February 1917 indicated that “in regiments where discipline is strict, these irregularities [regarding slackness in saluting] do not take place.”<sup>189</sup> In this view, reinforcing unit discipline and insisting on punishment would necessarily lead to solid, positive morale that would help all in the unit. And good morale would all but guarantee good results on the battlefield. This, of course, was a specious argument at best. Disciplinary problems in a given unit did not definitively mean that its soldiers were bad, but may have pointed to the reality of combat and trauma on the Western Front, and inadequacies of rotation or leave policies. Contemporary documents and anecdotal evidence suggests, however, the army belief that some soldiers were simply ‘bad apples,’ troublemakers, had “bad character,”<sup>190</sup> and were unable (or perhaps unwilling) to follow discipline properly. The attitude and personal history of some individuals certainly made them less amenable to military life, but to suggest that entire units were bad was reductive. Issues of leadership, unit operations and casualties, equipment and supplies, cohesion and comradeship all played a crucial role in performance in combat.

The legal and disciplinary aspects of army life also played an important function in the combat motivation of the troops. With a legal structure designed with certain goals in mind, and with discipline used sparingly and sensibly, soldiers felt more comfortable

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<sup>189</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 26, Volume 2180, Folder D-2-26 Volume 6, ‘Confidential Circular Memorandum,’ February 1917.

<sup>190</sup> And the author of a report on *HMHS Araguaya*, moreover, stated that discipline was largely good aboard the vessels, “with the exception of the usual two or three [soldiers] who are always out to make trouble.” This reinforces the idea that the authorities felt some men were simply ‘bad apples’ or troublemakers. See LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, No. 3 Canadian Sanitary Section, Discipline document of 12 May 1919, and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4577, Folder 5, File 6, H.M.H.S. Araguaya, ‘Discipline.’

doing their duty to the utmost, knowing that if they were driven to or beyond the breaking point, they would be treated with sympathy and leniency. This was not always the case, however, and the problems pertaining to the legal/disciplinary system of the British and Canadian forces may have compromised the motivation and commitment of the average soldier. The motivation of soldiers could be impacted by both carrots and sticks, or the promise of reward and the threat of punishment<sup>191</sup> to induce or discourage certain behaviour. Training and lectures, moreover, could also assist in the process of motivating soldiers to fight. Training had several purposes, including strengthening discipline, assisting in fitness, developing self-confidence, and increasing the offensive spirit.<sup>192</sup> And even when soldiers were out of the line, in need of a respite from the strains of war, this training continued. A soldier of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote on 11 September 1918 that “we have had training almost every day of what is supposed to be our rest” period.<sup>193</sup> And as the author of one training document suggested, “there can be no repose for any of us until the object before us – the defeat of the enemy – is accomplished.”<sup>194</sup> The defeat of the enemy, as well as the desire to finish the war and return home, served as strong motivating forces for soldiers in the war. This motivation, and discipline of the troops, however, could be undermined by many factors, such as inclement weather,<sup>195</sup> supply problems, ineffective leadership, futile attacks or the general lack of success in operations. For a soldier who had already been in the war for months or years, and with no apparent end in sight, sticking it out until the defeat of the enemy was a tall order indeed.

The legal and disciplinary aspects of soldier life in the war also had an impact on the endurance of the troops at the front and behind the lines – these had a direct bearing on the ability, and willingness, of the men to endure at the front. First-hand accounts and primary sources, and subsequent secondary analyses, illustrate that there were things

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<sup>191</sup> See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 662, D-100-2, Discipline, ‘Princess Patricia’s Red Cross Hospital.’

<sup>192</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, File 3, ‘Training – Division.’

<sup>193</sup> Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 127.

<sup>194</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>195</sup> Lord Moran wrote that armies exposed to the elements for extended periods can see their discipline erode. Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 85. And William Ball of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Divisional Artillery wrote in early April 1917 that bad weather hurt the morale of the troops. McGrath, *World War I Diary of William Hannaford Ball*, 87.

soldiers did in an attempt to stay in their unit and not go sick, or do something more drastic like desert or administer a self-inflicted wound (SIW). The use of alcohol and other drugs as coping mechanisms and fortifying forces was but one example of attempts to endure what was, in many ways, an unendurable existence. Scrounging for food to supplement meagre or monotonous army rations, as well as the receiving and sharing of food parcels from home also helped. Sufficient food, water, and alcohol helped with both the morale and health of the troops, both of which positively contributed to the ability of the soldier to remain at the front. Time out of the line, concerts and drinking, music and shows all helped in this process, and in the words of one MO, good food and company “did much to make us forget, for the time being, the squalor and dreariness of our surroundings and duties.”<sup>196</sup> The question, however, was whether these distractions and coping mechanisms would be enough over the long-term.

Soldiers unable to endure, however, might be driven to commit a crime or do something drastic to escape the trenches and find a reprieve, even if it was brief or illegal. For instance, there were accusations that some soldiers purposely became infected with VD, likely after visiting brothels or prostitutes on leave.<sup>197</sup> A member of the No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance stated that VD should be punished, as “with but very few exceptions venereal disease is contracted in immoral sexual connection.”<sup>198</sup> The implication was that these soldiers got what they deserved, and should be punished. It is impossible to determine the veracity of these comments, especially the purposeful contraction of VD, and it is difficult to understand the motivations of a soldier who would purposely endure the shame and discomfort. An appreciation of the terrible trauma at the front, the sight and stench of bloated and discoloured corpses, and the other stresses and strains of war help us in this understanding, however. A soldier pushed beyond the breaking point might try almost anything to escape the horror of the front, and might even

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<sup>196</sup> Norris, *The Memoir of Captain Harold McGill*, 111-112. Another soldier wrote that after Vimy, sports “help us forget the ordeal we have gone through in the past.” Walsh, *The First World War Diary of Private Bert Cooke*, 108.

<sup>197</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4717, Folder 110, File 22, ‘Canadian Special Hospital, Witley.’

<sup>198</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4555, Folder 4, File 8, V-D, Circular Letters Re., 3-11-16 to 11-3-17, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance.

risk serious debilitation, court martial,<sup>199</sup> and other negative aspects for a much-needed reprieve.

It seems, moreover, that wilful SIWs also fall into the category of a soldier, driven by desperation, doing something drastic to get removed from combat. The medical and military authorities, however, were aware that SIWs or ‘left-hand wounds,’ as they were sometimes known colloquially, were a well-known method of escaping the trenches and active service. In the words of the historian of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Casualty Clearing Station:

The penalties against men who deliberately made themselves casualties were heavy, and precautions were taken to apprehend such men. Consequently, all patients suffering from accidental or self-inflicted wounds were accompanied by documents, explaining the origin of such injuries. The breaking of a dental plate [for example] was always regarded as a highly suspicious case.<sup>200</sup>

Even accidental SIWs could be punished due to negligence. If a soldier shot himself (or another) while cleaning his rifle, for example, he could still be charged for failing to follow orders properly. And if conclusive evidence regarding the SIW could not be found, the soldier could still be punished under the catch-all charge of “conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline” (section 40 of the *Army Act*).<sup>201</sup>

Contemporary evidence indicates that authorities believed discipline had an important role to play in the prevention and treatment of casualties. One of the most common problems in the trenches was trench foot. This condition, described by a

<sup>199</sup> It was widely known in the army that SIWs, even accidental ones, were punishable by court martial. VD and trench foot also came to be seen as SIWs by the latter half of the war, and were therefore a crime. This was the case apparently because these were preventable injuries, and there were many army rules and regulations to (attempt to) prevent these problems. See Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 24 and Macphail, *Medical Services*, 269.

<sup>200</sup> DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 88. For more information on dental work in the Canadian forces, see Lt.-Col. H.M. Jackson, *The Story of the Royal Canadian Dental Corps* (Ottawa: Unknown Publisher, 1956).

<sup>201</sup> If there was conclusive evidence presented that the SIW was deliberate, the soldier could be charged under Section 18 of the *Army Act*, ‘Disgraceful Conduct of the Soldier,’ which included malingering, pretending to be ill, or deliberately injuring yourself. PPCLI Archives, Sub-Series 30, Nominal Rolls, Courts Martial and Discipline, Parts I and II, File #: 30 (21) - 5 and ‘First Army No. C/469, 13/6/16, Self-Inflicted Wounds.’ For the treatment and punishment of SIWs see *Ibid*, Part II, File #: 30 (22) – 5, ‘Memorandum – Desertion;’ LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4551, Folder 1, File 4, ‘Third Army Circular Memorandum No. 23,’ dated 18 September 1916 and reprinted 4 January 1918; *Ibid*, Volume 4554, ‘3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division Medical Arrangements upon Taking over the Front Line at Present Held by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division;’ *Ibid*, Volume 4542, Folder 5, File 1, Reports On, and Instructions Re. SIWs, A.D.M.S. 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, document of July 1917, II Army Circular Memorandum, Self-Inflicted Wounds, and British GHQ, ‘Self-Inflicted Injuries,’ dated 27 April 1916.

contemporary MO as constituting “dead-white, doughy feet that will later go black, with spongy, swollen soles,”<sup>202</sup> became a serious problem for the authorities. Dr. Robert Atenstaedt in *The Medical Response to the Trench Diseases in World War One* wrote that trench foot mostly attacked the toes, but could also cause swelling up to the knees, and large blisters could form.<sup>203</sup> The problems associated with terrible trench and frontline conditions, coupled with the “neglect of personal cleanliness,”<sup>204</sup> ensured a steady stream of these casualties. Exposure to wet conditions, above freezing temperatures, also played an important role in the development of this affliction.<sup>205</sup> Casualties could make both individuals and military units highly inefficient,<sup>206</sup> which could in turn negatively impact the overall military situation in any given sector. Trench foot seemed to peak in winter months, not surprisingly, and during the war there were forty-one deaths from this affliction, and 10,000s of hospital admissions; this acted as a “severe drain on manpower,” and ultimately “constituted a grave problem in the British army” and affiliated units.<sup>207</sup>

The prevention of trench foot entailed keeping feet clean and dry, and the frequent issuing of warm socks, which was not an easy task in the front lines. Furthermore, the use of good waterproof boots, the use of braziers in the trenches, the application of anti-frost grease, foot powder, and especially whale oil on the feet, and taking off the boots and puttees periodically to massage the feet all helped in prevention<sup>208</sup> It was also important that MOs inspected feet frequently, and this “close surveillance by the military authorities” assisted in this process. The problem, of course, was that MOs could not fully control the conditions in which the men served, they were themselves under the authority

<sup>202</sup> Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 165.

<sup>203</sup> Dr. Robert L. Atenstaedt, *The Medical Response to the Trench Diseases of World War One* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2011), 59.

<sup>204</sup> Major-General Sir W.G. Macpherson, Colonel Sir W.H. Horrocks, and Major-General W.W.O. Beveridge, eds., *History of the Great War Based on Official Documents: Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume I* (London: His Majesty’s Stationary Office, 1923), 305.

<sup>205</sup> Atenstaedt, *Trench Diseases of World War One*, 61.

<sup>206</sup> Macpherson et al., *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume II*, 295.

<sup>207</sup> Atenstaedt, *Trench Diseases of World War One*, 157-158. A British MO also claimed that despite treatment and preventative measures, the “number of men having to recover high and dry, out of the trenches, begins to grow” over time. Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 165.

<sup>208</sup> Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 165; Macpherson et al., *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume I*, 306-311 and Atenstaedt, *Trench Diseases of World War One*, 198.

of unit COs and HQ, and the health of the troops was often subordinate to larger military goals.<sup>209</sup> The most important aspect of prevention, however, was probably the need for periodic rest away from the conditions of the trenches. This was particularly difficult under active service conditions, especially as contemporary doctors suggested that tours of duty in wet or water-logged sectors should not exceed twenty-four to thirty-six hours.<sup>210</sup>

The military authorities, though, seemed to believe that discipline was the most important factor in the prevention of trench foot casualties, and in the healing and treatment process for other casualties as well.<sup>211</sup> As one MO argued, “the prevention of this disease [trench foot] is almost entirely a matter of discipline, and can only be carried out by the cooperation of the company and battalion officers” with the MO.<sup>212</sup> The principles of prevention were published in general routine and standing orders, so that the soldiers would be aware of the precautions to be taken. COs, however, were “responsible that the instructions were carried out,” and that soldiers were equipped with the proper clothing and equipment to do so. One such instruction was that the troops were to remove their boots (and change their socks if possible) once every twenty-four hours.<sup>213</sup> But just how possible or realistic was this under active service conditions? Units often spent several days at the front lines, and without proper dugouts and shelters, the use of funk-holes was widespread and it was a practical difficulty to properly care for feet with shells dropping and snipers on the prowl. Soldiers had sentry duty and working parties, and

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<sup>209</sup> Atenstaedt, *Trench Diseases of World War One*, 175.

<sup>210</sup> Others argued that good food and rest “were the best forms of treatment for foot cases.” Moreover, another military doctor argued that it took 20-36 days of total treatment before the soldier was again fit for duty. Macphail, *Medical Services*, 270; Macpherson et al., *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume II*, 297-298 and Atenstaedt, *Trench Diseases of World War One*, 167-169.

<sup>211</sup> Some MOs and officers felt that army discipline could be useful in the recovery and treatment process. The author of one report wrote that “many patients... would be benefitted by coming under direct disciplinary control for a few hours each day.” Many believed discipline was also useful in dealing with trauma or ‘shock.’ On its transport vessel, for instance, the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade had a collision with a British destroyer heading to France. This was a “shock,” but after all men were paraded on deck with lifebelts, “perfect discipline was maintained throughout.” Military discipline was also applied in civilian hospitals, even those back in Canada, under the auspices of the Military Hospital Commission. See LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4577, Folder 4, File 5, Canadian Military Hospital, Hastings and LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4688, Folder 41, File 12, 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Historical Records, 20-6-15 to 22-7-18. Desmond Morton, *Fight or Pay: Soldiers’ Families in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2004), 137.

<sup>212</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4546, Folder 7, File 7, Trench Foot.

<sup>213</sup> Macpherson, *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume II*, 300.



there were also raids and patrols which occupied their time, energy, and attention. Prior to going into the trenches, moreover, soldiers were to wash, dry, and apply grease to their feet.<sup>214</sup> Grease and clean dry socks were not always available, however, and officers simply could not monitor every single soldier under their command to ensure that the proper precautions were taken.

The legal structure and disciplinary system that applied to Canadian troops also had a direct bearing on their military effectiveness and efficiency. Training documents and after-action reports, for instance, stressed the importance of discipline to the morale, combat motivation, and military prowess of the troops. One document on defeating enemy counterattacks stated that:

If the discipline of the [machine gun] detachment is good, and if the men keep cool, they are bound to break up the enemy's attack...[the success in defeating counterattacks depended on] tenacity, discipline, and bravery...it must therefore be impressed upon all machine gun detachments that, unless they have specific orders to the contrary, they are to remain in action even if surrounded.<sup>215</sup>

The implication of this, of course, was that the sheer bravery and discipline of the defenders could defeat any counterattack; moreover, it was understood that troops should fight until surrounded, and to the death, if need be. Those who failed in their duty were often greeted with little to no sympathy, and even with a firing squad. This was the reality of life for soldiers on the Western Front, and was reflected in contemporary and post-war poems, literature, and other accounts, both patriotic and pacifist. The British novelist and poet Gilbert Frankau, for example, explored some of these themes in his poem "The Deserter:"

‘I’m sorry I done it, Major.’  
We bandaged the livid face;  
And led him, ere the wan sun rose,  
To die his death of disgrace

The bolt-heads locked to the cartridge;

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<sup>214</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3615, 25-7-1 to 25-7-6, Diseases, Miscellaneous, Generally.

<sup>215</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3859, Folder 85, File 'Notes on Defensive Employment of MGs.'

The rifles steadied to rest,  
 As cold stock nestled at colder cheek  
 And foresight lined on the breast.

'Fire!' called the Sergeant-Major.  
 The muzzles flamed as he spoke:  
 And the shameless soul of a nameless man  
 Went up in the cordite-smoke.<sup>216</sup>

This poem suggests that these executed soldiers died in disgrace, were quickly forgotten (a "nameless man"), and his comrades had turned away from his suffering and plight ("...colder cheek"). Extenuating circumstances were taken into account, at times, but generally soldiers were expected to do their duty until they were (physically) debilitated, or killed. As the CO of the PPCLI Agar Adamson explained, his long period of service in France began to take its toll on his health and ability to withstand the conditions at the front. He wrote in a letter to his wife Mabel in January of 1918 that "my nervous strain both in and out of the line is considerable; if anything goes wrong I will be hanged [executed], which is a minor matter personally, but a serious one to the Regimental records."<sup>217</sup> And despite the hyperbole of Adamson, he seemed to accept the need for discipline and punishment, as a good officer would have, and was more concerned with the reputation of his regiment than his own personal safety.

It is important to remember, however, that discipline did not equate with military effectiveness or military prowess. The Australian soldiers, for instance, "were generally looked down upon by most of the Allies as tough and undisciplined, though hailed as great combatants" at the front.<sup>218</sup> A Canadian artilleryman, furthermore, wrote that military executions were "generally speaking quite useless." He explained that "the rest of us [in the unit] did not need the example, and the poor fellows who were shot for the most part could not help what they did," in a rather sympathetic and thoughtful understanding of the situation. This soldier furthermore argued that:

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<sup>216</sup> Poem taken from Waters, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 134-135.

<sup>217</sup> Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 330-331, Letter to his wife Mabel, from Zouave Valley, 21 January 1918.

<sup>218</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 4.

I doubt if any man ever did his duty from fear of being shot...[and] I am quite sure that the fact that he was pardoned three times after sentence of death never resulted in one single man deserting or shirking his duties.<sup>219</sup>

This is of course just one example, but illustrates that not everyone in the military hierarchy believed that discipline was the most important aspect in fighting effectiveness and dedication to duty.

### Legal Aspects, Discipline, and War Weariness

Discontent at the legal and disciplinary system which applied to the troops could be a contributing factor to the onset of war weariness. The unequal application of discipline, and the punitive nature of the military legal system could act as a demoralizing force, eroding the faith soldiers had in the system. Furthermore, the unfamiliarity of new soldiers, especially reinforcements and replacements, with the unit history and traditions made the maintenance of discipline more difficult,<sup>220</sup> and could also compromise the morale of the individual and collective. Competent, paternalistic leadership was also important in the combat motivation of the soldiers and the disciplinary system of the unit; without solid leadership, unit cohesion and endurance suffered as a result, which only served to make the troops more vulnerable to war weariness and associated problems. Even volunteers might find that their commitment to the war effort and dedication to duty began waning after months, and then years, of war and combat. Repeated promises of victory came to naught. The situation was even worse for conscripts, whose commitment to the war effort, and their own personal involvement in it, were already questionable.<sup>221</sup>

The enormous casualties suffered at the front, and the lack of tangible military gains, at least until the final months of the war, reinforced the notion that survival in the

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<sup>219</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 28-29.

<sup>220</sup> Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*, 52.

<sup>221</sup> One British soldier admitted that there was no *Journey's End* [reference to R.C. Sherriff's play of the same name] public school spirit in his unit, as they were all from factories, mines, shops and were "unwilling soldiers, conscripts." At first, conscription/mandatory service was interpreted as an "escape from the dull drudgery of shop life," or as an "escape from a life I hated." He would soon be seeking escape from trench and army life, however. Anonymous, "The Deserter," in *The Atlantic – Special Commemorative Issue* (Summer 2014): 70. Originally published as "The Deserter: Just As He Was," September 1930.

war was minimal, and fleeting. Some soldiers were driven mad by the war, debilitated by shell shock, broken by mental health problems, war neuroses, and psychiatric casualties. Other soldiers, however, decided that they would rather risk the stigma associated with the failure to do one's duty than attempt to carry on at the front. Firsthand accounts and other evidence illustrate that some soldiers actively sought a Blighty wound;<sup>222</sup> others administered a SIW or contracted a self-inflicted illness; some troops became apathetic, overly cautious, or took to malingering; and still other soldiers sought to escape the front and active service by going AWL or deserting their units.<sup>223</sup>

The reality at the front and the stresses imposed on the soldiers also contributed to the onset of war weariness amongst individuals and the unit. The lack of proper food and other shortages, demoralization, discomfort, death and disfigurement, and a host of other factors all contributed to this sense of futility or the erosion of commitment to the war effort. One soldier wrote that after months and years of war and with no end in sight, the troops were hungry, downhearted, and "talk becomes mutinous"<sup>224</sup> as soldiers expressed their displeasure with the way the war was going, as well as their own personal involvement in it. The manifestations of war weariness, moreover, reflected this erosion of commitment to the war effort on both an individual and collective level. One Canadian, for example, admitted to disobeying orders of a superior officer, explaining that he was

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<sup>222</sup> A British soldier, for instance, broke his ankle which removed him from combat. He wrote that this was a "sudden, unexpected event envied by all the other chaps when it luckily took me back to England." Ibid. The poem by German soldier Alfred Lichtenstein illustrated this desire for this type of wound nicely. His poem *Prayer Before Battle* included the lines: But suppose I have to take it/ Don't let me get badly wounded./ Send me just a little leg wound/ Or a slight gash on the forearm/ So I go home as a hero/ Who has got a story to tell. Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, xxvii.

<sup>223</sup> One soldier wrote that after his return to health in hospital "I was in the machine again, being trained to kill and be killed." He did not want to die, and so it became firm in his mind that he would not risk it any more. He justified it by saying that "what I felt and thought at that time may be called sheer cowardice by some patriotic people, but, as I saw it, it was the most primitive kind of common sense carried into action." It seems that the survival and self-preservation instinct, coupled with reflection on his current situation, overwhelmed his sense of duty, discipline, loyalty to unit, and concern for comrades. Anonymous, "The Deserter," in *The Atlantic – Special Commemorative Issue* (Summer 2014): 70. Originally published as "The Deserter: Just As He Was," September 1930. For apathy, caution, and the increasing unwillingness of war-weary soldiers to put themselves in harm's way and follow orders blindly, see John Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage – The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle 1915* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd., 1967), 101; Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front*, 114 and Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History*, 216. SIWs and illnesses were a way to escape the trenches; apathy, fatalism, malingering and slacking were coping mechanisms and ways to reduce risks to the individual; and AWL and desertion were other ways to escape the front and further duty, which would increase the chances of being killed or mutilated.

<sup>224</sup> Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed*, 213.

exhausted and “fed up.”<sup>225</sup> This ‘fed up’ attitude was an important indicator of war weariness. A Private Cushman, moreover, was described in medical documents as “fed up with the Army,” and that he was “depressed and at times reckless of authority and discipline,”<sup>226</sup> illustrating that this attitude began to shape the soldier’s behaviour as well. Personal and internal coping mechanisms allowed many soldiers to continue with duty, but there also needed to be institutional and external ways to ensure soldiers carried on at the front. The legal and disciplinary regime in place could not possibly deal with the myriad problems facing both individuals and military units. Indeed, some of the army’s responses to infractions and insubordination were problematic, and actually exacerbated pre-existing problems. Without sufficient and appropriate supports, the war-weary soldier was liable to take drastic action to remove himself from harm’s way. The lack of a proper response to the phenomenon of war weariness was bad enough, but the inappropriate responses and insufficient understanding of shell shock and other negative impacts of the war on the individual were even worse. It is to these health and medical problems that we will now turn in the next chapter, especially as there was much overlap between the contributing factors toward war weariness.

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<sup>225</sup> Christie, *The Memoir of John Becker*, 196.

<sup>226</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, Folder 25-13-8 Mental Cases, ‘Medical Report on an Invalid.’

## Chapter 2 – The Medical Aspects of Service

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The medical system that confronted the Canadian soldiers during the war, like the military legal system, allowed problems in the realm of health to be dealt with at a more local and personal level, or through more official institutional channels. Decisions had to be made as to whether the soldier was fit to return to duty, and if so, in what capacity.<sup>227</sup> The medical and legal authorities also had similar goals, namely, to defeat the enemy using all available means, which included ensuring that sufficient soldiers were at the front and on the lines of communication to carry out operations and attain common goals. So long as soldiers were deemed useful, and soldiers could do myriad tasks aside from combat, they were considered important cogs in the vast war machine. Only the worst soldiers or the most serious medical cases were discharged. In addition to this, the army medical and legal systems were designed to monitor the soldiers, punish them for breaches of conduct, treat them for ailments keeping them out of the trenches, and ultimately ensure they did their duty to the utmost. And finally, both of these systems only paid lip service to the issues of motivation and intention; a disobedient soldier who committed a crime while under active service needed to be punished for the good of the unit, overall system, and chain of command – regardless of *why* he committed this breach of conduct. Mitigating factors and circumstances could be taken into account, but the emphasis was always on the collective (over the individual), and the ends seemed to justify the means of motivation and persuasion.

This section was guided by several research questions pertaining to the medical structure of the British and Canadian troops during the war. How did this military medical system deal with the more problematic, and rising, evidence of war weariness? How did this medical system address indiscipline, and how did it interact with the army's legal and disciplinary structures? And finally, how did this system actually deal with the casualties and reality of war, and how did this play out on the battlefield, especially in the periods of April-August of 1917, and July-November of 1918? This section will attempt to answer

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<sup>227</sup> There was a system of categorisation and classification for the soldiers, based on their health and fitness, and their capacity for combat and other non-combatant army work.

these questions, and identify the connections between the onset and manifestations of war weariness and the medical aspects of the war. And though war weariness and shell shock are not the same phenomena, they both reflect the impact of combat on the individual, and there is also overlap between their contributing factors and manifestations. Moreover, shell shock was a more serious problem than war weariness, although the latter was more widespread and concealed the cumulative decline by veteran soldiers. My project seeks to examine those soldiers who were pushed to, but not quite beyond the breaking point,<sup>228</sup> and how they were able to carry on *despite* their war weariness.

Primary and secondary sources suggest that the medical system and reality for soldiers on the Western Front could be an indirect contributing factor toward the onset of war weariness. A sense of injustice regarding military medicine, for instance, could contribute to this fed up, apathetic, or cautious attitude that were indicators of war weariness. Moreover, in the military medical system the individual was nearly always subsumed into the collective; this dehumanization and loss of individuality may have led soldiers to question the war effort, or at least their own personal involvement in it. In addition to this, the routines and regulations regarding the medical aspects of service might have become tedious. The tendency of the military medical staff, as well as other authorities, to focus on the minutiae of discipline and medicine, rather than on larger issues such as the provision of adequate supplies and proper use of these resources, might also have demoralized the troops. Why focus on the health and physical well-being of the soldiers if the military authorities could not figure out a way to cross No Man's Land with sufficient force to seize and consolidate positions against German counterattack? The health and sanitation<sup>229</sup> of the troops was inconsequential if they lacked the technology or

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<sup>228</sup> For those troops driven to the point of breakdown, collapse, or shell shock debilitation, see Mark Humphries, *A Weary Road: Shell Shock in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918* (London: University of Toronto Press, 2018).

<sup>229</sup> Each infantry division contained a Sanitary Section as part of their medical complement. It was the task of these officers and ORs to deal with the quality of water consumed by the troops, and with garbage, kitchen waste (such as grease and fat drippings), sewage, and other aspects. Moreover, the duties of the Sanitary Section were "chiefly inspectorial," which included visiting units, and providing advice and guidance regarding the sanitary conditions of quarters, for example. The Sanitary Section was also responsible for continuity in unit turnover, ensuring that procedures continued to be followed even when new units entered the line. These sections worked in conjunction with infantry officers, town majors, members of the medical services, and others to fulfill their duties. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, 24-4-2, Medical History of the War, 'The Care of the Casualty;' LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4717,

techniques to accomplish their military objectives. Medical problems during the war, such as disease, illness, and physical and non-physical wounds, all served to erode the health and fortitude of the troops. The medical and health problems of the troops, in both combatant and non-combatant branches of service, depleted the ranks, depressed morale, and decreased combat motivation and efficiency.<sup>230</sup> Some medical problems, moreover, might also be partial manifestations of war weariness. After months and years of service at the front, even the most dedicated, strongest volunteers showed clear signs of wear and tear. Some soldiers, it seems, decided that they had simply had enough, and took steps to reduce or eliminate their participation in the war. Over time, most human beings eventually succumbed to the strains associated with service, and there were tangible indicators of an erosion of endurance and staying power at the front. Many war-weary soldiers, moreover, seemed to have been on the very cusp of shell shock, debilitation, and breakdown. Or, put another way, many of these soldiers indicating manifestations of war weariness were pushed to, but not yet beyond, the breaking point. However, there was some overlap between shell-shock debilitation and war weariness, and at times there was a fine line between them. Most war-weary soldiers were able to carry on, reluctant though they might become, whereas those troops debilitated by shell shock were unable to continue with service, though they might very well desire to stick it out. Their medical problems merely prevented them from doing so.

There was also much overlap and similarity in the forces and factors that contributed to the onset of both war weariness and shell-shock debilitation. The long-term and near-continual exposure to war, and the trauma of combat in particular, both contributed to these two understandings of personal reactions to combat. War weariness can be understood as the *reluctance* (or *unwillingness*) to continue in combat, whereas shell shock debilitation was the *inability* to endure further combat. Aside from longer exposure to the stressors associated with battle, acute or intense exposure to trauma might

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Folder 111, File 1, No. 1 Sanitary Section, 'Historical Records' and LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3865, Folder 100, File 6, 'Organisation and Establishment Sanitary Sections.'

<sup>230</sup> Englander, "Discipline and Morale in the British Army, 1917-1918," in *State, Society and Mobilization* ed. by Horne, 135. Another soldier admitted in September 1918 that "I had been so long on the job I was losing my efficiency," obviously undermining military performance. Teed, ed., *Uncle Cy's War*, 254.



also accelerate the process of breakdown. The lack of proper rest, respite from trauma, and the inadequacies of the leave and rotation system also contributed to the development of both these problems.

Military medicine was distinct from civilian medicine and peacetime medical practices and priorities. Military medicine was more concerned with the issues of overall numbers, manpower, and morale. The health, recovery, and wishes of the individual soldier were relegated to secondary consideration behind the need to maintain sufficient force to attain objectives. The army medical system, and other aspects of army life, prioritised the collective over the individual; military medicine was not really about the genuine health and long-term recovery of the individual patient/soldier as an end in itself, but rather as a means to an end. This also harks back to the discussion on the legal system facing the Canadian troops during the war – military law was also a means to an end, prioritised the collective over the individual, and was about discipline rather than on justice. Moreover, relapsing troops were certainly an issue for the authorities, and efforts were made to minimise the number of soldiers who had to be taken out of the line for treatment for previous health problems. The military reality, however, often necessarily took precedence over the well-being of the troops. This is reflected in the fact that soldiers were often returned to the front *prior* to their full recovery, as was the case during the emergency of the German offensives beginning in March 1918.

### Military Medicine as Surveillance and Control

In addition to ensuring proper numbers in the firing line and on the lines of communication, the military medical system was also about the control and surveillance of troops. This ensured that there was a disciplinary and paternalistic element to the system. The well-being of the soldiers was important only in the context of the wider army itself and the attritional struggle that was the First World War. It was not as though the army, its officers, and medical authorities were necessarily callous and indifferent to the plight of the soldiers under their command and care, but rather that the individual was simply less important than the survival and victory of the Entente and way of life over the

alternative. Individual soldiers were a means to an end, and perhaps more cynically mere cogs in the vast impersonal war machine that developed to defeat the Central Powers.

The concepts of proximity and immediacy were integral to the organisation of the army medical system. This might actually have prolonged war weariness and medical problems, however, as soldiers were unable to properly escape the source of trauma and gain genuine respite. The army sought to reduce the number of soldiers evacuated from the front, and from the war zone more generally, in order to maintain unit numbers. Proximity ensured that soldiers would be treated as close to the front lines as possible, whereas immediacy entailed sorting and treating casualties quickly (triage). Corps and divisional rest stations were designed to ensure that those soldiers worn down from combat, but without serious (physical) wounds, would be able to recover promptly. These rest areas sought to “save wastage in minor medical cases,” and only those who were “expected to require only a few days treatment medically are sent there.”<sup>231</sup> The army emphasis on manpower and the control of troops was designed to reduce ‘wastage’ rates, for illness, wounds, and even psychiatric casualties. Minor cases, and also those labelled as NYDN (Not Yet Diagnosed - Nervous), a label for shell shock, or “overwrought mental conditions requiring a short period of treatment, will be retained in the divisional area.” The author of this report indicated that “it is [only] more serious cases that are sent to the special hospital”<sup>232</sup> for war neurosis. This reflected the army’s desire to keep troops close to the front and their units, but also illustrates the acknowledgment that ‘overwrought mental conditions’ could be directly attributable to service. And yet despite this acknowledgement, this classification also suggested that the medical authorities were reluctant to make a definitive judgment on the issue, and even sought to blame the soldier himself (as being predisposed to these problems or just simply ‘nervous’). The army sought to husband its resources, and prevent any apparently minor cases from slipping

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<sup>231</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 2-9-4-8, File ‘1<sup>st</sup> Divisional Rest Station.’ Moreover, in relation to the conditions of Trench Fever and Pyrexia of Unknown Origin (P.U.O.), soldiers were only transferred back to the UK if there was no improvement after a long observation period. Ibid, 3-1-1-14, Neurology, War Neuroses, ‘A Report on Invalidism Caused by Trench Fever.’

<sup>232</sup> Ibid, Folder 3-1-4-2, ‘Treatment of Shell Shock Cases at the Front.’

through the cracks and being evacuated to Blighty. Any soldier who might recover in relatively short order was to be kept close to the front lines.

And yet, many cases were indeed evacuated to Britain, a problem that was identified by authorities by at least 1916. The MO T.P. Woodhouse wrote in November 1916 that he was concerned that casualties of a 'lighter' nature were being evacuated too readily back to England. He argued that around 5% of these lighter casualties evacuated were

of such a slight nature that recovery is effected within a period of about a fortnight...[and after recovery these soldiers were sent to reserve units, but] steps should be taken to avoid this great delay in getting men back to the fighting line...[some will inevitably be evacuated unnecessarily but] during normal periods, no slight case should be allowed to leave this country...I would therefore be glad if you will take steps to treat such cases in Convalescent Depots, instead of evacuating the[m] to England.<sup>233</sup>

In many instances, it was war-weary soldiers and those experiencing the beginnings of shell shock who needed this rest and could recover in as little as two weeks. Inadequate rest only exacerbated this problem and encouraged more permanent breakdown. The army medical system was designed to ensure adequate control over the troops, but also to shape their behaviour and thinking. The many regulations to which the troops were subject convinced many reluctant soldiers that nearly every aspect of their existence was monitored or subject to bureaucracy. In terms of sexual conduct, for example, it was the duty of officers, NCOs, chaplains and MOs to ensure that all soldiers were aware of army rules and consequences for breaches of discipline. Instructions issued by the CAMC in March of 1915 ordered officers to supervise the men closely, to carry out regular and surprise inspections, and to provide lectures on prophylaxis and the benefits of early treatment.<sup>234</sup> This was in the best interest of the individual soldier, but also helped with the manpower and morale issues in the army itself.

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<sup>233</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4563, Folder 1, File 3, Circulars, Report/document by D.D.M.S., 10 November 1916.

<sup>234</sup> Canada, *Army Medical Corps Instructions: General Orders, Militia Orders and Precip of Headquarters Letters bearing upon the Administration of the Canadian Army Medical Service – Published between August 6<sup>th</sup>, 1914, and December 31<sup>st</sup>, 1916* (Ottawa: The Militia Council, 1917), 42-43. It has also been suggested above that the discipline used in military hospitals was understood as helpful in the treatment and recovery process, but this discipline also

The monitoring of the soldiers, and the careful control of their movements, took other forms as well. The severity and increasing number of psychiatric casualties became a serious problem for the medical and military authorities. To deal with this problem, and to minimize wastage and evacuation of soldiers, the British insisted on the use of the NYDN label for these casualties, in part to suggest that any diagnosis was only temporary, and also to reject the notion of psychiatric casualties altogether. As the British Army general routine order No. 2384 indicated, soldiers who were made militarily non-effective but *without* any visible wound were to be diagnosed as NYDN.<sup>235</sup> This was ostensibly to prevent the ‘needless’ evacuation of casualties or misdiagnosis, but also an attempt to reject non-physical wounds entirely. Nevertheless these cases were to be kept near the front under army discipline, as well as monitored closely, to look for signs of recovery, relapse, or malingering. The medical services were instructed to be very careful with the use of nomenclature and diagnosis, lest all these psychiatric and non-physical casualties be listed as wounded or battle casualties.<sup>236</sup> Only when the issue was serious enough to warrant evacuation to the UK or if the director general of medical services, based on “the recommendation of a neurological board at the Granville Canadian Special Hospital,” decided this was to be classified a battle casualty.<sup>237</sup>

And even if soldiers were evacuated to hospitals or convalescent centres, their progress was monitored closely. This was the case because the army needed to maintain sufficient numbers in each unit at the front. During the German spring offensives (*Kaiserschlacht*) beginning March 1918, the authorities were concerned that there were not enough troops in the line to stem the tide of German attacks. Because of these concerns, and the fact that “men were urgently wanted for the front,” there was much pressure on the medical services to ‘heal’ the soldiers promptly and send them back to

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helped reinforce army authority. See, for instance, the photographs taken at No. 7 Stationary Hospital in Europe. DUASC, No. 7 Overseas Stationary Hospital, PC2-26-56, War Hospitals, Photos.

<sup>235</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, ‘25-13-6, G.R.O. 3867,’ 25 April 1918 and ‘G.R.O. 2384.’

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, Folder 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, Mental Cases, ‘Procedure to be Followed in Deciding Whether or Not an Officer or Soldier Suffering from Nervous Disorder Without any Visible Wounds Shall be Classified as ‘Wounded.’’

<sup>237</sup> Ibid.

their units as soon as possible. As one report for the Canadian Special Hospital at Witley indicated,

It was a time of stress at the front, and the number of days a patient spent in hospital was that number of days' delay in training and taking his place in the firing line. For this reason hospital days were carefully watched, and all attempts made not to lose time...[while men were in hospital, they could not help defeat the Germans] it had long been felt that patients were wasting a great deal of time while in hospital. The average stay in hospital of a patient at this time was about five weeks. Many patients, of course stayed longer. The parades for treatment and physical training did not take up a great deal of their time, and they tended to lose physical condition and morale.<sup>238</sup>

This was but another example of the military taking precedence over the medical, and the collective gaining priority over the individual. And though this was understandable given the situation, it likely alienated some individuals and undermined recuperation efforts.

Soldiers suffering from wounds or problems deemed of a "slight nature" were to be returned to the front as soon as possible.<sup>239</sup> Even more serious psychiatric casualties were kept in France and Belgium, especially if they were not definitively diagnosed as a battle casualty. Medical arrangements for the British XVII Corps in May 1918, for instance, noted that "ordinary sick," NYDN cases, "slight gas cases," and "trivial wounded" will be evacuated to the divisional rest station, and not to the casualty clearing station.<sup>240</sup> The medical authorities apparently believed these cases were not serious enough for evacuation, and should be grouped in with other 'slight' cases. 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division Medical documents of March 1918 also stipulated that NYDN cases were to be sent to the No. 46 Field Ambulance, along with "sick (other than serious cases)" and "wounded (trivial)" casualties, and not to No. 8 Casualty Clearing Station. The MO also stated that the field ambulance "will only retain such cases as will be fit for duty within 3

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<sup>238</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4717, Folder 110, File 22, Canadian Special Hospital, Witley, 'Historical Records,' documents of March 1918.

<sup>239</sup> Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 147 and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4563, Folder 1, File 3, Circulars, Report of D.D.M.S., dated 10 November 1916.

<sup>240</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4541, Medical Arrangements, C.A.M.C., 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, 4-6-10 to 21-7-18, 'XVII Corps, Medical Arrangement No. 9.'

days time.”<sup>241</sup> Again, this suggests that psychiatric casualties, and those worn down by acute stress or cumulative exposure to combat, would be fit for duty in a relatively short period of time, and were depicted as less serious than other casualties. Removing the soldier from frontline service and especially the source of their stress, even if only for a short while, did show positive results for many. For these troops, the transition from war weariness to shell-shock debilitation had not yet been completed. The failure to remove war-weary soldiers or those pushed to the breaking point, however, could lead to even further medical and disciplinary problems, as a desperate soldier sought any means of escape from the horror of the trenches.

### Treatment, Punishment, and Army Medical Facilities

Many cases, however, required more than just rest and removal from combat. The types of treatment were nearly as varied as the ailments, problems, and types of casualties affecting soldiers.<sup>242</sup> Treatment, however, often contained elements of army discipline, and even punishment. More traditional authorities believed that soldiers, invalided out of the line due to their own carelessness or neglect of orders, needed to be punished, under close army supervision and discipline, until ready to take their place in the line again. Others suggested that more stoic or dedicated soldiers would rather not leave their unit to go sick at all, but only if a serious (physical) wound or injury prevented them from continuing at the front. Captain Ralph Bell of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion refused to add the names of “at least half a dozen well-known scrimshankers to the roll of sick, lame, and lazy,”<sup>243</sup> which would remove them from duty, at least for a short while. Of the thirteen soldiers

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<sup>241</sup> Ibid, ‘A.D.M.S., 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division,’ 30 March 1918.

<sup>242</sup> There were advances in plastic surgery and facial reconstruction, as well as in the realm of prosthetics during the war. Other treatments included: surgery, the use of drugs, physical and remedial training, massage, electrical treatment, and use of games, training, and exercises to build physical strength. In the UK treatments included: remedial gymnastics, physical training, massage, hydro and electro therapeutics. Of course, there was a class and rank element to all this, as officers and ‘gentlemen’ were generally treated with more respect and sympathy than their lower class and OR counterparts. This also applied to non-physical casualties, with shell shocked officers generally diagnosed as Neurasthenic, but other ranks as suffering from Hysteria. See LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3597, 24-1-7 (Volume 4), Returns Only, Remedial Treatment and Volume 3493, 11-1-15 to 11-1-21, ‘Report of the Work Done in Remedial Gymnastics, Physical Training, Massage, Hydro and Electro Therapeutics in the C.A.M.C.’

<sup>243</sup> Bell, *Canada in War-Paint*, 54.

who showed up for sick parade, nine were given medicine and duty, one was given light duty, and another removed from duty altogether. And of those forced to remain at duty, many were also required to take the hated No. 9 Pill, a general purgative, sometimes interpreted as a form of punishment. And to further discourage the nine who showed up on sick parade from trying to avoid duty in the future, they were given a nine-mile route march in heavy marching order; Bell noted approvingly that “next day there were no representative of ‘A’ company on sick parade.”<sup>244</sup> The deterrence appeared to work splendidly.

The army medical system incorporated different treatment centres to deal with the myriad types of casualties encountered in a war of this magnitude.<sup>245</sup> Convalescent hospitals handled recovering soldiers prior to their return to the front, reinforcement depot, or unit. There were also hospitals dealing with specific aspects of service, certain types of casualties, or for particular patients. Special hospitals dealt with shell shock cases and other kinds of casualties.<sup>246</sup> The CAMC in conjunction with the RAMC ran these facilities, and by war’s end there were dozens of hospitals and treatment centres under Canadian authority, which treated Canadian and other Entente troops.<sup>247</sup> These facilities were a vital aspect of preserving the health and effectiveness of soldiers worn down over time.

For a soldier wounded at the front, their treatment and evacuation followed a definite pattern<sup>248</sup> designed to deal with these cases as efficiently as possible. Leaving the

<sup>244</sup> Ibid, 57-59.

<sup>245</sup> These included more permanent structures, furthest from the front, including base, general, special, stationary, and convalescent hospitals; facilities closer to the line, such as the CCS; storage and testing areas like medical stores depots and mobile laboratories; convalescent centres, corps and divisional rest stations; and closer to the line collecting stations, main and advanced dressing stations, and RAPs. In terms of hospitals, each type had a different function or priority. Stationary and general hospitals were larger facilities, further from the front lines, that could handle hundreds of patients (as measured in number of beds), and where surgery could be performed.

<sup>246</sup> For example the Westcliffe Eye and Ear Hospital. There were also Officer Hospitals, such as at Broadstairs, and private facilities like the Red Cross Special Hospital and the IODE Hospital. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4716, Folder 109, File 4, No. 3 Canadian General Hospital, ‘Historical Records.’ Entire volume is useful, however.

<sup>247</sup> There were, for instance, Nos. 4, 5, 11-16 Canadian General Hospitals, the military hospital at Epsom, Red Cross hospital, King’s C.R.C. Hospital, four C.C.H. facilities, Canadian Special Hospitals at Witley, Buxton, Ramsgate, Broadstairs, Folkestone, and Lenham, Etchinghill, and Granville Canadian hospitals. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686, 30-0-0 (Volume 5), CAMC Units, Correspondence regarding Special Investigation Committee.

<sup>248</sup> Soldiers wounded in the line would first be treated by themselves, their comrades, stretcher bearers, or MOs. If needing to be evacuated within the war zone, they would first be sent to the RAP; then to an advanced dressing station, main dressing station, and finally the CCS. See Macpherson et al., *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume I*,

wounded at the front was detrimental to morale, and might also impede military operations. The severity of the wound or injury, coupled with the soldier's service record, also determined how far they were to be evacuated and how much sympathy they were given. An infantryman with a serious battle wound, who had performed his duties in the past and did not have a history of (even suspected) malingering, for instance, could be evacuated out of the battle zone, toward the coast, and even to Britain and beyond. Soldier treatment also depended greatly on the prevailing circumstances. During active operations, medical personnel had less time for treatment and triage, and added a sense of urgency to procedures. Of course, these policies might actually exacerbate war weariness in some soldiers, and even promote its transformation into more serious neurosis. The diary of a British doctor explained that:

In the military [in contrast to civilian practice], your duty as a medical officer is not to put the patient first, but the battalion. Malingerers must be weeded out, 'swinging the lead' reported, the *wounded patched up and sent back to action, even if it worsens their condition*. Triage on the battlefield is a necessity, prioritising treatment for those most likely to fight again, leaving those beyond help to die.<sup>249</sup>

The casualty clearing station (CCS) and other facilities in close proximity to the front lines were operated by the field ambulance (FA) of each unit at the front.<sup>250</sup> The most serious cases were sent to the CCS, a facility more equipped to deal with a larger number of patients,<sup>251</sup> and a crucial cog in the medical evacuation and treatment system. The CCS worked in conjunction with other facilities, and was designed to relieve the FAs

284; LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, 24-3-2, Medical History of the War, 'The Care of the Casualty' and Norris, *The Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 329.

<sup>249</sup> The editor of this diary noted that "this was a long way from the Hippocratic Oath." In this passage the italics are mine, used for emphasis. Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 33.

<sup>250</sup> One MO described the field ambulance as having 11 officers and 232 ORs, and as a "versatile, mobile unit, able to serve three [infantry] battalions at once because it was divisible into three independent sections." Moreover, "each section had a stretcher bearer subdivision for collecting the wounded and a tent subdivision for treating them. In addition to setting up advanced dressing stations and main dressing stations, not far from the front, field ambulances operated divisional and corps rest stations at the rear." LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, 24-3-2, Medical History of the War, 'The Care of the Casualty' and Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 329.

<sup>251</sup> The CCSs were at first found in buildings and other permanent structures. But as the war went on, as destruction accumulated, these buildings became scarcer. Eventually, the CCS came to incorporate tents and huts. Macpherson et al., *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume I*, 278.



of their sick and wounded. The MOs, nursing sisters,<sup>252</sup> orderlies, and other doctors at these locations provided care for patients, and decided upon as well as organised their evacuation, return to duty, or further treatment. From the CCS, ambulance trains would take casualties to larger, more permanent hospitals closer to the coast. In the First World War these centres were often busy, with each handling thousands of patients each year.<sup>253</sup> The staff of the CCS faced serious difficulties in the performance of their duties. Aside from the horrific wounds associated with combat, medical personnel were also exposed to the stresses and trauma of war, without the ability to retaliate against the source of this trauma (the enemy). Being in range of enemy shell fire, the exposure to poison gas, and enduring German air raids all took their toll on medical staff. In addition, facilities often became overwhelmed with casualties, especially during and following operations. Hospitals and CCSs were “very full after the Vimy show,” for instance, and medical staff and resources were taxed to the utmost.<sup>254</sup> This also served to exacerbate medical and manpower issues during the war, and illustrates the enormous pressures on both soldiers and medical staff. The lack of respite, rest, and the reality of exhaustion were all contributing factors to war weariness and medical problems.

The CCS was important in the treatment and evacuation system, as it was connected with rest areas and convalescent centres. These facilities were established to deal with cases not yet ready for return to action at the front, yet deemed not serious enough for further evacuation down the line. There were both divisional and corps rest stations, where the MO “detains those not quite well and those who need a short rest,”<sup>255</sup> rather than hospitalization. The 1<sup>st</sup> Divisional Rest Station, for example, was established to “save wastage in minor medical cases...[and] cases as are expected to require only a

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<sup>252</sup> “The Nursing Sisters of Canada,” Veterans Affairs Canada, Government of Canada, last modified 28 November, 2017, <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/those-who-served/women-and-war/nursing-sisters>.

<sup>253</sup> To provide but one example, the 1st Canadian CCS during the war handled 65,441 cases, and of these 6,053 were returned to duty, 1,536 died of their ailments, 170 were sent to rest stations, 4,417 sent to other hospitals and facilities, and 53,265 were evacuated to base (hospitals). See Macpherson et al., *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume I*, 278 and DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919* by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, pages 2, 230, 310.

<sup>254</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 6-3-1, Hospitals, France, Generally, ‘No. 3 Canadian General Hospital McGill.’ The presence of influenza in these facilities compounded the problem, especially as the virus spread amongst personnel and patients, despite the best efforts at quarantine and treatment.

<sup>255</sup> Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 259.

few days treatment medically are sent to this.”<sup>256</sup> What constituted a ‘minor’ case was ambiguous, but retaining cases in the army area helped ease the burden on military hospitals. Rest areas were crucial to the continued functioning of the armed forces; a short rest out of the line, and especially respite from the direct sources of trauma, helped mitigate the worst effects of war weariness. These rest centres also minimised the overall numbers of sick and wounded. Some of the more understanding MOs, for instance, argued that it was better to send “exhausted men” to these facilities close to the front, rather than further down the line.<sup>257</sup> This concept of proximity (to the front) and immediacy (in treatment) became important aspects of the army’s approach to psychiatric casualties as the war progressed. Further down the line and closer to the coast, convalescent depots were also designed to rehabilitate soldiers prior to their return to active duty. These supposedly “slighter” cases were retained “pending return to duty or transfer” to other medical facilities.<sup>258</sup> These centres were reserved for “Canadians who are likely to be fit for service again...and given the opportunity to recover their strength” before being sent to reserve battalions or appearing before medical boards<sup>259</sup> - and thus were appropriate for many war-weary troops. Moreover, each stationary and general hospital sent its recovering patients to facilities for further convalescence.<sup>260</sup> These centres espoused military discipline, incorporated training, and were often understood as the penultimate step before a soldier returned to his place in the line. Convalescent centres and camps, furthermore, sought to make use of these soldier patients for labour or other purposes.<sup>261</sup>

The most seriously wounded or ill patients would be evacuated to, and treated at, the more permanent hospitals furthest from the front. Along the lines of communication and at the French coast bases there were general,<sup>262</sup> stationary, special, and convalescent

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<sup>256</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 2-9-4-8, ‘1<sup>st</sup> Divisional Rest Station.’

<sup>257</sup> Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 260.

<sup>258</sup> Macpherson, *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume I*, 278.

<sup>259</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, 24-3-2, Medical History of the War, ‘The Care of the Casualty.’

<sup>260</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4570, Folder 2, File 5, ‘Entertainment.’

<sup>261</sup> These were “for men who, while temporarily unfit for duty with their units, could yet be used for light fatigues” and other duties. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4717, Folder 111, File 1, No. 1 Sanitary Section, ‘Historical Records.’

<sup>262</sup> General hospitals were typically the largest of the military medical facilities, with a capacity for 1,040 to 2,500 patients (or beds). The case of the No. 3 Canadian General Hospital (McGill) is instructive. Its experience during the

hospitals, all serving a different purpose or different type of casualty. For those requiring further evacuation, or who were permanently debilitated, hospital ships conveyed these patients across the Channel to Britain,<sup>263</sup> and from there to Canada, if need be.<sup>264</sup> Special hospitals were organised to treat particular types of casualties, those requiring more resources, attention, or specialist equipment. These hospitals were established in the war zone itself, along with neurological centres inspired by French practices, and incorporating the idea of proximity. Special hospitals were also established in the UK for longer-term treatment, and for “patients suffering from the more obviously psychological effects of shell-shock and war neuroses.”<sup>265</sup> The idea was that psychiatric cases and functional nervous disorders could be treated, and perhaps even ‘cured,’ obviating the need for long-term disability or discharge from His Majesty’s forces.<sup>266</sup> The understanding of war weariness was not quite as advanced, but policies to address incipient shell shock also helped with war-weary soldiers.

## Medical Personnel, Arrangements, and Evacuation

The medical system required substantial personnel to ensure that it functioned according to guidelines laid down. Yet the medical personnel were still often over-worked and were liable to exhaustion or worse. A letter from the OC No. 3 Canadian General Hospital to (Nursing) Matron Margaret Macdonald, for example, lamented proposals to increase the capacity of the hospital as problematic. Each hospital had only so many MOs and staff, and “with the very active work which we are carrying on here, it is very trying to every one of these who are taking on additional work.” The officer and

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Battle of the Somme “taxed our efforts to the utmost,” in the words of one member. In a single day, the No. 3 hospital admitted over 800 patients, and discharged 1,100. And yet, by 6:00pm of that same day there were still over 1,000 patients in the hospital. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4716, Folder 109, File 4, No. 3 Canadian General Hospital, ‘Historical Records.’

<sup>263</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, 24-3-2, Medical History of the War, ‘The Care of the Casualty.’

<sup>264</sup> Ibid. The case of the No. 3 Canadian General Hospital (McGill) is instructive. Its experience during the Battle of the Somme “taxed our efforts to the utmost,” in the words of one member. In a single day, the No. 3 hospital admitted over 800 patients, and discharged 1,100. And yet, by 6:00pm of that same day there were still over 1,000 patients in the hospital. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4716, Folder 109, File 4, No. 3 Canadian General Hospital, ‘Historical Records.’

<sup>265</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, 3-1-4-2, Treatment of Shell Shock Cases at the Front, and ‘Treatment of War Psychoses.’

<sup>266</sup> Ibid.

hospital administrator continued, writing that after the loss of a key member of the staff, who had yet to be replaced, “Captain Rhea is doing the sanitary work in addition to his pathology, so you can see how his efforts are being considerably taxed, and...I am rather afraid that unless something is promptly done in this matter, that he will *break down*.”<sup>267</sup> This seems to be a clear acknowledgment that exhaustion and overwork could have serious and potentially long-term health effects on those subject to pressure. In addition to the MOs attached to each infantry battalion, there were also medical specialists who worked at the military hospitals in the war zone, along the lines of communication, as well as back in the UK. Moore Barracks Hospital in Shorncliffe, for example, employed a specialist in ‘mental diseases,’ who oversaw wards 24 and 25.<sup>268</sup> Other specialist doctors that fell under the ‘mental diseases’ category were those such as Captain E. Ryan, an expert in ‘insanity.’<sup>269</sup>

These doctors and specialists were supported by the Canadian Chaplain Service, the Canadian Army Service Corps (CASC), and private organisations such as the YMCA, Red Cross,<sup>270</sup> and similar groups. The Canadian Chaplain Service, unit chaplains, and padres assisted with the health and well-being of the troops by providing them with comforts and entertainment while out of the line, but also in assisting with medical duties at the front and during operations. Chaplains helped organise sporting contests, concerts, and other events, and ensured that soldiers were given material comforts, such as chocolate, hot coffee, cigarettes, stationary to write home, and a place to relax behind the lines. In this sense, the chaplains assisted with the morale and mental health of the troops, which obviously contributed to their overall (physical) health and ability to endure the stresses of war. And during attacks and other operations, chaplains could be found helping with the wounded at dressing stations and field hospitals, and were also known to

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<sup>267</sup> The italics are mine, added for emphasis. LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4570, Folder 2, File 8, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian General Hospital, Establishments, Personnel – Beds, letter dated 15 March 1916.

<sup>268</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4577, Folder 4, File 7, Moore Barracks Hospital, Shorncliffe, ‘Inspection.’

<sup>269</sup> Another specialist was experienced in ‘lung and nervous disease,’ others trained in VD, surgery, ear, nose, and throat, dental, pathology, and others. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3601, 24-2-8, Army Lists, Corr. re., ‘List of Medical Officers in the CAMC,’ as of 22 September 1916.

<sup>270</sup> See, for instance, the medical arrangements for Vimy Ridge and the role of the Red Cross. Percy L. Climo, *Let Us Remember Them: Lively Letters from World War One* (Cobourg: Self-Published, 1990), 253.

go forward with the infantry (or just after), to assist in the care and removal of casualties from the battlefield.<sup>271</sup> Chaplains could also be found at base hospitals and convalescent centres, along the lines of communication, and wherever soldiers were located. As the OC Buxton Military Hospital argued, chaplains rendered “important and valuable services, and I do not see how we can possibly do without them, or even release one.”<sup>272</sup>

The army medical system and its evacuation procedures were designed to remove the most serious cases from the front lines, lest their presence undermine soldier morale,<sup>273</sup> discipline, and endurance. During battles, frontline casualties were sent down the line using the FAs and stretcher bearers,<sup>274</sup> and would pass through regimental aid posts (RAPs) where triage was performed. Some of the wounded were quickly patched up, others sent back to the firing line, and still some were left alone, being “beyond help.”<sup>275</sup> Those able to walk on their own were sent to the advanced dressing stations, and also to the divisional walking wounded collection stations. Stretcher and more serious cases were sent via lorries to the main dressing stations, and ultimately to the larger hospitals beyond.<sup>276</sup> This system of evacuation worked better during static trench warfare, when lines of communication had been worked out and medical facilities established in a more permanent manner. Routine and predictability aided in this process. During more

<sup>271</sup> During battle, chaplains played a vital role for the troops. For example, during the operations at Lens there were seven coffee stalls and a soup kitchen established “during the fight.” Five of these were “under shell fire almost continuously...[and] two of our men were killed and one wounded.” Chaplain-run canteens were also “in the shelled area during the operations.” At these facilities they “issued free cigarettes, coffee, milk, sugar and biscuits.” During the action “thousands of men were served,” which was of great importance for their ability to carry on. LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4664, Reports ADCS France.

<sup>272</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4654, Hospitals 7, Buxton. Chaplains helped with the recovery process, and were also tasked with providing dying soldiers with comfort, and for Catholic troops, the last rites. Military chaplains also oversaw burials, wrote to next of kin, and even visited the bereaved if possible.

<sup>273</sup> Good and swift treatment and evacuation were deemed “vital to morale.” It also reassured men ‘going over the top’ and increased the chances a wounded soldier could be used again. Gaudet, ed., *The World War I Journal and Poems of Pte. Frank Walker*, x.

<sup>274</sup> During battles and operations, it was crucial to have plentiful stretchers and extra bearers to carry the wounded. Captured POWs were also made use of as stretcher bearers, though this was not always enough. It was important for the CAMC to be prepared for heavy casualties to ensure prompt evacuation, and hence medical treatment. During engagements, and especially when “casualties are severe,” MOs and stretcher bearers were often over-worked, exhausted, yet expected to carry on to deal with the urgent matters at hand. See LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3846, Folder 52. File 1, ‘First Division Report on Vimy Operations’ and Colonel W.W. Murray, *The History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion (East Ontario Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Mortimer Ltd., 1947), 284.

<sup>275</sup> Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 80.

<sup>276</sup> *Ibid.*

open and mobile warfare, such as during the Hundred Days campaign, the movement of the troops complicated matters.

Aside from evacuation, the CAMC and medical services had policies in place to address manpower and morale issues in the war zone. One way in which authorities attempted to reduce the overall number of casualties and those forced down the line or evacuated was to hold regular sick parades and inspections. These voluntary parades allowed troops who were sick or injured to be inspected by the unit's MO, who would then decide whether they should be sent down the line for further treatment. This was a regular part of any medical officer's duty,<sup>277</sup> and was designed to be the 'first line of defence' for the authorities. However, there were some problems with this system. First of all as casualties mounted, especially during periods of heavy combat, there was only so much a battalion MO could accomplish, and only so much time he could devote to individual soldiers. This meant that hasty diagnoses were commonplace. This also meant that some soldiers genuinely deserving of a rest away from the stresses of the front fell through the cracks and were forced to remain at duty. Secondly, there was the problem of separating legitimate casualties requiring further treatment and evacuation, from those who were simply trying to escape the front, for whatever reason. As one MO noted, some soldiers seemed to "seek treatment too readily," thus clogging up the system.<sup>278</sup> The third problem, however, was the opposite of this, namely, that some dedicated soldiers avoided these parades altogether, even if they did have a genuine medical issue, "refusing to accept [that] they are ill" or wounded.<sup>279</sup> There were myriad reasons why a soldier would reject medical treatment, including a stoic or traditional British 'stiff-upper lip' attitude, leadership responsibilities, a sense of commitment and duty, the unwillingness to let one's comrades down, optimism, the fear of being viewed as weak, or plain denial.

If soldiers were deemed unfit for further service at the front, there were certain procedures to be followed during evacuation and treatment. All patients undergoing

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<sup>277</sup> See, for instance, Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 253, 325.

<sup>278</sup> Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 232.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid. See also LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, Folder 2-4-1, Major G.S. Strathy, 'War Diary August 1914 – February 1918.'

treatment and evacuation were required to have certain documents on their person. To provide but one example, all cases of “mental diseases” at Camp Bramshott were sent to No. 12 Canadian General Hospital, and were to be accompanied by Army Form B.179 (medical history of an invalid) and Army Form B.183.<sup>280</sup> These were to accompany the soldier in order to track their medical history and treatment, but also to ensure that certain types of casualties were not evacuated to Britain. For many medical and military authorities, there was a suspicion of, and hostility to, psychiatric casualties, war neuroses, and shell shock. The understanding of the very real effects of trauma on the human body and mind were underdeveloped, though the horrors of the Somme, Third Ypres, and similar battles provided many lessons regarding these casualties. Ultimately, however, the upper echelons of the military hierarchy and the generals only paid lip service to psychology during the war.<sup>281</sup> The understanding of war weariness, moreover, was also underdeveloped, ensuring that pre-existing problems were exacerbated by the army medical system.

The medical bureaucracy also included army medical boards, which were tasked with deciding the fate of many a wounded or sick soldier. Those who seemed to require (at least) six months of treatment were brought before these boards, sometimes with a “recommendation for invaliding back to Canada,”<sup>282</sup> which would ease the burden on medical personnel and resources, at least in Europe. For soldiers requiring long-term care, but who were not invalided back to Canada, doctors would be kept informed as to the status of patients. The soldier’s stay in hospital was dependent upon the nature and progress of the case, as well as the wider military situation. Moreover, there were regular re-evaluations of patients to prevent shirking and to maintain manpower requirements.<sup>283</sup> Ultimately, however, the goal of the CAMC was to ensure that there were sufficient

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<sup>280</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686, Folder 30-0-0 (Volume 4), ‘Instructions for RMOs in Bramshott Area.’ Regarding ‘Mental Disease,’ no soldier was to be transferred without proper documents. See also LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4551, Folder 1, File 7, ‘D.G. 1108/2.’ In some cases soldiers required written statements from their CO attesting that they did in fact experience a traumatic event which explained their current psychiatric condition/incapacity/debilitation.

<sup>281</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 16.

<sup>282</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686, Folder 30-0-0 (Volume 5), CAMC Units, ‘Correspondence re. Special Investigation Committee.’

<sup>283</sup> Ibid. For more information on medical boards and ensuring only physically fit soldiers proceeded to the front, see LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, Nos. 10 and 12 (British) FLD AMS, ‘Asst. Inspector of Drafts, Etaples.’

troops in the line, and along the lines of communication, to accomplish military objectives and keep the enemy at bay. The role of the CAMC was to make men effective soldiers. It was evident that

the first and greatest duty of the Army Medical Service is to keep the man well and fit. The second duty is, if sick or wounded, so to treat him that he will become effective again with the shortest possible delay.<sup>284</sup>

It is telling that the MO who wrote this used the term ‘effective,’ rather than ‘healthy;’ the needs of the army took precedence over the well-being of the individual soldier. This ensured that many war-weary soldiers were unable to gain proper respite which promoted the transformation into more serious shell shock.

Only the most seriously wounded soldiers were discharged from the forces permanently; others were expected to return to duty once they had recovered. As soldier Charles Douie wrote in his memoirs, it seemed that it was always the best leaders and bravest who died first, as they volunteered for the most dangerous duties and were often in the vanguard. These troops, “wounded time and again, they returned to the front”<sup>285</sup> only to be wounded once again, or ultimately killed in battle. For perceptive and reflective soldiers, it appeared that death was inevitable the longer one stayed at the front. This helps explain the adoption of a fatalistic attitude amongst combatant soldiers, but also the development of war weariness in ever larger numbers. The army desired to send soldiers back to their units as soon as possible after wounding, and there was a lack of appreciation for the nature, extent, and severity of psychiatric casualties. MOs had to decide those “who were likely to be fit for duty within a reasonable time” so as to retain them in the army area.<sup>286</sup> It was the duty of the MO to balance the needs of the collective with those of the individual. This was made all the more difficult with long-serving soldiers, especially those “who because of long service in the front line needed a rest,”<sup>287</sup> but had no other medical problems to justify transfer or time out of the line. Without this

<sup>284</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, Folder 24-3-2, Medical History of the War, ‘The Care of the Casualty.’

<sup>285</sup> Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*, 21.

<sup>286</sup> DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 81.

<sup>287</sup> Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 226.



rest, a war-weary soldier might very well descend into more serious shell shock. Military authorities, however, believed these soldiers should stay with their units and remain at duty until rotated out of line with their comrades or granted leave. The problem with this approach was that by that time it might be too late; the soldier may have already been pushed beyond the breaking point. But MOs could help prevent this through their “timely insistence on a man’s transfer to a rest camp or light duty in the rear area...[and through which they] could avert a tragedy.”<sup>288</sup> Superiors did not always accept these recommendations or interventions, however.

Intervention on the part of MOs, commanders, and chaplains was crucial, but they were not always given leeway to ensure soldiers got the rest they needed. MOs were restricted in their diagnoses to prevent the evacuation of certain casualties,<sup>289</sup> even if such evacuation could prevent more permanent breakdown and was thus better for the army as a whole. Addressing war weariness early on was preferable to more permanent debilitation and shell shock, though it was, admittedly, difficult to do so. Instructions issued to field ambulances and unit MOs admonished medical personnel to do whatever possible to reduce the sick (and presumably wounded) numbers at the front. Officers were to pay attention to “all matters that can conduce to the health of the troops,” including “securing all possible rest for the men whilst not in the trenches or on necessary duty.”<sup>290</sup> The problem, of course, was that there were times where the rest and rotation out of the line should have been given priority over trench and other ‘necessary duty.’ Even when troops were not in the trenches, they had many duties behind the lines, and still found themselves exposed to danger and stress.<sup>291</sup> That further duty only exacerbated problems, and further contributed to their war weariness. Surely periodic and genuine rest from the

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<sup>288</sup> Ibid, 227.

<sup>289</sup> Medical documents of the (British) First Army instructed MOs that “special care must be taken to see that the letters N.Y.D.N. are not thoughtlessly placed on a Field Medical Card either to get rid of a useless man or to *give a good soldier a much needed rest.*” The italics here are mine. LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4551, Folder 1, File 7, ‘D.M.S. First Army 7 94/86.’

<sup>290</sup> The author also suggested that hot food, bathing facilities, good water, estaminets, care of feet, sanitation, and other medical aspects contributed to the health, morale, and well-being of the soldiers. Of course, these were not always available, especially during the more mobile warfare of the final months of the war. LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4530, Folder 12, ‘April 28<sup>th</sup> 1916 – O’s C Field Ambulances and M.O’s i/c Units.’

<sup>291</sup> Behind the lines soldiers had to deal with disease, air raids and other dangers. See Cate, ed., *A Soldier’s Memoir of World War I*, 43; Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 106, 113, 136 and Lamin, *Letters from the Trenches*, 147.

strains of warfare to extend the ‘shelf life’ of the soldier was preferable to premature breakdown and long-term debilitation. The authorities, however, did not necessarily see it this way.

Medical officers also had to contend with the medical classification system. Medical personnel and boards were instructed to ensure that “all men proceeding to the front are physically fit to carry on with their respective units,”<sup>292</sup> but what of psychological fitness for duty? This stubborn understanding of fitness as purely physical was perhaps naïve, and was certainly counterproductive in many ways. Clearly the military authorities were uncomfortable with the idea of psychiatric casualties in general, and did all they could to will the problem away. There was concern, for example, that merely acknowledging or mentioning the problem would actually legitimise it and increase its occurrence. This is, however, not really surprising given the traditional and unsympathetic understanding of these casualties from authorities of all stripes.<sup>293</sup> Other MOs were reprimanded for trying to explain why soldiers had “failed in their duty” and for diagnosing soldiers with certain medical conditions “without due consideration of the military issues at stake,”<sup>294</sup> emphasising the military over the medical. And the confusion and debates surrounding shell shock also complicated the role of the MO. There were disagreements and varying viewpoints as to the use of the term itself, its symptoms, treatments, long-term implications, and other aspects.<sup>295</sup> Even the British War Office

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<sup>292</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, Nos. 10 and 12 (British) FLD AMS, ‘Assistant Inspector of Drafts, Etaples.’

<sup>293</sup> Macphail wrote that shell shock was merely a “manifestation of childishness and femininity. Against which there is no remedy.” Medical boards and the classification of soldiers divided these cases into two, as a) “true shell shock” and b) “symptoms resulting from nervous exhaustion or loss of self-control.” Macphail, *Medical Services*, 278 and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, 2-3-6-2, ‘Documents for Troops Returning, Boards.’

<sup>294</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4546, Folder 6, File 2, ADMS 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division (Notes on Various Battles), ‘Extract from G.H.Q. Letter,’ 14 October 1916.

<sup>295</sup> Captain Dillon of the CAMC wrote that there was confusion surrounding the use of the term shell shock, partly because it had been “applied indiscriminately to cases incapacitated through shell explosion or other sudden shock of war, without showing signs of visible injury,” but obviously also had other causes as well. Many cases had been admitted under the label of ‘shell shock,’ including skull fractures, concussion, hysteria, and other afflictions. Another problem surrounded the mutability of symptoms, and the fact that not all psychiatric casualties were treated equally. In 1916, for example, shell shock, neurasthenia, “nervous breakdown,” and those diagnosed as ‘Inability to stand shell fire’ were sent to No. 32 CCS to see a Specialist of Nerve Diseases and “will not be evacuated to base unless there are definite lesions and symptoms which show that the disability is thoroughly genuine.” This suggested that only those with physical indicators would be deemed ‘genuine.’ See LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 5, *Bulletin of the CAMC*, Volume I, No. 6 (September 1918), article entitled ‘On the Nature of Shell Shock,’ by Captain F. Dillon of the CAMC and Ibid, Volume 4551, Folder 1, File 7, ‘D.D.M.S. M.1/55,’ dated 7 November 1916 and ‘Shell Shock and Gassed Cases,’ dated 6 November 1916.

Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock’ of 1922 only developed a rather ambiguous understanding of the problem in the years following the war.<sup>296</sup> If the military authorities themselves could not agree on what constituted shell shock and related afflictions, it was even more difficult for MOs to grapple with the problem. War weariness, moreover, was a more difficult concept to understand, and the army medical policies, the emphasis on manpower and morale at the expense of nearly all other factors, served to exacerbate pre-existing conditions and encouraged the development of war weariness into shell shock.

## Different Types of Casualties, the Categorisation and Classification of Soldiers

Diseases and illnesses<sup>297</sup> were problematic because they could be communicable, could make soldiers vulnerable to other health problems, and ultimately undermined the overall health, morale, endurance, and well-being of those in uniform - all of which could contribute to war weariness. Some diseases also affected the soldiers both physically *and* mentally. Syphilis, for instance, could lead to serious mental and neurological impairment. And the scourge of tuberculosis, as well as its treatment, could have a marked “mental effect” on the soldier patients.<sup>298</sup> Long periods spent in hospital could be demoralizing, especially if troops felt they were letting their comrades down or if they missed a big ‘show’ (battle).

Diseases/illnesses served to compromise the health and endurance of soldiers, but could also undermine commitment and morale, acting as a contributor to war weariness.

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<sup>296</sup> See, for example, Ted Bogacz, “War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-1922: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock,’” 250.

<sup>297</sup> Other illness were related to gas poisoning, and there was also alcoholism, influenza, Scarlet Fever, smallpox, dysentery, measles, mumps, tetanus, scabies, and diseases of the ear, respiratory, digestive, and lymphatic systems. The drinking of water contaminated by gas, both Allied and enemy, was also cause of gas poisoning. The medical services developed tests to determine if local water sources were safe for ingestion, but not all types of gas could be tested in such a way. There was also an effort made to inspect water sources, and to educate the troops and COs about the dangers of drinking, especially stagnant, water. Shell holes often filled with water, and therefore “could be readily poisoned, especially with arsenical compounds.” One report suggested that Yellow Cross gas could be “rendered harmless by boiling.” LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4563, Folder 2, File 1, ‘Testing of Water Poisoned by Gas Shells;’ Ibid, Folder 3, File 3, No. 1 Canadian General Hospital, ‘October 1914 – March 1915’ and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3615, 25-3-11, 25-3-12, 25-4-2 to 25-6-2, files ‘Scarlet Fever,’ ‘Disease: Smallpox, October 1914 to December 1918,’ ‘Diseases, Miscellaneous,’ and ‘Non-Infectious Diseases.’

<sup>298</sup> Ibid, Volume 4576, Folder 2, File 7, ‘Tuberculosis.’

Suffering from disease or other medical problems did not guarantee the development of war weariness, but it did make soldiers more susceptible to it. These wounds, illness, and other problems illustrate the difficulties facing the soldiers, on both an individual and collective level. But they also suggest that the soldiers' powers of resistance were weakened over time and contributed to the activation of self-preservation behaviours, not to mention self-reflection and calculations regarding long-term chances of survival. Because of the bloody nature of the war, and the fact that prior to the autumn of 1918 there was no end in sight, soldiers might very well determine that their best chances of survival were to evade duty<sup>299</sup> or escape service altogether. It was under these conditions that war weariness thrived.

Especially problematic were the non-physical casualties, and the debates over what constituted a genuine wound and battle casualty. Shell shock, hysteria, exhaustion,<sup>300</sup> and neurasthenia cases, depending on the MO, could be classified as either directly caused by (or related to) combat or frontline service, or alternatively, blamed on the soldier and attributed to his weakness, predisposition, mistakes, or similar defect. War weariness, though a very real phenomenon and reaction to combat, was more ambiguous. Those who were deemed honourable soldiers, who had done their duty and were wounded during service, were treated more sympathetically than those who were depicted as weak, cowards, or shirkers. There were, of course, rank, class, and cultural dimensions to this false dichotomy, as evidenced by both diagnoses and the awarding (or not) of pensions.<sup>301</sup>

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<sup>299</sup> See, for example, Different types of purposeful SIWs are explored in Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 24-26, and accidental SIWs and their impact in Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 195-196.

<sup>300</sup> Medical reports on the flying services noted that some "aviators [were] suffering from exhaustion due to flying stress," and that "this condition of relative incompetency rapidly passes off, and one will find that the [haemic] murmurs entirely disappear with a couple weeks' rest." Other pilots were diagnosed with Neurasthenia. The report stated that "one untoward experience may be sufficient to unbalance the nervous system of the stoutest pilot." LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3493, 11-2-7/11-2-8, Reports MO DGMS, 'Reports Medial Aspect Air Service,' 20 August 1917.

<sup>301</sup> MOs and army medical boards looked for signs of "nervous instability" in soldiers. Moreover, by 1921 there were some 65,000 soldiers discharged from the BEF and still receiving pensions for Neurasthenia. Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 162. The MO Macphail stated that there were 8,513 soldiers diagnosed with "nervous diseases" during the war, though it is not clear if he was referring to only Canadian troops, or the time period, or his methodology or sources. Macphail also noted that shell shock was a term used to describe a "variety of conditions ranging from cowardice to maniacal insanity," suggesting that it was the soldier's own fault, or he was already predisposed to mental illness prior to combat and service in the forces. Some MOs saw those suffering from psychoneurosis of war as merely slackers or malingerers. Macphail, *Medical Services*, 276-277.

The disagreements over what constituted a battle casualty highlights another issue, namely, how soldiers should be classified and what role they should play based on their health and strength. Some soldiers, due to their age or wound/illness, for instance, were no longer fit for frontline service. This was especially true for infantrymen, who were most exposed to enemy fire. These were the soldiers at the ‘sharp end’ of combat.<sup>302</sup> Yet despite debility, these troops could still be useful along the lines of communication, in the CASC or similar units.<sup>303</sup> These categories were developed to maximise manpower and efficiency, as well as to ensure that frontline units always had enough troops to carry out their duties. Because of this, some soldiers who should have been granted a temporary rest were forced to carry on. The classification system had five separate categories, from “A” to “E,” each of which also had sub-categories. Category “A” men,<sup>304</sup> were deemed fit for general service, whereas “B” troops were deemed fit for overseas service, but not in combat units. These “B” troops thus could join forestry or labour units, as well as do sedentary work (such as clerks).<sup>305</sup> “D” troops were considered temporarily unfit for service, while “E” troops were inadequate for military service of any kind, and were awaiting discharge.<sup>306</sup> “A” soldiers needed to be able to withstand long marches and heavy physical exertion, to see properly (to fire a weapon), to hear well (to be able to respond to verbal orders), and be “able to stand active service conditions.” This last point was particularly problematic, as it was nearly impossible to screen-out those predisposed to breakdown – if there even were such individuals – and even good, loyal, hard-working,

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<sup>302</sup> This was the title of historian Tim Cook’s first volume on Canadians in the Great War. Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916 – Volume I* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2007).

<sup>303</sup> For one British infantry subaltern “it is not unreasonable to speculate that his later transfer [to the lines of communication in Italy]...was a recognition of the fact that he was no longer fit for further front line service in France and Flanders.” Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*, ix.

<sup>304</sup> Troops classified as “A1” or “Aii” were believed to be ready for overseas service in terms of training and their “physical and mental qualifications.” Aii troops were ready for overseas service once their training was complete. Aiii soldiers were those casualties in hospitals or command depots, who were fit for Ai service “as soon as hardening and training is completed in reserve units.” Aiv troops were under 19 years of age, but otherwise healthy and fit for frontline service. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686, 30-0-0 (Volume 4), June 1918 – December 1918, General Correspondence, ‘Instructions for Medical Officers,’ dated 21 August 1918.

<sup>305</sup> The PPCLI saw their active strength decrease as Private Robert Christie (Reg. # 51106) was downgraded from category “A” to “B1,” due to Neurasthenia. He was thus transferred to the Canadian Labour Pool and “struck off strength of the P.P.C.L.I. accordingly.” PPCLI Archives, 34 (3)-6, Battalion Orders, Daily Orders Pt. II, 1 January – 31 December 1918.

<sup>306</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686, 30-0-0 (Volume 4), June 1918 – December 1918, General Correspondence, ‘Instructions for Medical Officers,’ dated 21 August 1918.

and strong soldiers could break down due to acute or cumulative stress at the front.<sup>307</sup>

And in many ways, ‘active service conditions’ were dynamic and unpredictable.

Soldiers suffering from psychiatric casualties, or made militarily ineffective from combat but *without* physical wounds, were not always diagnosed as battle casualties. This meant these troops were often treated unsympathetically or prevented from escaping further frontline service, despite their inability to endure further combat and their potential for permanent and long-term debilitation.<sup>308</sup> And in order to reduce the number of shell shock diagnoses, and to prevent the impression that authorities were sympathetic to these cases, there were certain rules and guidelines surrounding classification.<sup>309</sup> Some MOs, for instance, were reprimanded by superior authorities for being too generous and too liberal in diagnosing certain (psychiatric) casualties as shell shock cases. In the experience of the No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, some believed this diagnosis of shell shock was “being abused [by medical officers].” Medical Officers were reminded that they needed to follow orders and regulations as “in some divisions a diagnosis of SHELL SHOCK is not permitted without an accompanying confirmatory note from [the] officer commanding, unit.”<sup>310</sup> This simply reinforces the point that the needs and recovery of the individual soldier/patient were secondary to those of the army, especially manpower and morale considerations. Moreover, it also illustrates that medical officers were limited by army rules and regulations and, at least in this case, the commanding

<sup>307</sup> The editor of one soldier’s journal wrote that “even among those who seemed steady and solid under the constant danger from enemy fire, the stress of service at the front had a cumulative effect on the soldier.” Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 15.

<sup>308</sup> Practically speaking, this meant that these psychiatric casualties and shell shock cases might not be treated as traditional battle casualties, such as gunshot wounds, and could thus be denied pensions and further government support following discharge from the forces. One report, for instance, made it clear that the Army sought to limit government support for these types of casualties, and feared giving the impression to other soldiers that they were sympathetic to these cases. The author stated that “soldiers discharged from [the] Army for psychogenetic conditions (Neurasthenia, Shell Shock, Psychasthenia, Psycho-Neurosis, etc.) should not receive a ‘pension’ but rather a temporary allowance. The word ‘pension’ has too permanent a sound.” LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-6, ‘G.R.O. 3867,’ 25 April 1918 and ‘Report on Visit to Special Hospitals for Nervous Cases.’

<sup>309</sup> Routine Order No. 298 clearly outlined rules regarding the diagnosis and classification of casualties. Those listed as NYD [Not Yet Diagnosed] Gas were not to be listed as battle casualties, unless and until they were “definitely diagnosed as cases of gas poisoning” by a more senior officer. The report continued, stating that “the diagnosis of M.Os. in charge of fighting units cannot be taken as final.” This suggested that there was a rather high burden of proof for certain casualties, and that the medical authorities were not always trusted to do the right thing for the needs of the army (manpower and morale). LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4554, Folder 2, File 12, ‘Routine Order No. 298.’

<sup>310</sup> *Ibid*, Folder 1, File 4, ‘Notes to Medical Officers, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance,’ 28 May 1916.

officer (and *not* the MO) had the final say regarding the health and diagnosis of the soldiers. Nevertheless, due to the sheer volume of psychiatric casualties and other non-physical cases during the war, the British Army developed a treatment and classification system for shell shock casualties, in order to maintain “prompt and efficient treatment”<sup>311</sup> to ensure they returned to duty as soon as possible.

This classification and categorisation system was important for a few reasons. First of all, it meant that some troops were transferred to other units, for good or ill, or that they could be discharged from the forces entirely. When manpower demands were elevated, for instance during the German attacks of 1918, service and non-combatant units were ‘combed out’ for those who could undertake infantry duty at the front. A report of 15 April 1918 indicated that due to manpower demands the CO of a CASC unit would interview troops in the hopes of determining if category “A” soldiers could be released and replaced by “B” men. The idea was to select “for employment those men of the lowest category of physical fitness compatible with carrying on the work [of the service corps] required” of the unit, but also ensuring the “economy and efficiency of personnel desired.”<sup>312</sup> Another report argued category “A” soldiers under the age of 40 currently serving in CASC units could be released and sent to the infantry.<sup>313</sup> This classification system was also important as the misdiagnosis of soldiers could mean they were discharged from the forces prematurely or unnecessarily.<sup>314</sup> In the interests of manpower, this was not an ideal arrangement.

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<sup>311</sup> Class I cases, for example, were given treatment from a few hours to several days. After which they were transferred to Class II, the “semi-convalescent class,” where soldiers were given further treatment and military training, such as fatigues, marches, and physical training. From there, they were sent to Class III, the convalescent section. In Class III the patient was returned to regular wards, as “up to this time the shell shock patients had been segregated from the other patients.” According to the author of this report this system apparently worked, as “75 per cent of the patients were returned to duty with very few relapses or recurrent cases.” LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4562, Folder 5, File 3, ‘Work: Resume of No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital,’ 1-5-17 to 10-7-18.

<sup>312</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4533, File 1, ‘X.R. 27261,’ ‘To the OC No. 1 Canadian Field Butchery, BEF.’

<sup>313</sup> Yet before CASC personnel were dismissed from the service it was important to ensure that they could not do another, presumably less strenuous, job instead. The report stated that “care should be taken to consider the man power situation and the difficulty of securing satisfactory replacements.”

<sup>314</sup> The officer in command of the Moore Barracks Canadian Hospital Shorncliffe, for instance, complained that “there are some cases suffering from mental disease who are now invalided to Canada and subsequently recover their mental balance.” He continued, writing that “this recovery sometimes takes place within a short time,” and thus they could still be useful as soldiers in some capacity. LAC, RG 9 III B2, volume 3618, Folder 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘Moore Barracks Canadian Hospital Shorncliffe, 25 July 1917, officer i/c Hospital to A.D.M.S. Canadians Folkestone.’

Secondly, this classification system attempted to keep pace with the overall declining standards and requirements for frontline service over time. The system, after all, was established in part to make the most out of the available manpower and to ensure there were enough of each category of soldiers. Though often a source of ridicule on the part of serving troops,<sup>315</sup> the decline in medical standards was a reality of the war, and the Army did what it could to ensure continuity of calibre, especially for the combat arms and services.<sup>316</sup> Thirdly and finally, this categorisation ensured that medical officers, unit COs, and especially medical boards had an enormous influence on the fate of thousands of young soldiers. To provide but one example, the medical board at the British base at Étapes and the ‘Inspector of Drafts’ were to scrutinise all Canadian troops arriving in France, to re-classify those rejected from these drafts, as well as those returning from hospital and those sent to the base as temporarily or permanently unfit by MOs at the front. This medical board was “responsible that all men proceeding to the front are physically fit to carry on with their respective duties,”<sup>317</sup> though it seems their emotional and psychological fitness *were not* taken into account. This, of course, was problematic for the individual troops as well as their units at the front, especially if the soldiers were unable to withstand the strains of combat. In such a situation, the war-weary soldier could quickly become more seriously shell-shocked, and ultimately, debilitated. For the military authorities, however, the health and well-being of the soldier in the long-term was subordinate to the collective needs of the army. After all, the medical services were designed to return men to duty as quickly as possible,<sup>318</sup> despite the long-term consequences on the individual.

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<sup>315</sup> Various Authors, *Mr. Punch's History of the Great War* (New York: Frederick A. Stokes Company, n.d.), 157.

<sup>316</sup> For declining medical standards, see LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4533, File 1, ‘Disposal of Unsuitable CASC Personnel’ and ‘CASC Reinforcements.’ These documents indicated that “it is not to be expected that former standards of reinforcements can be maintained,” and that “new arrivals were not in many cases capable of carrying on.” See also Nic Clark, *Unwanted Warriors: The Rejected Volunteers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), Appendix A, B, and C (for example).

<sup>317</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, Nos. 10 and 12 (British) FLD AMS, ‘Asst. Inspector of Drafts, Etapes.’

<sup>318</sup> To provide but one example, experiments were conducted with oxygen chambers in an attempt to return soldiers to combat as soon as possible. The chambers were used on gassed soldiers in the hopes of making them “more ‘fit’ and capable of withstanding the strain,” which spoke to the wider function of the medical services, namely, that soldiers were merely a means to an end. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, Folder 25-13-6, Gas Poisoning, December 1915 – May 28 1918, File ‘The Use of Oxygen in Gassed Cases.’



## Shell Shock, PTSD, War Neuroses, Psychiatric Casualties, and Breakdown

Despite some harsh and rather unsympathetic attitudes toward breakdown and psychiatric casualties among the military and medical authorities, as the war dragged on it could not be denied that these casualties were real, and becoming a real problem. There was, for instance, a sense of inevitability toward breakdown,<sup>319</sup> as though it was only a matter of time before *all* soldiers succumbed to the stresses and strains of war. And because both acute stimuli and cumulative exposure to the trauma of combat and war could elicit this breakdown, no troops, whether they were in combatant services or otherwise, were exempt from these dangers. Canadian MO Andrew Macphail, infamous for writing that shell shock was merely a manifestation of “childishness and femininity,” admitted that even the best soldiers could ultimately suffer from “anxiety neurosis” after years of war.<sup>320</sup> And unlike previous conflicts, the First World War was a unique war in which for frontline soldiers the periods of genuine respite were insufficient, if not lacking entirely. This was a point made by the British MO Lord Moran, who argued that lack of respite drained the soldiers of their inner reserves and led inevitably to the “breaking of men” in uniform.<sup>321</sup> For the troops stationed at the front, tours of duty in the trenches could be extended, and in contrast to previous wars, there was little break in the winter when the campaigning season was put on hold. The nature and intensity of the conflict, and during the final months of the war the pace of the conflict as well, served to assault the health and well-being of the troops regularly.

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<sup>319</sup> It was also true that for every soldier there came a time “when he can endure no further.” They may still be healthy, but there will soon come a day when he will break, and “the certainty that the break is coming fills him with dread,” and he betrays this dread in “little ways” that are noticeable to the perceptive officer. Laffin, *Soldiers’ Stories from France and Flanders*, 268. One British veteran recalled that during an attack or under an artillery bombardment “the noise would grow into a crescendo and at a certain point your nerve would break.” This suggests that there was a sense of inevitability about this, and it was not a question of *whether* their nerve would break, but rather *when*. Moreover, the feelings of helplessness or hopelessness, and the inability to strike back at your tormentor, could accelerate this process. One MO wrote that “the war is becoming a slow slide into inevitability – inevitable wounding, maiming, death, destruction.” Arthur, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, 235 and Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 228.

<sup>320</sup> Macphail, *Medical Services*, 278 and 277.

<sup>321</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 75.

Shell shock and breakdown affected all types of soldiers and personalities – just as war weariness did – and even dedicated, hard-working, and strong individuals could be pushed to, and sometimes beyond, the breaking point. Canadian officer Ernest Black acknowledged this, writing that “courage, or lack of it, had nothing to do with shell shock...I never knew a braver man than” the one who succumbed to it in his battery.<sup>322</sup> Some broke down and suffered from psychiatric casualties after a particularly harrowing or intense traumatic experience, such as being buried alive or watching a pal get torn to bits by shells, whereas others experienced this only after months, or in some cases, years of combat.<sup>323</sup> And Captain Harold McGill noted in his memoirs the warning signs of impending exhaustion, and the potential for more permanent breakdown. He explained that “the recent heavy work and extra exertion [of working parties on top of other duties] had brought these men, some of whom had given many months of excellent service, to the stage of rendering them medically unfit”<sup>324</sup> for duty. This was not a case of lazy, unwilling, or malingering soldiers refusing to carry on with work, but rather dedicated troops being pushed too far and their bodies (and minds) giving in. The issue of shell shock was compounded by the fact that soldiers could be made medically unfit and militarily useless even without a physical wound. For some, the shock and trauma of combat overwhelmed their powers of resistance and endurance. One Canadian soldier, for instance, wrote of the pressure and concussion of artillery barrages

that damages some men, some more than others. They don't have a mark to show [on their bodies], but they are hurt. There was nothing wrong with a fellow who couldn't stand it [any longer]. Some were just more mentally prepared than others. It was like a man who has led a scholarly life all of a sudden getting involved in a gang fight. It could be quite a scary experience.<sup>325</sup>

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<sup>322</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 83-84.

<sup>323</sup> The MO Captain McGill wrote of his experience with a hysterical soldier. This man was in a state of agitation and stress at incoming shells and he explained in his memoir that “he was a brave soldier too, but it must be a harrowing experience indeed to lie helpless in a trench with shells exploding in all directions.” This was a case of a good soldier merely being pushed to the breaking point. Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 111 and Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 83.

<sup>324</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 162.

<sup>325</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 172.

Though this reflects a rather sympathetic understanding of breakdown in combat, no amount of mental preparation could make any normal, rational individual immune to the effects of the war and the cumulative and acute strains of combat to which they were exposed. The results could be both devastating and pitiful.<sup>326</sup>

As with more traditional and physical wounds and illnesses, psychiatric casualties had both general and specific causes and contributing factors. The same pressures, stresses and strains that led to the onset and development of war weariness – the death and dying, hardships, exhaustion, sense of helplessness and hopelessness – also undermined soldiers and contributed to psychiatric casualties. Indeed, these two phenomena were on the same spectrum. But unlike physical wounds, it was not always easy to identify why a particular soldier suffered breakdown when he did. Put another way, the threshold for war neurosis and shell shock debilitation was not consistent, and some soldiers suffered breakdowns *despite* the fact that they never directly came in contact with the enemy. In this sense, both combatant and non-combatant troops suffered, provided they were exposed to sufficient trauma and were denied an outlet or ‘escape’ from this trauma.

The general service conditions under which soldiers existed contributed to their emotional and psychological problems. The intensity of the war, as well as the near-constant exposure to the stresses associated with combat, ensured even the toughest volunteers and veterans were worn down over time. One MO made the link between “frayed nerves,” exposure to combat, and health problems, whereas others noted the “physical and psychological horrors of combat.”<sup>327</sup> After all those serving in the war, even along the lines of communication, would be exposed to death and disfigurement on a regular basis. Furthermore, aside from frontline infantry and those in the combat services, support troops were exposed to mortal danger, but lacked the ability to directly retaliate against the enemy.<sup>328</sup> Even the less sympathetic and traditionally-inclined MOs

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<sup>326</sup> See, for instance, the Wilfrid Owen poem “Mental Cases,” found in Waters, *Poetry of the First World War*, 180.

<sup>327</sup> Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 226 and Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, viii.

<sup>328</sup> These labour and supply troops had a less “spectacular” job than the infantry or artillery, but were no less important to the war effort. With these duties “not only is the labour involved very considerable but the danger is constant.” This might encourage psychological casualties or a sense of helplessness as these troops could not directly respond to enemy

came to acknowledge that “the stress of war” was a direct contributing factor toward the onset of psychoneuroses, and that “active service conditions” could explain hysteria and other afflictions.<sup>329</sup> Temporary conditions, based on the strains of war combined with the lack of rest and respite, could become more permanent if the soldier was not allowed rotation out of the front lines and away from the sources of trauma. Relapses were common, and worn-down soldiers could become permanently debilitated if not treated with care.<sup>330</sup> A war-weary soldier, fed up with the war and worn down by long-term service, could become a more permanent casualty as war weariness transmuted into shell shock over time.

Aside from the strains associated with general and active service conditions, the cumulative exposure to the stresses and trauma of combat, as well as the lack of rest and respite, contributed to psychiatric casualties. British MO J.C. Dunn wrote that soldiers could become “temporarily unable to stand the strain,” and that he himself was “worn out through physical and mental strain” by 1917/1918.<sup>331</sup> John Becker of the 75<sup>th</sup> (Mississauga) Battalion also noted the detrimental effects that cumulative strain imposed on the individual. He wrote that after exhibiting undue caution during an artillery barrage, “I realized then that my nerves were going and that I wouldn’t be much good in action if I kept at it many weeks longer.”<sup>332</sup> With this candid admission that his ‘nerves were going,’<sup>333</sup> Becker acknowledged that the stresses and strains of combat were, over time,

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fire or ‘fight back.’ Moreover, ‘flight’ from danger was certainly not a legal option for them. Another officer argued that even troops not at the front, or indeed even in a combat role, could break down from the war. He wrote that “the men at the front do the showy work, and may get some honours and promotions, whilst men [behind the lines] who do heavy steady work until they *break down* receive no recognition.” My italics. See LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4714, Folder 104, File 5, Canadian Corps Ammunition Park, ‘Narrative of Operations,’ 2-14 June 1916 and LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4656, Mediterranean Expeditionary Force, letter/report by C.W. Shelly.

<sup>329</sup> Macphail, *Medical Services*, 276 and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘Medical Report of an Invalid.’

<sup>330</sup> In one case a soldier had been exposed to intense stimuli and suffered a breakdown, and that “if [he] continued under the stress of active service conditions a *permanent mental condition* will ensue.” My italics, to illustrate that even regular service conditions had a certain level of stress and strain involved which could erode the powers of dedicated, otherwise-healthy soldiers. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘Medical Case Sheet.’

<sup>331</sup> J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew, 1914-1919: A Chronicle of Service in France and Belgium with the Second Battalion, His Majesty’s Twenty-Third Foot, the Royal Welch Fusiliers* (London: Jane’s Publishing Company Limited, 1987), xxxv-xxxvi.

<sup>332</sup> Christie, *The Memoir of John Becker*, 203 and Chartrand, *The Canadian Corps*, 16. Fraser wrote of a shell-shocked soldier whose “nerves and control were absolutely gone” at Vimy. Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 268.

<sup>333</sup> A Private Robert Duncan of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Battalion also wrote that after a battle “I was so exhausted that I was almost delirious...the cooks had a hot breakfast for us and we ate like wolves but all the time we ate the lot of us cried like

eroding his ability to withstand duty at the front. The pressures placed on infantry were bad enough, but all soldiers<sup>334</sup> required not only a physical rest away from the sources of danger, but also a psychological respite from these sources of trauma. The “symptoms [of exhaustion]...largely depend upon the kind and amount of work done in a given time,” as “repeated and prolonged exposure” to the stress of combat “produce[s] continuous cumulative stress, to which the human organism is compelled to give way” over time. Cumulative strain was especially problematic, and yet the reality of combat helps explain the prevalence, intensity, and unpredictability of psychiatric casualties during the war. Most Canadian soldiers serving in Europe were not the hardened frontiersmen, hunters, *voyageurs*, and lumberjacks of myth and lore, but were simple middle-class clerks and urban workers.<sup>335</sup>

Over time the cumulative stress and strain of wartime service led to war weariness and ultimately shell shock, but intense, unusual, or particularly traumatic experiences could also initiate or accelerate this process. The sense of absolute terror and helplessness that accompanied being trapped in an artillery barrage, for instance, was something that many veterans and contemporaries referred to. Captain Ralph Bell of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion wrote that being trapped in an artillery bombardment could lead to the onset of shell

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babies...I couldn't have told you why I cried excepting that my nerves were completely gone.” Grescoe, eds., *The Book of War Letters*, 169.

<sup>334</sup> Medical reports on the effects of flying on the human body and mind illustrate just how serious the impact could be. Pilots and other aircrew could face a shock, especially going from warmth to “intense cold; from relative quiet to a continual rush and roar; from a state of equilibrium to one of instability; from muscular and mental rest to highly-skilled and nerve-trying [situations]...from safety to possible death...[these pilots were] subject to intensive, intermittent and cumulative stimuli of a degree to which men has never been exposed before...[and] these unfavourable, afferent impulses produce perceptions of the most trying character, so that the individual's RESERVE FORCE RAPIDLY BECOMES USED UP, and after many shows [or sorties] he becomes, to use his own expression, 'dud.' He lacks resolution, loses confidence in himself, becomes stale, and if he is not withdrawn for a rest usually comes to grief.” Capitalised in the original. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3493, 11-2-7/11-2-8, Reports Medical Officer DGMS, 'Reports Medical Aspect Air Service.'

<sup>335</sup> Even if they were volunteers and healthy, dedicated young men, the nature, pace, and intensity of the fighting eroded even the strongest individuals. According to the British War Office, troops could be used for employment on the home front, including (former) “A” soldiers discharged “owing to nervous breakdown resulting from service in the present war.” Another officer (a chaplain) admitted that he was “desperately weary at times,” and sometimes “depressed” and discouraged, but that “I feel sure that it is only owing to the physical, nervous, and mental strain” of the war. Officers also acknowledged the strain and exhaustion of the troops, especially after “good hard fighting,” they were under “terrible strain.” See LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4576, Folder 2, File 9, 'Discharges' and newspaper clipping from *The Standard*, dated 30-4-17; LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4669, Chaplains Reports, 'Hospitals 1,' and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 1, File 10, Casualties, 2-3-17 to 1-1-18, CWRO, 387, '50<sup>th</sup> Battalion.'

shock,<sup>336</sup> even if there was no concussion or physical effect of the shelling. This was another problem with psychiatric casualties, namely, that they could emerge seemingly without physical derivation.<sup>337</sup> Another soldier admitted that “during barrages I did see shell shock victims,” and that there was no cover at Passchendaele; “there was nowhere to run...there wasn’t a tree left in the area” to provide a modicum of protection.<sup>338</sup> And Thomas Salmon wrote in *The Care and Treatment of Mental Diseases and War Neuroses* (1917) that during the war functional nervous diseases came to constitute “a major medico-military problem,” especially as sustained artillery bombardments<sup>339</sup> undermined soldiers’ powers of resistance.

During the war medical authorities sought to understand the nature of shell shock casualties to a much greater extent than they did war weariness. Medical authorities, moreover, attempted to develop a classification and treatment plan to return soldiers to duty as quickly as possible. Medical reports on war neurosis, for instance, attempted to divide cases into those who experienced “prolonged” versus “exceptional” strain, reinforcing the point that it could be cumulative stress or particularly acute trauma that caused shell shock, or a combination of the two. In the view of some authorities, “the Neurasthenia class includes some normal individuals whose breakdown is the result of *prolonged* strain,” whereas the “shell shock cases are individuals with normal resistance subjected to *exceptional* strain” during duty.<sup>340</sup> In other cases, medical services acknowledged that one particular event could exacerbate or bring shell shock symptoms to the fore. One such soldier, for example, seemed to be “suffering from Hysteria, caused

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<sup>336</sup> Bell, *Canada in War-Paint*, 161.

<sup>337</sup> Medical professionals argued that soldiers could develop symptoms without being buried alive, or without being exposed to shell fire. Even without a known physiological basis, soldiers could develop psychological issues that could not be ignored. An MO noted that explosions could leave troops physically intact but with “dishevelled minds,” and could be made ineffective “though there was no scratch upon him.” Some troops simply “cracked” due to stress over time, as intense emotional shock could strip them of their self-control and equilibrium. And medical documents of the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion noted that soldiers could be partially buried or have a shell burst very close to them “and yet be absolutely unaffected by it from a medical point of view.” See Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 28-29; Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 21-25, and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 1, File 10, Casualties, 2-3-17 to 1-1-18, CWRO, 387, ‘50<sup>th</sup> Battalion.’

<sup>338</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 172.

<sup>339</sup> Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 27.

<sup>340</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 3-1-4-2, Neurology, War Neuroses, ‘Treatment of Shell-Shock Cases at the Front.’ The italics are mine.

by general service conditions.” He had done capable duty in the trenches for 15 months, but was then buried alive, certainly a traumatic event. The author of the soldier’s medical case sheet concluded that “if [he] continued under the stress of active service conditions a permanent mental condition will ensue.”<sup>341</sup> And if the strains related to ‘active service conditions’ could induce war weariness and psychiatric casualties, those “subjected to some extraordinary exposure not incidental to all military operations”<sup>342</sup> could suffer even more.

Another factor in the onset of war weariness, and ultimately shell shock, was the conflict all dedicated soldiers felt between their duty, and their self-preservation instinct: the tension between the needs of the collective and those of the individual. The inability to reconcile these two conflicting motivations could cause temporary and more permanent psychiatric problems for individuals exposed to the trauma of combat. The social circles of the soldier all reflected and reinforced the hierarchical nature of the military system, and the troops were expected to contribute to group goals and conform to its rules and values. Human beings exposed to traumatic stimuli and mortal danger, however, will instinctively seek to protect themselves, and thus it was the role of comradeship, military discipline, group cohesion, leadership, regimental pride, “social tradition,” and other forces to counteract this biological fight or flight mechanism.<sup>343</sup> This was one of the main issues facing contemporary authorities, namely, how to convince individuals to face terror and potential death or disfigurement when they had innate urges to ‘escape.’<sup>344</sup> And even steadfast and experienced volunteers were beset by this problem, to say nothing of conscripts, untested, or reluctant soldiers. Pre-war tests and screenings to determine who

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<sup>341</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, volume 3618, 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘Medical Case Sheet.’

<sup>342</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4536, Folder 6, File 2, ADMS 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, ‘Extract from G.H.Q. Letter,’ dated 14/10/16.

<sup>343</sup> One soldier wrote that without friends and comrades, “I’d have sprinted back to the coast and hopped a steamer to Blighty long ago,” and that his chums did wonders “for a man’s resolve.” Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 109. W.H.R. Rivers referred to this tension as “the conflicts between the instinctive tendencies of the individual and the forces of social tradition,” and argued that “in the production of psycho-neurosis” there was “conflict arising out of...instincts, and especially that of self-preservation, [which] takes an active if not the leading role” in this production. W.H.R. Rivers, “Psychiatry and the War,” *Science – New Series* 49, 1268 (April 1919): 367-369.

<sup>344</sup> In a discussion on attempting to prevent ‘encouraging’ the problem, Salmon wrote that this was “the unending conflict between duty, honour and discipline, on the one hand, and homesickness, horror, and the urgings of the instinct of self-preservation on the other.” Many feared that making neurosis ‘a way out’ for soldiers would be seized upon by the men and an used as an exit or escape from their duties. Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 42.

could endure the fire of battle were limited, and the veracity of the concept of predisposition<sup>345</sup> to breakdown is shaky at best. But experience in combat could be a double-edged sword. Experience could allow the soldier to expect and anticipate dangers at the front, as well as process powerful emotions inherent in battle. These experiences, however, also wore down the individual over time and reinforced the idea of the inevitability of death or disfigurement. And this sense of hopelessness or helplessness was characteristic of war weariness.

As military authorities grappled with the reality of psychiatric casualties, there was some debate over whether this was a new affliction, or if it was merely an updated version of problems seen in the past. In the nineteenth century victims of industrial accidents or railway crashes, for instance, seemed to exhibit some of the same symptoms that now affected thousands of soldiers in the war. Moreover, early on there was a largely physical understanding of shell shock, with an emphasis upon the bodily effects of shell explosions, hence the term ‘shell shock.’ This was problematic, as it became clear that psychiatric symptoms could emerge *without* physical origin; after experience and reflection, it was acknowledged that its cause could be primarily mental, or shell explosions themselves might be merely “the spark which releases deep-seated, psychical forces due to the strains of warfare” and especially combat.<sup>346</sup> By 1917, shell shock came to represent “practically any nervous symptoms in soldiers exposed to shell fire that cannot be explained by some obvious physical injury,”<sup>347</sup> and factors outside shell fire could also act as a contributing factor. According to one MO, the British Army and War Office ultimately agreed on three different types of psychoneurosis of war: shell shock, hysteria, and neurasthenia.<sup>348</sup> The concept of war weariness was not well-developed

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<sup>345</sup> It was suggested that certain troops were more predisposed to breakdown than others, including those with an “unstable nervous organisation,” poor education, or poor surroundings [profession? upbringing? class?] to prepare the man. There were concerns throughout the war about recruitment and “the types of men predisposed to these disabilities,” and with “unfit recruits” and “general questions of prophylaxis.” Others who were apparently predisposed included “organic nervous cases,” “feeble minded soldiers,” “border types,” those with criminal tendencies, alcoholics, etc. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 3-1-4-2, ‘Functional Nervous Disorders’ and Volume 3751, 2-4-1, ‘Duties of the Military Hospitals Commission.’

<sup>346</sup> Rivers, “Psychiatry and the War,” 367.

<sup>347</sup> Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 27.

<sup>348</sup> Macphail, *Medical Services*, 276-277. Many shell shock cases were depicted as Neurasthenia, as soldiers broke down after sustained periods at the front. This was often juxtaposed with Hysteria. Symptoms for hysteria included:



during the war years, however, but it is a useful concept for understanding the impact of combat on the individual, and as an important marker on the road to shell shock debilitation. Hysteria was characterised by panic-stricken and erratic behaviour, and was often applied to ORs and lower-class soldiers who were negatively impacted by the cumulative trauma of war, often set off by exposure to intense or extraordinary situations. Neurasthenia, on the other hand, was often reserved for officers and those from the upper echelons of society; these cases were the result of long-term service at the front, and resulted in more exhausted, apathetic, worn-down patients.<sup>349</sup> And by the final years of the war, British authorities had established a shell shock classification system based on the prognosis and phase of treatment for soldiers,<sup>350</sup> acknowledging that individuals reacted differently to trauma and some recovered in short order, whereas others never fully recovered. Medical authorities also made use of other expressions regarding the myriad symptoms related to combat service and traumatic exposure. Some of these shell shock cases, for example, were subsumed into the larger category of ‘insanity,’<sup>351</sup> suggesting a more permanent debilitation, pre-war mental health problems, and hereditary predisposition.

War weariness as a concept was most fully developed after war, though some contemporaries did use this expression. And aside from the shell shock designation, authorities made use of other terms and even euphemisms to describe this phenomenon. The complexity and confusion surrounding the nature of psychiatric casualties was one reason for this ambiguity and reluctance. But there were also cultural explanations for not

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erratic behaviour, seizures, irritability, lack of focus, depression, and others. Grescoe, *The Book of War Letters*, 169 and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘Medical Report of an Invalid,’ 4 June 1917.

<sup>349</sup> In MO McGill’s memoir it was noted that Neurasthenia was “the more commonly observed breakdown resulting from the cumulative exposure to the stress of combat,” but was still a manifestation of shell shock. Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 98.

<sup>350</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4562, Folder 5, File 3, Work, ‘Resume of No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital,’ 1-5-17 to 10-7-18.

<sup>351</sup> The Hospital Ship *HMHS Araguaya*, for instance, had 65 “mental” cases aboard, or around 8.5% of its total number of cases. Of these cases, 16 were diagnosed with dementia praecox, 15 as delusional insanity, 10 with mental stupor, 6 confusional insanity, 6 mania cases, 4 melancholia, 3 mental deficiency, and 1 each of mental instability, hysteria, and G.P.I., which suggests there was some difficulty in nomenclature and distinguishing between the nature and symptoms of these psychiatric conditions. MO Andrew Macphail also referred to concussion/fright neurosis, hysteria, neurasthenia, psychasthenia, reflex paralysis, and katatonic [sic] stupor. LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4577, Folder 5, File 6, ‘H.M.H.S. Araguaya’ and Macphail, *Medical Services*, 277-278.

drawing attention to these problems, as well as a widespread fear that giving these conditions a name would only legitimise them, and thus encourage its development in others. The term exhaustion,<sup>352</sup> for example, was commonly used to describe troops who had been worn down by conflict, and were suffering the inevitable physical (and psychological) reactions to sustained combat. In other instances, NYDN was applied,<sup>353</sup> suggesting the authorities were unable or unwilling to acknowledge debilitation and the fact that soldiers were being made militarily ineffective but without a physical, tangible wound. The use of the term ‘nervous’ served to put the responsibility for breakdown squarely on the shoulders of those suffering these conditions, rather than on the nature of the war itself. Another expression used to emphasise the failings of the individual rather than highlight the extreme circumstances in which most frontline troops found themselves, was “temporarily unable to stand the strain” of combat.<sup>354</sup> At least with this example, the word ‘temporarily’ suggested that this soldier had been able to endure trauma in the past, and with proper care, could do so again in the future. Other soldiers found themselves “all in,” and unable to carry on;<sup>355</sup> others suffered a “crack up” or “cracked” under the pressure;<sup>356</sup> and still others had a case of “nerves,” suffered from “shattered nerves,” or found that their nerves had “let go,” were “in pieces,” or their nerves “were going.”<sup>357</sup>

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<sup>352</sup> Without rest, exhaustion could make a normally robust soldier “break down” over time. A Canadian MO also wrote of “nerve and exhausted” cases, a “worn out and exhausted officer” as well as “badly shocked and exhausted men” at sick parade. Other soldiers were described as ‘tired’ and ‘worn out.’ See Bell, *Canada in War-Paint*, 184 and Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 156.

<sup>353</sup> Those diagnosed as NYDN found it more difficult to be evacuated down the line than other, more traditional or physical casualties. Moreover, there seemed to be some stigma attached to this designation, as though they were less deserving of army resources, time, sympathy, and the like. LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4541, Folder 2, File 4, ‘XCII Corps, Medical Arrangements No. 9’ and ‘A.D.M.S., 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division,’ 30 March 1918.

<sup>354</sup> Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew*, xxxv.

<sup>355</sup> Bell, *Canada in War-Paint*, 182.

<sup>356</sup> Canadian artilleryman Ernest Black noted that when laughter did not work as an outlet or ‘safety valve,’ “sometimes there was a crack up” in the unit. Humour has been depicted by others as “an escape valve” as well for soldiers. Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 21 and Laffin, *Soldiers’ Stories from France and Flanders*, 2, 178. Black noted, moreover, that in the Second World War this was called battle fatigue, but was known as shell shock in the First World War. Also, even the strongest troops, those “full of guts” could break down from shell shock. And Lord Moran wrote that some “cracked” due to stress over time. The conditions under which the soldiers fought “tested [even] the strongest of constitutions.” Gaudet, ed., *The World War I Journal and Poems of Pte. Frank Walker*, xi.

<sup>357</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 98, 154; Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 215; Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 104 and Christie, *The Memoir of John Becker*, 203.

The contributing factors to the onset of war weariness could not be removed entirely, and thus prevention was perhaps the best approach to help minimise the worst effects of psychiatric casualties. Care for the health, morale, and physical well-being of soldiers helped with their endurance, giving them the best chance to stave off the worst effects of long-term service. The mental and physical state of soldiers, especially infantry, was important for success in combat, and training and “the condition of men are important factor[s]” to be considered. Moreover, troops should be lightly equipped in any attack, to avoid exhaustion, be well-fed prior to going ‘over the top,’ and be well-rested so as to be “fresh and can [therefore] fight better.”<sup>358</sup> ‘Collapse’ was also especially troublesome in the cold months. Proper equipment and clothing, dry warm blankets, heat, and hot drinks were all helpful, and “all efforts are to be directed toward combating collapse during the cold season,”<sup>359</sup> though it is not clear if they were referring to collapse of energy, will, health, or something else entirely. Alcohol, moreover, also helped prevent ‘collapse,’ exhaustion, and other problems, at least to a point. Alcohol had the ability to induce a feeling of warmth and comfort, provided a sense of euphoria at first,<sup>360</sup> calmed rattled nerves, and acted as a fortifying force. It was issued prior to attacks and other engagements, was used as an incentive to recruit volunteers for raids, patrols, and other missions, and often issued following combat to help soldiers cope with exhaustion and trauma. And for shell-shocked soldiers combatting the enemy as well as their own terrors and nightmares, booze was a welcome gift.<sup>361</sup> Robert Graves in *Goodbye to All That* also referred to the healing effects of alcohol, especially in officers, who with their greater privileges had better access. Alcohol acted as a coping mechanism, but there were also problems pertaining to dependency and addiction.<sup>362</sup> Humour, laughter, and even weeping

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<sup>358</sup> The Military Museums, W.A. Howard and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM F00 81, John Cummer Fonds, Volume 1, Series 1-4, 9-3-4, Folder 9, ‘Training: Trench Warfare.’

<sup>359</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4554, Folder 2, File 2, ‘Dressing Stations, Organisation Of.’

<sup>360</sup> W. Langdon Brown and J. Keogh Murphy, eds., *The Practitioner’s Encyclopaedia of Medical Treatment* (London: Oxford University Press, 1915), 153.

<sup>361</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 246.

<sup>362</sup> Graves also referred to a “two bottle” company commander, who relied too heavily on alcohol to cope with the trauma and terror experienced. Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 152. The use of alcohol as a coping mechanism can also be found in fictional accounts of the war, such as Gail Bowen and Ron Marken, *Dancing in Poppies* (The Playwrights Guild of Canada, 1992). The tendency to use alcohol to dull the (emotional) pain can also be found in Fred Doucette, “Sick Soldiers: A Veteran with PTSD describes War’s Invisible Wounds,” *The Walrus*, 13, 2 (March 2016): 55-56. For

also acted as coping mechanisms, by providing psychological relief, reducing tension, and promoting adaptation.<sup>363</sup>

The preconditions for the onset of war weariness could never be eliminated entirely, but the treatments and responses to psychiatric casualties were important to the future well-being of the individual. There were both official and unofficial treatments; at times, these cases were severe enough (and the soldiers militarily ineffective) to be sent down the line to be cared for by other medical personnel, whereas other cases were deemed moderate enough that treatments at or near the front was believed sufficient. For care near the front lines, it was important that the soldier be kept busy and occupied, so as not to dwell on their situation or be given much time for brooding. One MO speculated that more soldiers did not lose their sanity “because they had little opportunity to indulge in introspection.”<sup>364</sup> Keeping the patients busy with exercise, games, or light employment helped “divert the patients’ mind from dwelling on his own symptoms”<sup>365</sup> and deteriorating further. Other authorities insisted on treatment in close proximity to the firing line, “where the spirit of army discipline is most felt” by the soldier.<sup>366</sup> In these treatment centres, army discipline, drill, and physical exercise were emphasised,<sup>367</sup> so the individual would be treated more as a soldier than an invalid, and be given rest in the guise of military exercises or duties.

For more serious cases, or with soldiers who dealt with sympathetic MOs, evacuation down the line to larger and more specialised medical facilities led to further treatment. Special Hospitals for shell-shock cases allowed for the concentration of specialists and equipment that could be tailored to these cases and problems.<sup>368</sup> Aside

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other information on alcohol and Canadian troops, see Tim Cook, “‘More a Medicine than a Beverage:’ ‘Demon Rum’ and the Canadian Trench Soldier of the First World War,” *Canadian Military History* 9, 1 (2000): 5-22.

<sup>363</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 83-84; Teed, ed., *Uncle Cy’s War*, 12, and Susan M. Labott and Randall B. Martin, “The Stress-Moderating Effects of Weeping and Humour,” *Journal of Human Stress*, 13, 4 (Winter 1987): 159-164.

<sup>364</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 198.

<sup>365</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, 3-1-4-2, Neurology, War Neuroses, ‘Functional Nervous Disorders.’

<sup>366</sup> Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 36.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*, 39. It seemed only the most serious cases were evacuated out of the front lines. Those classified as NYDN, with minor symptoms, or “overwrought mental conditions requiring a short period of treatment, will be retained in the divisional area; it is more serious cases that are sent to the special hospital.” LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, 3-1-4-2, ‘Treatment of Shell Shock Cases at the Front.’

<sup>368</sup> For example the Granville Canadian Special Hospital at Ramsgate, in the UK. This hospital “gave the C.A.M.C. the opportunity to play a pioneer part in the Imperial Army in establishing remedial treatment for...the many forms of

from these hospitals, training schools were established to train officers and medical personnel to deal with these cases, and neurological centres were established in the army zones themselves. These were inspired by French practice and embraced the idea of proximity of treatment.<sup>369</sup> Behind the lines, however, treatments and responses to psychiatric casualties comprised re-education of the soldier, including persuasion and hypnotism, drill and physical exercise, gymnastics, massage, hydrotherapy, and electrotherapy.<sup>370</sup> Some ‘treatments,’ especially electro-shock therapy, bordered on torture, which is not surprising given that some MOs and doctors believed that shell shock was “a condition which is essentially childish and infantile in its nature,”<sup>371</sup> clearly not conducive to a sympathetic attitude. Treatments outlined in the *CAMC Journal* emphasised the various techniques applied to an individual, including the application of electric shocks, but also explored the reality of relapse and the complicated nature of psychiatric casualties. An examination of one soldier indicated a “well-developed, well-nourished man,” with normal heart, lungs, and reflexes, and his x-rays and tests were negative.<sup>372</sup> This soldier, however, had become ‘shaky’ after a close call; following a stay in hospital, he returned to his unit but relapsed and broke down mere weeks later. He was ultimately sent to the Granville Canadian Special Hospital after both psychiatric/psychological *and* physical symptoms began to emerge.<sup>373</sup> Needless to say

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nervous disorders which at first were included under the term ‘Shell Shock.’” Special Hospitals were also established in Canada for more permanently debilitated cases, such as at Cobourg and Newmarket. Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 34, 41; LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4554, Folder 2, File 3, ‘Medical Arrangements, 25-6-17 to 20-12-17;’ LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, 24-3-2, Medical History of the War, ‘The Care of the Casualty,’ and Volume 3751, 2-4-1, ‘Duties of the Military Hospitals Commission.’

<sup>369</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, 3-1-4-2, Neurology, War Neuroses, ‘Treatment of War Psychoses.’

<sup>370</sup> Ibid, 38-40. See also LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, 3-1-4-2, ‘Treatment of Shell Shock Cases at the Front’ and Volume 3493, 11-1-15 to 11-1-21, ‘Report on Remedial Gymnastics, Physical Training, Massage, Hydro and Electro Therapeutics in the C.A.M.C.’

<sup>371</sup> Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 40.

<sup>372</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, Folder 24-3-1 (Volume 1), *CAMC Journal*, ‘An Unusual Psychoneurosis of War,’ by Digby Wheeler, Temporary Captain, CAMC.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid. The soldier came to France in September 1916, and “carried on without any trouble until buried by high explosive shell” on 27 April 1917. He was unconscious for roughly three hours, and then sent to a CCS by his MO after “having requested to be allowed to carry on.” But he was told he was ‘shaky,’ and needed respite. At the base hospital three days later he noticed he could not taste or smell. By May 1917 he was back at his unit, but “his M.O. would only allow him to carry on at the kitchens,” knowing he needed a break from frontline stress. While at the kitchens, though, he uncovered two rotting German corpses while digging a pit. By June 1917 he was sent again to the CCS for trench fever. While at the hospital this time, however, “he developed gross symptoms of shell shock, such as tremor and persistent occipital headaches.” He was then sent to Granville Special Hospital, where electric currents were applied to his muscles. The fate of this soldier is unclear.

this soldier had ceased to be an effective member of the military unit, had moved beyond war weariness, and was unable to carry on at the front.

The ultimate goal, of course, was to treat the soldier and return him to his unit as soon as possible. It was important, for manpower and morale considerations, to ensure units were up to strength and soldiers were kept in the line save for the most serious cases. Perhaps the most effective treatment for minor to moderate cases of shell shock, however, was rotation out of the line, rest, and respite from the strains of war, as well as the trauma and tensions associated with combat. Importantly, rest was also crucial to stave off the worst effects of war weariness, and to prevent its further development. The contemporary *Practitioner's Encyclopaedia of Medical Treatment* advocated for 'rest cures,' and argued that pain required rest, whether it be psychological or physiological in origin, and that "pain may persist apart from material causes."<sup>374</sup> Worry and mental tension could also manifest as pain, and victims naturally developed both physiological and psychical defences.<sup>375</sup> In other situations, the intervention of the medical or commanding officer could make the difference between short-term and recoverable war weariness, and long-term debilitation from shell shock and ineffectiveness. The MO of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, for example, distinguished between those who were too willing to parade sick, and those with an "apparently genuine case of nerves." This latter soldier was allowed to "go back to the horse lines to do light duty" until the battalion was relieved at the front.<sup>376</sup> Historian Pat Brennan argued that

'Light duty' was a frequently employed treatment for so-called 'deserving cases' of battle stress/shell shock. Anything that removed the tension of combat, even briefly, helped all but the worst cases. Being kept close to their comrades aided in the steadying of such men, as did the fact that there was no stigma of malingering attached to such light duty assignments close to the front.<sup>377</sup>

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<sup>374</sup> Brown, *Medical Treatment*, 66-67. Soldiers sometimes developed defence symptoms "against an intolerable situation in the world." Furthermore, there were generally three scenarios as it applied to rest cures. 1) Soldiers recover, and then relapse when put once more into the old situation. 2) The soldier "may be dominated by the idea that as soon he recovers he will have to go back to the intolerable situation, and remain un-influenced." 3) The soldier sees things in a new light and finds a solution to the problem.

<sup>375</sup> Ibid.

<sup>376</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 102.

<sup>377</sup> Ibid, Footnote 13.

Rest, respite, and rotation out of the line, even for a short period, could do wonders for the health, mental stability, and general well-being of most cases. The problem, of course, was that not all would recover after a short time out of the line, and not all MOs, army doctors, or commanders agreed who were ‘deserving cases.’ Certainly some soldiers were killed or broke down permanently when they might have been salvaged had they been taken out of the line sooner.

This sympathy and intervention on the part of military or medical authorities could help prevent war-weary soldiers from becoming seriously shell-shocked, and assisted with the soldiers suffering from shell shock from deteriorating further. Captain McGill of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion saw many cases of “shattered nerves” during one particular battle. The worst were sent to the field ambulance, but “the majority I allowed to lie down in an adjoining dugout” and get some rest. Furthermore, some “partially-recovered” soldiers and “nerve and exhaustion” cases were kept in the vicinity and made up a fatigue party.<sup>378</sup> It seems McGill here made a compromise, allowing the soldiers a rest from normal duties, but without allowing them to be removed from their units entirely or sent down the line for longer-term absence. Captain Dillon of the CAMC argued in September 1918 that powers of resistance and especially repression are “voluntary and maintained by effort.” He wrote, however, that “long-continued strain, therefore, by exhausting the reserves of mental energy is apt to bring about a breakdown,” which can also be caused by “sudden and intense strain or shock of exceptional nature.”<sup>379</sup> And both war weariness and shell shock or nervous exhaustion could be helped by rest and light duty. Despite the complexity and varying severity of these cases, in time some soldiers were sufficiently recovered to return to duty. One Canadian MO even boasted that in contrast to previous cases, “to-day the vast majority of those affected [by shell shock] are returned to the front

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<sup>378</sup> Ibid, 154-156. It is important to note that there were limits on the discretion of the MOs. One set of ‘Instructions’ issued in August of 1918, for example, indicated that “a medical officer will not grant an other rank more than 24 hours exemption from duty,” even if this short rest allowed the soldier to carry on in the longer-term. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686, 30-0-0 (Volume 4), June 1918 – December 1918, General Correspondence, ‘Instructions for Medial Officers,’ dated 21 August 1918.

<sup>379</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 5, *Bulletin of the CAMC*, Volume I, No. 6 (September 1918), article ‘On the Nature of Shell Shock,’ by Captain Dillon, and File 6 ‘Categorisation.’

as efficient soldiers in the course of a few weeks” of treatment.<sup>380</sup> The problem, however, was that the author did not provide much information on *how* these soldiers were treated nor the rates of relapse after returning to the front. Yet despite the long-term nature of many psychiatric casualties, some were indeed returned to a version of active duty. Some were placed in units on the lines of communication, rather than sent back to combat infantry duties, whereas some officers took on staff or training duties behind the lines. Others managed to get relatively safe or ‘bomb-proof’ jobs behind the lines,<sup>381</sup> despite jeers of cowardice or malingering from those still at the front. And yet even after a full year of treatment and time away from the front, some cases “may never improve.”<sup>382</sup> It was these soldiers who were permanently debilitated by shell shock and were no longer capable of being effective soldiers, and sometimes even effective citizens.<sup>383</sup>

An examination of the symptoms and consequences of psychiatric casualties suggest serious suffering and implications for the individual, and his military unit. Shell shock was more serious than war weariness, although the latter was more pervasive and masked the real decline faced by long-suffering soldiers. The symptoms of war neuroses were various, affected everyone slightly differently, and were often based on the personal

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<sup>380</sup> There was also a well-entrenched belief that “only a very small proportion of men returning [to Canada] insane, can be pronounced hopelessly so,” and that “the majority of them will recover and the remainder who turn out to be incurable would be too small to justify large federal expenditure on buildings and other overhead expenses.” Other reports admitted that though some cases recovered, some were chronic and permanent cases. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 108, File 20, ‘Outside the Pale: Yet Another Canadian Hospital Bombed;’ LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, 2-4-1, ‘Relations with M.H.C.’ and ‘Duties of the Military Hospital Commission,’ and Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 15.

<sup>381</sup> One soldier admitted in June 1918 that his effectiveness had decreased over time, and was eventually transferred to the Ordnance Corps. He had requested the transfer over six months prior. He justified it by writing that “there were very few of the old mob left [in his unit] due to casualties,” and “I had already put in enough time ‘up the line.’” Rogers, ed., *Gunner Ferguson’s Diary*, 152-153.

<sup>382</sup> The statistics for the 65 “mental” cases aboard the hospital ship *HMHS Araguaya* are instructive. Of these, 18 were diagnosed as Dementia Praecox, 15 with Delusional Insanity, 10 Mental Stupor, six Confusional Insanity, four Melancholia, three Mental Deficiency, and one each of Mental Instability, Hysteria, and G.P.I. Of these 65 cases, 14 were convalescents and fit for release, 24 might be fit within six months’ time, 10 may be fit in a years’ (12 months’) time, 12 may improve over an undisclosed or unknown amount of time, and five “may never improve.” And in some cases where the “psychic element” is the main feature, “these cases do not improve with ordinary convalescent treatment, and should be occupied by light duty as soon as possible.” LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4577, Folder 5, File 6, ‘H.M.H.S. Araguaya’ and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, 2-3-6-2, ‘Documents for Troops Returning, Boards.’

<sup>383</sup> Many of these soldiers lived out the rest of their lives in sanatoriums or hospitals, needing constant care and mere shadows of their former selves. In the words of one MO, these were the “unfortunate men who had lost control of themselves and could only live on as useless wrecks of humanity,” no longer able to soldier or serve their country. They were those who, though they physically survived the war, were permanently debilitated by it nonetheless. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 108, File 20, ‘Outside the Pale: Yet Another Canadian Hospital Bombed.’



experiences of the individual. One contemporary medical assessment noted that in the symptoms of shell shock, “the soldier loses a function that either is necessary to continue military service or prevents his successful adaptation to war” and combat.<sup>384</sup> The soldier converted psychological problems into physical symptoms, which were manifest in numerous ways. One report by the *War Work Committee of the National Committee for Mental Hygiene* in 1917 indicated that these symptoms of the disturbance of psychic functions included delirium, confusion, amnesia, hallucinations, nightmares, anxiety states; the disturbance of involuntary functions including heart disorders, low blood pressure, vomiting, and diarrhea; and the disturbance of voluntary muscular functions including paralysis, tics, tremors, convulsive movements, mutism, and deafness.<sup>385</sup> Other symptoms included sweating, rapid heartbeat, headaches, weakness, sleeplessness or insomnia, loss of appetite, abdominal pain, vision problems, and others.<sup>386</sup> Continued terror could induce relapse, and “the ultimate fitness of such men as soldiers is a matter of considerable doubt, owing to the probability of relapse under fire.”<sup>387</sup>

These symptoms and the suffering of the individual were bad enough, but war weariness and shell shock also negatively affected the soldier’s military effectiveness and ability to carry on with duty. The most serious cases were removed from their units and sent down the line to hospitals and rest centres. In time, some returned to duty in some capacity, others were sent to base hospitals for longer-term treatment and hospitalisation, whereas the most serious cases were evacuated to England or even Canada.<sup>388</sup> For those

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<sup>384</sup> Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 31.

<sup>385</sup> Ibid. Other symptoms can be found in LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 5, *Bulletin of the CAMC*, Volume I, No. 6 (September 1918), article ‘On the Nature of Shell Shock,’ by Captain Dillon.

<sup>386</sup> Others noted uncontrollable shaking, “signs of dementia,” night terrors, crying and weeping, and hysterical blindness and paralysis. Private Robert Duncan (102nd Battalion) wrote in a letter that after a battle “I was so exhausted that I was almost delirious...the cooks had a hot breakfast for us and we ate like wolves but all the time we ate the lot of us cried like babes...I couldn’t have told you why I cried excepting that my nerves were completely gone.” And aside from shell shock as an umbrella term, concepts such as Hysteria and Neurasthenia continued to be used. The symptoms of Hysteria included erratic behaviour, hysterical seizures, irritability, a lack of focus, and depression. Army medical personnel also noted the “varieties of nerve breakdown.” Others made reference to insanity, psychosis (such as schizophrenia), ‘diseases’ such as paranoia, dementia praecox, delusions, manic “depressive insanity,” excitive form, etc. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, Folder 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘Report on an Invalid,’ 4 June 1917; LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4551, Folder 1, File 7, ‘D.D.M.S. 62/26’ and LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 392, C-9-1, ‘Casualties, Lunatics (B & T).’ See also Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed*, 126, 161; Norris, *The Memoir of Captain Harold McGill*, 198, 246; Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 215 and Grescoe, *The Book of War Letters*, 7, 169.

<sup>387</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 3-1-4-2, Neurology, War Neuroses, ‘Functional Nervous Disorders.’

<sup>388</sup> Ibid, ‘Treatment of Shell Shock Cases at the Front.’

returned to duty, the chance for relapse was real,<sup>389</sup> and could turn a short-term problem into long-term debilitation. Addressing the very real problem of war weariness early on could thus pay substantial dividends *before* it transmuted into shell shock debilitation. For soldiers forced to stay at the front, or who convinced their CO or MO to allow them to ‘carry on,’ there were other consequences of war weariness and shell shock. Some were made “helpless from shell shock,”<sup>390</sup> or became paralysed by fear. These soldiers were obviously militarily ineffective, as were those who could no longer endure shell fire. This can be explained in part by the sense of helplessness and hopelessness – also characteristic of war weariness – that being trapped in an artillery bombardment could induce. One MO recounted that “a man reported in a state of nervous collapse and confessed that he could not bear the shell fire...I advised that he be employed behind the lines for a time,” giving the soldier a break.<sup>391</sup> This erosion of combat effectiveness was noted by other participating soldiers as well. One argued that officers became less useful over time as Neurasthenia developed, and John Becker of the 75<sup>th</sup> Battalion admitted that his nervousness and jumpiness compromised his soldiering abilities.<sup>392</sup> One medical report noted that a soldier became overly apathetic about his existence at the front, and did not “seem to worry greatly over his future.” This was certainly problematic for authorities, especially if the soldier became excessively cautious or reckless. This one soldier also illustrated a “marked indifference,” and was “nervous.”<sup>393</sup> This probably did not inspire confidence in his comrades.

The impact of shell shock and other psychiatric casualties went beyond the suffering of the individual, and also affected his military unit. These problems also went beyond war weariness; the reluctance of soldiers was becoming the inability to carry on

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<sup>389</sup> Army reports acknowledged that some Hysteria cases or “other neuroses” can relapse while in convalescent hospitals or after discharge. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 3-1-4-2, Neurology, War Neuroses, ‘Functional Nervous Disorders’ and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 7, ‘DMS Circular Letter No. 25.’

<sup>390</sup> Climo, *Lively Letters from World War One*, 249.

<sup>391</sup> This sympathy and understanding of the hardships endured was evident elsewhere in McGill’s memoir as well. In one section he wrote that “I sent four men who were too exhausted for trench duty back to the transport lines,” and that “the men appeared greatly fatigued and done in.” He also wrote that one soldier already sent to the rear for a rest felt “like a slacker” behind the lines cobbling boots; he requested to join a working party near the front, and McGill noted his “zeal to serve his King and country.” Norris, *The Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 106, 164-165.

<sup>392</sup> Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 152 and Christie, *The Memoir of John Harold Becker*, 203.

<sup>393</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘Medical Case Sheet.’

with duty. For infantry, recklessness or undue caution could imperil the unit or compromise its ability to seize battlefield objectives. Reckless behaviour could invite retaliation from the enemy or get the soldier and his comrades killed. Caution or fear could force soldiers to dig in or even withdraw, again hurting chances of carrying out orders. The author of a report on ‘Medical Aspects of Air Service’ noted that “after many [stressful sorties or] shows he becomes, to use his own expression, ‘dud.’” Soldiers driven to this point lacked “resolution, loses confidence in himself, becomes stale, and if he is not withdrawn for a rest usually comes to grief”<sup>394</sup> or brings grief to his unit. And the very nature of shell shock casualties “endanger[ed] the morale and discipline of troops in a special way,”<sup>395</sup> and therefore the army ignored or denigrated these casualties at its peril. The inability or unwillingness of authorities to acknowledge war weariness and shell shock problem certainly contributed to assaults on morale, discipline, and combat motivation.

For the soldiers driven to, and then beyond the breaking point, yet forced to remain at duty, serious health problems, permanent debilitation, and sometimes even death were the result. One chaplain admitted that he was “desperately weary at times,” but also “depressed” and “discouraged,” largely “owing to the physical, nervous, and mental strain” induced by service.<sup>396</sup> For some soldiers, especially those expected to stay at the front and endure the terror until killed, wounded, granted leave, or rotated out of the line, this depression and discouragement was simply too much to bear. Some soldiers could no longer withstand the pain, and used suicide as a permanent solution.<sup>397</sup> Other

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<sup>394</sup> These pilots were “subject to intensive, intermittent and cumulative stimuli of a degree to which men has never been exposed before,” and these natural reactions and “unfavourable, afferent impulses produce perceptions of the most trying character, so that the individual’s RESERVE FORCE RAPIDLY BECOMES USED UP.” LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3493, 11-2-7 / 11-2-8, Reports MO DGMS, ‘Reports Medical Aspect Air Service,’ 20 August 1917.

<sup>395</sup> Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 7.

<sup>396</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4669, Chaplains Reports, Hospitals 1.

<sup>397</sup> References to suicide, though, are relatively rare, but are still found in the historical record amid contemporary war diaries and medical documents. For example, one ‘mental case’ committed suicide; he had been described previously as “a melancholia – potential suicide.” LAC, RG9 III C10, Volume 4577, Folder 5, File 6, ‘H.M.H.S. Araguaya.’ See also Chapman, *A First World War Diary*, 133. More recent research suggests that “the relationship between serving in a high-stress military context and suicide is complex, and a direct relationship between serving in a war zone and suicide has not been well established.” There are, however, suggestive figures. Veterans with PTSD are four times more likely to commit suicide compared with non-PTSD veterans. Veterans with PTSD are also seven times more likely to commit suicide compared to the general civilian population. Janice H. Laurence and Michael D. Matthews, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Military Psychiatry* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 15-23.

soldiers acted in such a way that their behaviour would all but guarantee their death (or serious wounding) in combat. Though heroism and personal bravery were applauded, these acts often ran counter to discipline and orders, and the loss of experienced and veteran soldiers was difficult for both comrades and the unit to bear.

Statistics on the number of soldiers suffering from shell shock and other war neuroses, of various kinds, are notoriously difficult to find. Each army had different ways to calculate which casualties constituted shell shock, and war weariness was not tracked at all. And even within national armies, at times these casualties were calculated in different ways. MOs were busy with treating casualties and prioritised manpower and morale; accurate record-keeping and follow-up treatments were secondary considerations. Some soldiers were both physically and psychologically wounded, but were often lumped in with more traditional, physical casualties. Furthermore, many casualty lists did not have a separate category for psychiatric or psychological casualties, again lumping them under the umbrella term ‘casualties.’ In other instances, casualty figures are incomplete.<sup>398</sup> The numbers are also skewed by the fact that some soldiers suffered multiple breakdowns, or were diagnosed with shell shock, returned to duty, and then suffered a relapse. Should this be counted as multiple cases of shell shock? Or is it better to understand these cases as chronic?

Furthermore, many military and medical authorities were unwilling to admit how many troops were afflicted with shell shock to varying degrees. And because there was no clear consensus on what constituted shell shock, it was “relatively easy for the military authorities in Britain and Germany to associate the condition with cowardice and

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<sup>398</sup> Jones and Wessely argued that “the collection of data about soldiers suffering from psychological breakdown was haphazard and inconsistent.” Unfortunately, the British Official Medical History only collected information for the first two years of the war. In these years, psychological disorders accounted for 2.5% of casualties (in 1914) and 3.8% (1915). The problem, however, was that “these percentages greatly understate the true figures as they do not include functional somatic cases.” Edgar Jones and Simon Wessely, “Psychiatric Battle Casualties: An Intra – and Interwar Comparison,” *The British Journal of Psychiatry*, 178, 3 (2001): 242-247. Another historian noted that in 1914 1,906 cases of “behaviour disorder without physical cause” were admitted to hospitals. By 1915, this number had grown to 20,327, which constituted 9% of British battle casualties, though it is not clear where these admissions took place or which armies this included. Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 273. Colonel Nicholson argued that in the first two years of the war roughly 60,000 troops were returned to the UK from France with shell shock. Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, *Seventy Years of Service: A History of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1977), 104.

malingering.”<sup>399</sup> It was more honourable, for example, to be torn apart by shell fragments than be made militarily ineffective by little-understood psychiatric problems. The army authorities did not want to emphasise these problems and the difficulties this created. Yet despite these limitations, some information on rates of shell shock can be provided.<sup>400</sup> For example, a contemporary report on *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses* in the British Army stated that functional and nervous diseases represented one in seven discharges for disability in the Army, or one in three if (physical) wounds were excluded.<sup>401</sup> And Macphail stated in *The Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919: The Medical Services* that 8,513 soldiers were diagnosed with “nervous diseases” during the war,<sup>402</sup> presumably in Canadian combat units alone, though this certainly seems like an understatement of the problem. It should also be noted here that Macphail was notoriously unsympathetic to these types of casualties, which also might help explain his calculations.

Work done by historians and researchers in the years since the end of the war also provide some insight into the extent of the shell shock problem, and how it differed from war weariness. Historians Ian Beckett and Peter Leese in both wrote that there were approximately 80,000 war neuroses (shell shock) cases in the BEF during the war, representing 2% of all wounded.<sup>403</sup> These cases also represented approximately 36% of post-war disability pensions to veterans.<sup>404</sup> Martin Gilbert asserted that by 1916 “genuine cases of shell shock were also growing, reaching more than fifty thousand by the end of

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<sup>399</sup> Beckett, *The Great War*, 315.

<sup>400</sup> An understanding of the rates of shell shock diagnosis can give historians a rough understanding of the extent of the problem of war weariness as well, almost certainly more widespread than the former.

<sup>401</sup> Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 7. Another historian argued that by 1917 psychiatric admissions were four per 1,000 for those in the BEF, two per 1,000 for those on home service, and one per 1,000 for the civilian population. Richard Holmes, *Firing Line* (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd., 1985), 257.

<sup>402</sup> The medical authorities identified other conditions associated with the psychoneuroses of war, including aphonia, deafness, amaurosis, amblyopia, paresis, hemiplegia, paraplegia, amongst others. Macphail, *Medical Services*, 274 and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, 24-3-1 (Volume 1), *CAMC Journal*.

<sup>403</sup> Beckett, *The Great War*, 315 and Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 9, referencing the British *Medical Diseases of the War, Volume II*, published in 1923. See also Fiona Reid, et. al., “The Great Misconceptions of the First World War,” *BBC History Magazine*, 15, 8 (August 2014): 30-36. The editor of a stretcher bearer’s journal also asserted that “most modern historians dismiss [this number of 80,000] as impossibly low.” Gaudet, ed., *The World War I Journal and Poems of Pte. Frank Walker*, xv.

<sup>404</sup> Beckett, *The Great War*, 315.

the war,” presumably referring to the British Army alone. By 1920, roughly 65,000 ex-soldiers were still receiving pensions for neurasthenia, and 9,000 of these were still in hospital. By March 1939, around 120,000 British veterans of the First World War were receiving pensions (or had received their ‘final awards’) for war-related “primary psychiatric disability.” These 120,000 veteran pensions represented 15% of all pensioned disabilities.<sup>405</sup> Other historians, however, refer to the inadequacy of casualty lists in capturing the true extent of shell shock and the impact of combat on individuals. Peter Hart wrote that in addition to the roughly 9.7 million soldiers killed through military action in the war,

roughly 21 million were injured: some recovered relatively unaffected, but many were scarred or maimed for life. Nor do these figures really take into account the mentally traumatised, ranging from shell-shocked men who would never be sane again to the millions suffering from what we would now recognise as post-traumatic stress disorder [PTSD].<sup>406</sup>

There were also soldiers who survived the war, but then perhaps months or years later, experienced psychological problems due to their war service. And psychiatric casualties also transcended national, linguistic, geographic, class, and rank lines. One historian argued, for example, that in the German Army 613,047 soldiers, or 4.57% of all those mobilised were treated for ‘nervous disorders.’<sup>407</sup> Psychiatric casualties created a unique problem for MOs, and put them in an unenviable position, having to balance the needs of the individual patient with that of their employer, the army.

There was tension amongst MOs and other personnel in the CAMC related to their service, conflicting priorities and value systems, and differences between civilian and military medicine. It was army policy to be suspicious of certain types of casualties, namely, non-physical and psychiatric casualties. In the foreword to a medical officer’s

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<sup>405</sup> Ted Bogacz, “War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock,’” *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1989): 227-256. By 1939 roughly 40,000 Britons were still receiving pensions for mental disorders of the First World War, and a further 80,000 had already been settled. Ben Shephard, *A War of Nerves: Soldiers and Psychiatrists in the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), 165.

<sup>406</sup> Hart, *The Great War*, 468.

<sup>407</sup> Alexander Watson, “Self-Deception and Survival: Mental Coping Strategies on the Western Front, 1914-1918,” *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 41, 2 (2006): 247-268. These figures found on page 248.

memoirs, one historian wrote that there were often “very fixed views about courage and cowardice,” though there was some leeway for individual MOs to be sympathetic to shell shock cases. There was a rudimentary understanding of psychiatric casualties at the time. Moreover, the “prevailing military ethos of ‘courage unto death,’” as well as “anxiety over any displays of fear in front of one’s peers” combined with the MO’s main duty of ensuring the “maximum number of his battalion’s soldiers were available for duty every day” militated against too sympathetic an understanding of these problems.<sup>408</sup> And yet, it was official army policy that officers, even MOs, were not to coddle the men, but were to act in a paternalistic manner, expecting all soldiers to do their duty to the utmost. One MO noted, for example, that during a long and exhausting march many soldiers wanted to fall out or lie down, but the officers were expected to show no pity. Instead, they were to “curse them, cajole and coax, threaten and promise, appeal to their pride and power of endurance,”<sup>409</sup> anything really to keep them going. And doubtless some wounds were treated more sympathetically than others. Physical wounds suffered in combat or during active service were always treated more sympathetically and generously than ‘invisible wounds.’<sup>410</sup> Throughout the war, there was always some suspicion that those claiming shell shock were actually malingering, to escape further duty at the front. Those under suspicion were kept on the continent, and not discharged or evacuated to England,<sup>411</sup> pending further examination and diagnosis. Those without visible or serious wounds, and where shell shock could not be proven, were usually sent back to the front in short order. The emphasis on manpower and morale, the desire to discourage other shell shocked soldiers from ‘going sick,’ and the concern for “needless” evacuation and misdiagnosis<sup>412</sup> help explain this unsympathetic view.<sup>413</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Patrick Brennan in Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, ix.

<sup>409</sup> *Ibid*, 197.

<sup>410</sup> Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 17.

<sup>411</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-12-1 to 25-13-5, ‘D.M.S. Circular Letter No. 25 of 1917,’ dated 3 August 1917 and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 7, ‘DMS Circular Letter No. 25.’

<sup>412</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-6, ‘G.R.O. 2384.’

<sup>413</sup> This prompt return to the front, and the recuperative power of rest and respite, was also reflected in cultural understandings of the war. See, for example, the Robert Frost poem “Not to Keep,” found in Waters, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 175. It included the lines: *Enough./ Yet not enough. A bullet through and through./ High in the breast. Nothing but what good care/ And medicine and rest, and you a week./ Can cure me of to go again...And with his eyes he asked her not to ask./ They had given him back to her, but not to keep.*

The authorities often distinguished between legitimate cases of shell shock, and others. One MO in late 1916, for example, argued that it was necessary “for a disciplinary stand-point to distinguish between *genuine* cases of ‘shell-shock’ and those of loss of nerve power.”<sup>414</sup> War weariness was even more difficult to diagnose. And even into 1917, many authorities were requiring a very high burden of proof and clinging to a very narrow, traditional, and physical understanding of shell shock, as a shell concussion or other physical origin to explain these problems.<sup>415</sup> In this sense, there was a false dichotomy between legitimate wounds (mental or physical), suffered as a *direct* result of combat or enemy fire, and illegitimate problems suggesting cowardice or malingering. Many of the more traditional MOs subscribed to this latter view, suspicious that all claiming shell shock were ‘slackers’ or ‘swinging the lead.’ And even if MOs did acknowledge that the best soldiers, including volunteers and veterans, suffered from “anxiety neurosis,” war weariness, and other problems after months or years of service, many believed that their duty to the army trumped their Hippocratic Oath.<sup>416</sup>

And yet, military medical matters were complex and did not fit neatly into reductive black and white understandings of health. Not all soldiers reacted the same way to combat or stress, and family history, role in the forces, personal experience, length and intensity of service, duties performed, and hardships endured all could factor into how soldiers reacted to battle and service. Some soldiers broke down from shell shock after a relatively short period of time at the front, and cases of psychiatric casualties were also found in soldiers on the lines of communication behind the front.<sup>417</sup> Some were able to

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<sup>414</sup> My italics. Authorities also sought to classify soldiers and distinguish between “true shell shock” and “symptoms resulting from nervous exhaustion or loss of self-control,” clearly privileging one over the other. Others distinguished between two types of ‘Insanity.’ One was ‘insanity,’ whereas the other was ‘Mental Deficiency,’ shock, or suffering from “mental shock or hysteria.” See LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4551, Folder 1, File 7, ‘D.D.M.S. M.1/55,’ dated 7 November 1916; LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, 2-3-6-2, ‘Documents for Troops Returning, Boards;’ LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 6, ‘Categorisation’ and PPCLI Archives, Courts Martial and Discipline, Part II, File No. 30 (22) – 5, ‘Memorandum – Courts Martial – Medical Evidence – Insanity,’ dated 1 May 1915.

<sup>415</sup> In some cases, authorities demanded “an authentic and definite statement by a witness of direct contact with the effects of an explosion” to secure a diagnosis of Shell Shock (Wounded). Ibid, ‘D.M.S. No. 794/86.’ In other instances, the authorities admitted the causes of and explanations for shell shock were complex. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 1, File 10, Casualties, 2-3-17 to 1-1-18, ‘C.W.R.O., 387, 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion.’

<sup>416</sup> Macphail, *Medical Services*, 277.

<sup>417</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, 3-1-4-2, ‘Functional Nervous Disorders.’



recover in relatively short order after rest and time away from the sources of trauma.<sup>418</sup> Other troops required weeks or months of recovery time before being made effective again; some individuals never fully recuperated.

Some shell shock and psychiatric cases were more ambiguous and difficult to classify, reinforcing the overlap between war weariness and shell shock. This reality, combined with the somewhat confused and even contradictory response of the authorities, placed further pressure on the MOs tasked with determining who was ‘fit’ to carry on with duty, and who was given a chance to recover behind the lines. For example, NYDN cases fell somewhere between healthy, committed soldiers and those debilitated by shell shock. The army recognised that their military effectiveness and well-being had been compromised, but whose problems were not yet serious enough to warrant evacuation from the continent or discharge. MOs were to use this term in soldiers who became “non-effective” and lacked visible wounds, but were “presumed to have originated from the effects of weapons in action.”<sup>419</sup> Furthermore, in some cases the CO of the soldier’s unit needed to confirm with the hospital that “the man had been subject to exceptional exposure” to justify a transfer and time out of the line. Later in the war, the British high command even prohibited the use of the term ‘shell shock’ altogether, or at the very least seriously circumscribed its use.<sup>420</sup> Army policies and the desire to limit those evacuated from the front for psychiatric casualties compromised the ability of the medical services to properly and promptly handle casualties. In February of 1917, for example, a hospital staff member complained that “the hospital is getting clogged by the army regulations requiring evidence from the front before sending shell shock N.Y.D. and gas cases to the base”<sup>421</sup> hospitals. In this case we see army rules and procedures, and emphasis on manpower and morale considerations, take precedence over the needs of individual

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<sup>418</sup> COs had to sign courts martial documents for those who “failed to go forward with the regiments,” which could result in death sentences. Adamson argued, however, that these courts were often too final of a verdict, explaining that “the mental state of a man means so much and so greatly govern his actions and I have known men who recovered their nerve after behaving badly and proved most gallant fellows.” In other words, many suffered short-term breakdowns and could subsequently recover and become effective soldiers once again. Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 322.

<sup>419</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, 3-1-4-2, ‘Treatment of Shell Shock Cases at the Front.’

<sup>420</sup> See, for example, *Ibid.* The author of this document stated that the term ‘shell shock’ could only be used by the OC a special hospital in neurasthenia cases.

<sup>421</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, 6-3-2, Hospitals, France, Stationary, ‘No. 3 C.S.H.’

patients and long-term recovery. The desire to prevent seemingly ‘needless’ evacuation was deemed more important than the fact that hospitals were becoming overwhelmed, which compromised medical care. This was a reality that MOs had to conform to, at least in principle.

And at times the orders to and expectations of MOs were contrary to civilian practices, where most Canadian medical officers began their careers, as well as ambiguous. In civilian medicine, the ultimate goal was the recovery and continued health of individual patients, so they could once again become an effective member of society. In military medicine, by contrast, the ultimate goal was to ensure the maximum number of soldiers at the front; soldiers were mostly means to an end, and the needs of the army were paramount. In terms of ambiguous or unclear orders, MOs were instructed to retain “as many light cases as possible [in the army zone] until such a time as they were fit to return to duty.”<sup>422</sup> Of course, it was not always clear what constituted ‘light cases,’ and at times it was better to remove a soldier from frontline service for a short while rather than force him to remain at the front and risk a more serious breakdown. Preventative measures and sympathetic treatment were beneficial, even if they ran counter to official army policy.

Despite the personal views of the MOs and their commitment to the Hippocratic Oath and civilian medical values and practices, they were nevertheless in a difficult position. Seeing patients suffering and dying was bad enough. Having soldiers die under their care, despite best efforts, must have shaken even the most hardened veteran doctors. Declaring a soldier fit for further duty and sending him back to the front, moreover, could be akin to a death sentence for that soldier. For those soldiers who were pushed beyond the breaking point and could no longer endure at the front, desperation sometimes drove them to evade duty or escape the trenches. Malingering, however, was considered a crime

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<sup>422</sup> DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 229.

by the military authorities, and some shell shocked soldiers were no doubt executed as malingerers, shirkers, and slackers – often for cowardice or desertion.<sup>423</sup>

## Impact on Behaviour and Attitude

The stresses endured by soldiers serving at the front and on the lines of communication were enough to affect how they viewed the world, and their behaviour as well. The sights, smells, and sounds of death, coupled with the reality of suffering, witnessing and participating in terrible things, and the physical and emotional exhaustion all served to place an enormous burden on the individual. There was some comfort and safety in numbers, but each soldier dealt with trauma in his own way and was expected to do his duty and not undermine the unit. Support was offered in the form of chaplains, MOs, alcohol, and other fortifying forces, but each soldier faced difficulties at the front and were expected to endure until wounded, killed, or granted leave. After long and hard service, especially in combat units, some soldiers became reckless or apathetic, others fatalistic or overly cautious;<sup>424</sup> some troops were driven by bloodlust and feelings of revenge, whereas others were determined to seek a Blighty or give themselves a SIW. Others ‘voted with their feet’ and sought to avoid further duty altogether. There were many soldiers, however, who attempted to maintain their composure and stick it out at the front *despite* their war weariness. Notions of duty, regimental spirit and pride, comradeship, patriotism, fear,<sup>425</sup> and ‘carrots and sticks’ all help explain how and why soldiers tried to endure at the front, even if they were ultimately unable to do so. One

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<sup>423</sup> It was difficult to reconcile the natural self-preservation instinct with continued duty in intolerable situations. Flight and desertion could not always be prevented by ideals of duty, patriotism, honour, training, discipline, comradeship, and “herd reactions.” Moreover, soldiers were aware that cowardice “was punishable only with death, and [that] no medical excuses could be accepted” to mitigate the punishment. And yet, soldiers still risked this and went AWL, deserted, or found other ways to evade duty. Some were lacking in dedication or felt abandoned by the army system, to be sure, but this also suggests that many soldiers developed a level of desperation that drove them from duty, *despite* the potential consequences and all the forces keeping them in the line. Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 30-31, 43; Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 213 and Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed*, 56.

<sup>424</sup> Some soldiers seemed to accept their fate and the inevitability of their death in this war. Edward Thomas’ poem *Lights Out* included the lines: “There is not any book/ or face of dearest look/ that I would not turn from now/ to go into the Unknown/ I must enter and leave alone/ I know not how. Waters, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 141.

<sup>425</sup> The soldiers’ “subjection to strict military discipline, the fear of severe punishment or death from allowing their emotions to run riot, had a strong restraining influence” on their attitude and behaviour. T.H. Ames, *The Prevention of War Neurosis, Shell Shock* (Canadian Medical Association, New York Medical Journal, July 6 1918), 423.

infantry subaltern reflected that some soldiers sought to stay at the front and refused to be evacuated until the task at hand was completed,<sup>426</sup> even if they were on the verge of breakdown and were quickly declining in health and ability. Many did not want to shirk their duty or let their comrades down, which was admirable, but sometimes misguided. Having an unfit soldier remain at the front could be counterproductive; a shell-shocked man in the front lines could be disastrous for unit morale, and despite their commitment, these soldiers might very well be less than effective militarily.

The hard fighting, heavy casualties, and extended periods at the front could also induce a sense of helplessness or hopelessness amongst long-serving veterans. The longer that one was ‘in country,’ the clearer it was that their chances of unscathed survival were marginal at best. Loss of hope and feelings of helplessness were damaging to morale over time, and certainly contributed to the onset of war weariness.<sup>427</sup> This loss of hope and desire to end the pain and trauma once and for all drove some desperate soldiers to suicide and self-harm. If self-inflicted wounds and illnesses were a desperate act on the part of troops to evade duty and escape the trenches, suicide was a way to avoid further service and suffering permanently. The self-preservation instinct is strong, and thus few sought death consciously. Some, however, behaved recklessly or did commit suicide.<sup>428</sup> MOs noted deaths in their unit, including suicides and attempted suicides, as have other officers.<sup>429</sup> At times, the stresses and strains of the front lines, combined with bad news from home – such as Dear John letters – proved too much for these worn soldiers to endure. In many cases, if a soldier committed suicide at duty it would not be reported as

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<sup>426</sup> Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*, 148.

<sup>427</sup> Feelings of helplessness and hopelessness might also be characteristic of war weariness, rather than just a contributing factor. This loss of hope was one theme explored in Sassoon’s poem “Attack,” which included the lines: *Lines of grey, muttering faces, masked with fear./ They leave their trenches, going over the top./ While time ticks blank and busy on their wrists./ And hope, with furtive eyes and grappling fists./ Flounders in mud. O Jesus, make it stop!* See Waters, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 37 and Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 132.

<sup>428</sup> There was also the “unending conflict between duty, honour and discipline, on the one hand, and homesickness, horror, and the urgings of the instinct of self-preservation on the other.” Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 30, 42.

<sup>429</sup> Graves explained that one soldier committed suicide thusly: “He went through the last push, sir, and that sent him a bit queer; on top of that he got bad news from Limerick about his girl and another chap.” Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, xiv and 199 and Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 91. Historian Niall Ferguson, however, argued that the number of SIWs and suicides were “never very high.” Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 367. Canadian historian Tim Cook, however, made reference to several cases of suicide in his section on those pushed beyond the breaking point. Cook, *Shock Troops*, 245-246.

such, and their next of kin would be informed that their loved one died “a soldier’s death.”<sup>430</sup> Lord Moran noted the seemingly spontaneous nature of some of these suicides; he wrote that one soldier “did not appear ill” or suicidal, but then killed himself. Moran admitted, however, that this man was “out of sorts,” sullen, dazed, morose.<sup>431</sup> But in war and combat especially, dazed, sullen, or morose feelings were all too common. And Private Bert Cooke wrote of a comrade who “blew his brains out.” Apparently he was “a fine fellow, and no one would have thought he would have done such a thing...but this life is enough to make a fellow do anything.”<sup>432</sup> What was it that pushed these soldiers over the edge? And how can we account for those soldiers who were pushed to the edge, but not over it?

Personal motivations for suicide during military service are difficult to determine. Some soldiers were simply pushed beyond the breaking point, and saw no other way out. One MO argued that soldiers committed suicide because they could no longer face the war, but did not want to bring disgrace to themselves or their unit,<sup>433</sup> for example by deserting, surrendering, or otherwise acting in an undisciplined manner. In other cases, the guilt and shame of acting in such an undisciplined way, or being accused of such behaviour, contributed to the decision to end one’s life.<sup>434</sup> Other suicides are perhaps explained by an impulsive idea generated in a time of great distress combined with readily available firearms. For others, the uncertainty and violence at the front was just too much to endure. The lack of control over one’s own fate could be disheartening, and some took the matter into their own hands;<sup>435</sup> the act of suicide gave them a sense of control over a highly volatile existence and allowed them to leave this world on their own terms. It is certainly a sad state of affairs when suicide was deemed a better option than continued service at the front.

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<sup>430</sup> And not one of dishonour. See Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 91.

<sup>431</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 3.

<sup>432</sup> Walsh, *The First World War Diary of Private Bert Cooke*, 118.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>434</sup> The author of a contemporary report on war neuroses argued that “instances are also known where hysterics have committed suicide after having been falsely accused of malingering.” Salmon, *Mental Diseases and War Neuroses*, 43.

<sup>435</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 189.

## Malingering versus Breakdown, and the Self-Preservation Instinct

It was often difficult for MOs and commanders to determine whether soldiers were genuinely unable to withstand further duty, or whether they were simply fed up with the state of affairs and sought a way out. The differences between a war-weary soldier and shell-shocked soldier could be subtle. Of course, this is too simplistic an understanding of the problem, especially as some soldiers seemed *willing* to carry on, but were *unable* to endure. Conversely, there were also troops who were physically and psychologically healthy enough to remain at the front, but simply wanted, and probably deserved, a rest. The desire for a Blighty wound was a clear indicator of war weariness, as was the grumbling and complaining that was nearly ubiquitous in the forces. Grumbling and grouching, moreover, was understood by many authorities as a healthy outlet for discontent; by allowing critiques of the officers, for instance, this ensured that dissatisfaction did not become a collective problem and boil over into mutiny.<sup>436</sup> A Blighty wound offered the soldier a brief reprieve from combat, as well as time away from the front and perhaps also hospitalisation. Canadian artilleryman Ernest Black described these wounds as “nothing to do any permanent damage but enough to get him to hospital in England and a furlough before he came back to France” and further duty.<sup>437</sup> It was certainly no secret that many long-serving soldiers dreamed of or even sought out ‘cushy’ or Blighty wounds<sup>438</sup> as an honourable way to avoid further duty, at least until partial recovery. A 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion soldier recalled that “when you are really thoroughly fed up with the whole thing there, you would say, I wish I could get a Blighty.”<sup>439</sup> One MO noted that for those serving – and suffering – in the trenches, “a cushy wound, a Blighty business, seems the most desirable thing in the world.” Some soldiers after calculating

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<sup>436</sup> To provide but one example, the comedy shows whereby officers would be ridiculed and army life satirised allowed for a ‘safety valve’ for soldiers to express discontent in a controlled environment, far from the battlefield. By tolerating this behaviour, it helped keep discontent at a simmer so as to not grow into more serious and collective discontent and insubordination/indiscipline. The author would like to thank Dr. Vance for these ideas, which emerged during one of our many discussions on the First World War.

<sup>437</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 7.

<sup>438</sup> Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 97-98.

<sup>439</sup> LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume 7, Interview with W.V.B. Riddell of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, n.p.

their odds of survival, however, took the next step and actually sought out these wounds.<sup>440</sup>

But for the soldiers who did not get their Blighty, and were forced to remain at the front for the foreseeable future, other actions were taken to avoid further service. At times, this was done with clear goals in mind; the soldier made a conscious decision to minimise his participation in the war as much as possible. At other times, the soldier was merely reacting to his body and mind, ensuring that he could survive to fight another day by reducing his participation in the present. This was an important distinction to make, one in which gave MOs and officers much trouble, but close contact with their subordinates, clear channels of communication, and quality leadership practices certainly helped in this regard.

The sick parade was one way for MOs to gauge the authenticity and severity of the ailments presented by the troops. But this was often difficult, especially with the fickle nature of psychiatric casualties. Furthermore, the unit's worst malingerers and "scrimshankers" attempted to fool the MO by trying to "look their very worst." Captain Ralph Bell noted that some soldiers showed up on sick parade after failing to shave, with improper clothing, and acted in an exaggerated or pitiable way to emphasise their problems.<sup>441</sup> And at times, it worked, and they managed to get past the battalion MO.<sup>442</sup> Of course, many saw such behaviour as shameful and embarrassing, which could also bring disrepute on themselves and the unit. Indeed, some troops refused to go sick or leave their comrades, *despite* the fact that they were increasingly incapacitated and declining in utility. Major G.S. Strathy wrote that though some troops played up their symptoms, many seemed to want to stick it out at the front and claimed they were fit when they were not, "rather than be thought to be 'swinging the lead'" at the front.<sup>443</sup>

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<sup>440</sup> Some soldiers lingered in areas known for heavy shelling in the hopes of getting "a Blighty one." Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 114 and 121.

<sup>441</sup> Bell, *Canada in War-Paint*, 54.

<sup>442</sup> DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 88.

<sup>443</sup> Though he argued that neurasthenic, nervous, "lazy ones," and cowards did go sick. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, 2-4-1, 'Major G.S Strathy, War Diary,' August 1914 – February 1918.

It was a common viewpoint among MOs, even sympathetic ones, that only ‘genuine’ cases of shell shock deserved rest and medical attention. This also complicated cases of war weariness, which affected soldiers who were no longer fit and enthusiastic, but not yet debilitated by shell shock. Harold McGill of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion argued that the term shell shock was “much-abused,” and often used by misguided MOs to “describe a condition that was nothing but terror.” True cases of shell shock did occur, but “in my experience [this] never occurred in the case of cowards.”<sup>444</sup> McGill felt that those suffering from shell shock were often the best, hardest-working, and most committed soldiers of the unit, as

The victims were men of finest moral courage. This combined with a high sense of duty and a lively imagination set the stage for the development of shell shock...[as the soldier’s] whole physical nature revolted from the sights and sounds of bombardment. This was much intensified if he was with troops holding a static position and obliged to sit still and take punishment without the opportunity of striking back...[in response to such stimuli] all the man’s natural physical impulses promoted him to take shelter, and to run away if necessary...[but his] spiritual courage, his faith to his duty and his discipline forced him to remain...the result was a conflict under which the nervous system collapsed and the soldier became a gibbering maniac.<sup>445</sup>

The belief that some soldiers used shell shock as an excuse to evade duty was also espoused by other military authorities. One British MO acknowledged that when the term itself was coined, some “weaklings” saw it as an opportunity to malingering or escape the front,<sup>446</sup> justified in their behaviour by official recognition of the impact of combat on the individual. There were times, moreover, when shell-shocked soldiers were blamed for their condition, even if it was authentic and caused by exposure to battle. Some soldiers, for example, were said to have developed “functional disorders of the nervous system” but “under conditions which would not affect an individual with a stable nervous system,” thus putting the blame squarely on the soldier, rather than on an inadequate medical or

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<sup>444</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 172.

<sup>445</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>446</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 184. There were also instances of soldiers ‘shamming’ to escape the front. See Chapman, *A First World War Diary*, 145 and Hesler, ed., *Interlude: 1916-1919*, 33.



rotation system, or the impact of the war itself.<sup>447</sup> There was a fine line between breakdown and fitness for further service; those who were able and willing to carry on at the front one day could become debilitated by shell shock the next. There was also a fine line between war weariness and shell shock ineffectiveness. This emphasised the importance of MOs and commanders being familiar and in close contact with their subordinates.

In addition to conscious malingering and evasion of duty, soldiers reacted to the long-term exposure to combat and trauma in other ways, especially by succumbing to natural fear reactions. Fear, of course, was a natural aspect of wartime service. The human body and mind were placed in situations of extraordinary stress and mortal danger, and soldiers were also expected to endure and participate in traumatic and terrifying behaviours and circumstances. And despite the most rigorous and realistic training, one could never adequately prepare for the horrors of war, and combat in particular. In moments of extreme stress and terror, the natural response was to run and hide, anything to prevent continued exposure to such sources of fear. Leaving the battlefield and cowering in a shell hole were obviously frowned upon by military authorities; and indeed, these behaviours were illegal, not to mention deemed ‘cowardly.’<sup>448</sup> And yet no amount of regimental pride, promises of rewards, appeals to tradition, masculinity, and authority, sense of duty, good leadership, and threat of punishment could keep all soldiers in the firing line indefinitely when fear rose to a certain level.

In all species the natural self-preservation instinct is paramount. This often manifests itself as a fight or flight response,<sup>449</sup> when in the face of danger the victim needs to prepare to aggressively confront the sources of danger, or to flee this danger altogether. The problem for infantry soldiers of the First World War, however, was that especially during trench warfare the opportunities for direct retaliation and aggression

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<sup>447</sup> At times, moreover, with hysteria and other neuroses cases “there is a suspicion of malingering.” See LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, 3-1-4-2, Neurology, War Neuroses, ‘Functional Nervous Disorders’ and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 7, ‘DMS Circular Letter No. 25.’

<sup>448</sup> Some soldiers, however, were sympathetic to those who were “unable to stand more active service” anymore. See, for example, Cate, ed., *A Soldier’s Memoir of World War I*, 54.

<sup>449</sup> To Fight or Flight Grossman has added posture (or intimidation) and submission in response to aggression from another member of the same species. Grossman, *On Killing*, 5-14.

toward the enemy were limited, save during set-piece battles, patrols, and raids. Most of the time soldiers were in the trenches or behind the lines and exposed to enemy fire, but unable to properly retaliate. The inability to strike back at your aggressor as a cause of shell shock and other psychiatric casualties has been suggested by contemporary MOs,<sup>450</sup> and the chances to flee the battlefield without being apprehended or killed in the process were few and far between. Discomfort, stress, fear, and being under near-constant shell fire “from which every human impulse recoils...[and] every human instinct cries ‘go back!’”<sup>451</sup> was difficult to endure, day after day. And yet, there were few opportunities for respite.

One soldier acknowledged the power of the self-preservation instinct, and the “irresistible impulse to ‘take cover’” in these situations.<sup>452</sup> This ‘irresistible impulse’ to run and hide, however, obviously undermined the unit’s ability to carry out orders and seize objectives.<sup>453</sup> If all soldiers gave in to their natural instinct to run from danger, unit cohesion would collapse. Lord Moran argued that fear was simply the “response of the instinct of self-preservation to danger” encountered at the front. It was the soldier’s *resistance* to fear and fortifying factors that mattered, though this resistance could be lowered by wounds or illness, and intense emotional shock could strip soldiers of their powers of self-control.<sup>454</sup> For those who gave in to their self-preservation instinct and went AWL or deserted, being captured by authorities meant courts martial, stigmatisation, even death. Medical explanations such as shell shock often fell on deaf ears in these situations, as MOs and commanders would have to agree to allow the soldier to leave the front, even for a short rest. Those who were not granted this privilege were depicted as insubordinate, cowardly, or even traitorous. Other authorities were dismissive of psychiatric casualties, interpreting them as childish, feminine, or degenerate. One wrote

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<sup>450</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 172.

<sup>451</sup> Robert John Renison, “A Story of Five Cities: A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days” in J. Castell Hopkins, *Canada at War, 1914-1918: A Record of Heroism and Achievement* (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review Limited, 1919), 393.

<sup>452</sup> Major William Bishop, *Winged Warfare: Hunting the Huns in the Air* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 48-49.

<sup>453</sup> One MO admitted that before a raid he was “seized with an overwhelming desire to await the raiders’ return here in this deep dug-out with its immense sense of security” and safety. Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 145.

<sup>454</sup> Fatigue, loss of sleep, and witnessing friends die also used up soldier’s will power. *Ibid*, 19-25.

that the symptoms of shell shock were merely “the result of the action of the natural instinct of self-preservation,” and that this was “a primitive instinct expressed by the emotion fear,”<sup>455</sup> and would not be tolerated. It is thus no wonder that troops on the precipice of breakdown grew desperate and resorted to SIWs and illness, desertion, and other forms of evasion of duty.

### Links to Legal Aspects, Discipline, Criminality

There were direct links between the health and medical reality of troops at the front, and the legal and disciplinary aspects of service. War-weary soldiers might very well neglect their personal health and the military policies designed to maintain it – a sense of apathy and helplessness were characteristic of pronounced war weariness. Some medical ailments, such as trench foot and VD, were understood as only occurring in units with poor morale, weak discipline,<sup>456</sup> and ineffective leadership, or under extreme circumstances only. With the proper inspections, equipment and clothing, care for subordinates, and adherence to rules and regulations, it was argued, there would be very few cases of trench foot amongst units at the front. Good units and individuals with pride and commitment simply did not allow these cases to emerge. The reality, of course, was much more complex. Soldiers could also be punished and have their behaviour shaped by medical problems. Troops who had contracted VD, for example, were punished for failing to follow army regulations, but also needed to be controlled and perhaps confined in certain areas.<sup>457</sup> Medical issues afflicting soldiers could compromise their ability to follow orders, stay in the line or formation, and ultimately seize military objectives. This

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<sup>455</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, Mental Cases, No File Title.

<sup>456</sup> The author of a document on trench foot argued that “the prevention of the disease is almost entirely a matter of discipline and can only be carried out by the cooperation of the Company and Battalion officers.” Moreover, in order to maintain fighting strength “great care will have to be exercised by all to keep the men with the battalions, and thus maintain the low percentage of sick evacuation heretofore enjoyed by the Canadian Corps.” LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4546, Folder 7, File 7, ‘Trench Foot.’

<sup>457</sup> This was not always possible to achieve, especially with large numbers and in inhabited areas of the continent, but areas could be placed out of bounds, and leave to certain cities like Nice or Paris could be discontinued owing to the “great and increasing number of cases of venereal disease contracted in these places.” LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 4530, Folder 11, Leave, ‘Confidential: Cdn. Divn. A(a) 6-1 – 23-9-17.’

impacted all soldiers in all arms and services, especially high stress positions such as those in the air force<sup>458</sup> and infantry.

There was a difficult balancing act to maintain. On the one hand, the medical authorities needed to care for their patients and ensure sufficient health and strength to continue fighting. At times, this meant time away from the sources of stress. On the other hand, medical personnel were subject to and expected to uphold military discipline,<sup>459</sup> and were instructed to be more concerned with the collective rather than the individual. In many cases the needs of the army were privileged over those of individual soldiers, especially regarding matters of health. In the Canadian Hospital at Etchinghill, for example, close confinement of individual soldiers could retard recovery, but was still recommended and justified as “taken with a view to the best interests of military discipline and also with a view to the best interests of those other ranks as patients in this hospital.”<sup>460</sup> In this case, the impression made on other patients and the need to uphold military discipline were deemed more important than the recovery of the soldiers themselves. It should also be remembered that this was a more communal society, and many of the troops were used to subordination, paternalism, close control and discipline (such as in the factory). It was argued that the very survival of Western Civilisation was at stake, so the authorities could be forgiven for taking liberties with the soldiers. Nevertheless, soldiers were often still punished, such as with courts martial, for “fail[ure] to maintain equilibrium” when engaging the enemy, even if they had been medically diagnosed with shell shock or neurasthenia.<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>458</sup> The high-stress environment of flying coupled with the negative impact on the human body led to “marked impairment of judgment,” headaches, insomnia, “relative insufficiency,” and other symptoms associated with “exhaustion.” Moreover, battle stress and near-death experiences could induce a sense of caution and hesitancy that could negatively affect comrades. In one example after almost crashing, a pilot in his next encounter “broke away from his formation knowing that he would be pounced upon by enemy scouts [fighters], preferring this to the strain imposed upon him by continuing in formation. This pilot, after a rest, did excellent artillery work.” LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3493, 11-2-7 / 11-2-8, Reports MO DGMS, ‘Reports Medical Aspect Air Service,’ 20 August 1917.

<sup>459</sup> The medical services, including the CAMC, were under military discipline as members of the Canadian armed forces, fighting as part of the wider BEF. They were thus subject to the KRO, such as Nos. 1099, 1100, and 1111. The medical services were expected to maintain proper army authority and military discipline whilst treating patients in hospitals and other medical facilities. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, 2-4-1, ‘Relations with M.H.C.’

<sup>460</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 2, Volume 661, D-98-1, Discipline, ‘Etchinghill Hospital.’

<sup>461</sup> Those who failed to do their duty because they were “lacking in nerve stability...cannot be allowed to escape disciplinary action on the ground of a medical diagnosis of ‘shell shock’ or ‘neurasthenia’ or ‘inability to stand shell fire.’” The author of the report worried that too many officers and soldiers used the excuse of non-effectiveness to

The desire for a Blighty wound<sup>462</sup> amongst soldiers was certainly not criminal, but going the next step and actually wounding oneself was. The administering of SIWs and illnesses was likely not widespread, but it did happen and the army authorities were concerned. Furthermore, the desire to attain a SIW and then hide evidence of it did suggest *mens rea*, a guilty mind.<sup>463</sup> These soldiers knew that what they were doing was considered illegal and even cowardly, but they had had enough of the war and had grown desperate to escape further duty. There were also special procedures to be followed in cases of suspected SIWs, partly to ensure that further investigations could be made and partly to ensure these cases were not evacuated with other ‘legitimate’ physical wounds.<sup>464</sup> It seems even these desperate soldiers with SIWs and illnesses had not suffered enough, and the authorities sought to punish them further and deter others from attempting such behaviour.

Active service conditions, hard fighting, heavy casualties, the terror of combat, and the stresses of war eventually drove even the most committed, strongest, most-experienced volunteers to and beyond the breaking point. A minority of soldiers committed suicide<sup>465</sup> or acted in such a way as to invite death. Some soldiers broke down

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explain and justify why they “failed in their duty.” The author argued that MOs have fallen prey to this ruse, and “without due consideration of the military issues at stake, have accepted such cases as being in the same category as ordinary illness.” LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4546, Folder 6, File 2, ADMS 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division, ‘Extract from G.H.Q. Letter,’ 14 October 1916. And a Canadian MO argued that there were many slackers and malingerers, and (army) doctors had a duty to the armed forces that trumped their Hippocratic Oath. MOs played an important role in determining whether soldiers were fit to stand trial, and thus be tried with and even executed for cowardice and other crimes. Macphail, *Medical Services*, 277-278.

<sup>462</sup> Some soldiers sought Blighty wounds, or even increased the chances of attaining one by lingering in dangerous areas or exposing themselves unnecessarily to enemy fire. Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 114, 121. And one soldier recalled that “I saw some of the men lie down in a trench there and hold their feet up to see if they could get wounded.” Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 151.

<sup>463</sup> Or at least a recognition of the army’s prohibitions on such behaviour. One soldier sought a Blighty wound/SIW and suggested shooting into your leg, but “through a tin of bully beef (to avoid powder marks)” and evidence of self-harm. A good leg wound would certainly send soldiers down the line for treatment and hospitalisation, at least for a while. Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 216.

<sup>464</sup> Soldiers wounded with suspected SIWs were to travel with reports, crime sheets, and any evidence on hand. And “in all cases [a] note will be made on back of field Medical Card of Patient.” See LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4561, Folder 1, File 8, ‘No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital, Orders, Second Army, D.M.S.’; Ibid, Volume 4554, Folder 2, File 2, ‘Self Inflicted and Accidental Wounds due to Negligence’ and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686, 30-0-0 (Volume 4), ‘Instructions for RMOs in Bramshott Area.’

<sup>465</sup> The authorities were able to punish and proscribe behaviour for living soldiers, but for those who took their own lives, there was little they could do save prevent it from happening to another. And because of the notion of equality in death, these soldiers were granted burials alongside their comrades (this was also the case of those executed for military crimes). Suicide was not condoned or encouraged by the army, even if their policies sometimes pushed desperate troops over the edge. Other troops had serious mental health problems prior to enlistment and transport to England, which

and were debilitated by shell shock; others sought to evade duty, legally or otherwise. Of the latter, troops removed themselves from duty with SIWs, feigned illness, or deserted.<sup>466</sup> Those who served until wounded and removed from the line could expect a brief respite from duty, but only until sufficiently recovered to carry on at the front. Some were wounded several times, but never seriously enough to keep them from going back to the front for further action. As long as the soldier was not physically incapacitated by wounds, disease, or illness, he was expected to return and remain at duty until killed, or the end of hostilities.<sup>467</sup> In one case, a clearly shell-shock soldier was apprehended for desertion, and after repeat offenses was sentenced to death by firing squad.<sup>468</sup> He survived the war, however, as his sentences apparently were commuted or postponed each time; in this case, even desertion and a death sentence could not prevent this soldier from being returned to the front line.

## Preventative Measures, Mitigating Factors, Warning Signs

Medical officers, commanders, chaplains, and other support personnel had an important role to play in the prevention and detection of war weariness. It was important to recognise the early signs of war weariness in the individual, *before* it transmuted into larger problems like shell shock. It was thus crucial to identify ‘warning signs’ and other indicators of breakdown.<sup>469</sup> To identify the signs of war weariness, it was important also to understand what eroded the health and morale of the soldiers, both in the short-term

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were only exacerbated by service on the Western Front. Still others were pushed beyond the breaking point, and felt that suicide was the best option for themselves and their unit. It was better to end it all and rid the unit of an increasingly useless soldier, than to desert or go AWL and bring disgrace to the battalion. Suicide is different than war weariness, but they both speak to the impact of combat on individuals, the role of medical problems (including psychiatric casualties) in the armed forces, and evasion of duty. On the 31st Battalion’s voyage to England one soldier committed suicide by jumping overboard the *Carpathia*. There were other references to suicide by jumping overboard ships in the archival record as well. One such document made reference to “an insane patient.” See Norris, *The Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, xiv and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-11 to 15-14-9, ‘Suicide, or Deaths from Causes other than the Result of War Conditions’ and Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 3-4 and 189.

<sup>466</sup> DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 88.

<sup>467</sup> Waters, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 175.

<sup>468</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 28.

<sup>469</sup> And also other signals that the soldier was not faring well at duty. The cumulative stress, attacks on morale and health, exhaustion, trauma and other aspects of service served to wear down the soldier’s powers of resistance, even amongst the strongest and most dedicated volunteers.

and over longer periods. The transitions from war weariness to shell shock, from short-term breakdown to more permanent debilitation, could not be prevented entirely, but with care and consideration could be minimised and the worst effects mitigated.

There were different views on how best to prevent psychiatric casualties, and both medical and military authorities had a role to play in this matter. An article published in 1918 by the *Canadian Medical Association* offered some ideas on how to prevent psychiatric casualties, and to extend the effectiveness of the soldier. The author suggested that discipline had a role to play in the prevention of these casualties, but “discipline alone was not sufficient to prevent their occurrence;” discipline was no panacea. It was also important to be forthright with the soldiers and explain to them the reality of combat and especially reactions to it, such as fear. It was the duty of officers and leaders to assure the troops that “fear was nothing to be ashamed of,”<sup>470</sup> and was only a natural response to terrifying situations. Fear and terror were in fact *healthy* reactions to this stimuli, and it had to be impressed on all ranks that it was normal “in the presence of danger, and came to all except the insane and the liar.” This frank and forthright attitude, and the acceptance that they could be afraid and still be good soldiers, was somewhat of a departure from traditional British understandings of duty, endurance, and ‘character.’ The reality of the war on the Western Front forced this reappraisal.

Leadership also played an important role in the prevention of serious war weariness, and the mitigation of its worst effects. Officers and leaders needed to play an active role in the maintenance of the health and well-being of their subordinates, to care for their welfare, and “take a personal interest in them.” This last point was essential, as close contact with the troops allowed leaders to determine what each soldier needed; some required a joke or humorous anecdote to relieve stress, some needed a quiet chat of reassurance, and still others required a stern hand and paternalistic oversight. Regular acquaintance and familiarity with the troops allowed authority figures to monitor the soldiers and watch for “the slightest change in a man’s demeanor or habits [which] should

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<sup>470</sup> It was important to impress upon the soldiers that as long as everyone was ‘doing his bit’ they would be fine. This bred confidence, and “confidence was essential” in war. Ames, *The Prevention of War Neurosis, Shell Shock*, 422-423.

be reported immediately.”<sup>471</sup> It was important to keep the soldier occupied, interested, and distracted to “divert his mind from introspection” and dwelling on the negative aspects of service. Ultimately, it was crucial to treat the soldiers as “if they were human beings like themselves, and not as merely cogs of the machine” of war.<sup>472</sup>

Humanising the soldiers was an important aspect of endurance at the front. This reminded them that they had had a life prior to enlistment, had family and friends who loved them, and were more than just a regimental number. This was just one reason why tangible connections to home were so vital to morale and health, even if close and regular contact with home might actually *increase* stress. If leave to Canada was nearly impossible,<sup>473</sup> packages and letters from home could regularly reach the troops at the front. Parcels were also often shared around the unit, building camaraderie and providing some break from the monotonous food of the trenches. Moreover, special care packages from charity and religious groups back in Canada (and the UK) also helped sustain the troops. For those recovering in hospital, these comforts helped with morale and might very well have assisted with recovery. In one case, convalescing soldiers received liquor, cooking ingredients (herbs, corn flower, chicken broth), fruit (apples and oranges), lemonade crystals, syrup, and other such foodstuffs.<sup>474</sup> And for soldiers in the line, good food, equipment, and supplies helped disease resistance and general welfare.<sup>475</sup>

Concern for the general health of the soldiers also helped mitigate the worst effects of war weariness and assist endurance at the front. As the historian of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian CCS argued, the medical services and bathing facilities did wonders for the soldiers’ health and well-being.<sup>476</sup> Bathing and de-lousing allowed the soldiers to get

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<sup>471</sup> Ibid.

<sup>472</sup> Ibid, 422.

<sup>473</sup> Generally, the only ones allowed to return to Canada were those invalided out of the forces, or those taking care of serious family matters, but this mostly applied to officers. Duncan MacDonald wrote on 23 October 1917 from a convalescent hospital that “I almost wish I was more sick, so I might get sick leave to Canada.” DUASC, Duncan Chisholm MacDonald Fonds, Collection No. MS – 2 – 520, Box 1, Folder 1 – 3, Letter of 23 October 1917.

<sup>474</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4564, Folder 2, File 5, ‘Medical Comforts.’

<sup>475</sup> Good and hot food helped stave off exposure and trench foot. Fresh veggies and fruit, such as oranges, especially in winter, also helped maintain health. Macpherson, *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume II*, 51, 45.

<sup>476</sup> Lice was also responsible for much sick wastage, as carriers of disease. See LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 6, ‘Sick Wastage from Lice;’ Atenstaedt, *Trench Diseases of World War One* and DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 257.



clean, to get new undergarments, and to have their clothes steamed to eliminate much of the itching caused by lice, at least for a short while. The lice would soon be back, of course, but these facilities reminded the men that they were human, and that the high command did care for their well-being. Regular bathing was not always possible, but it was something to look forward to. According to instructions issued to the CAMC, “at least one bath per week is requisite,”<sup>477</sup> but this was not always realistic, especially during periods of more mobile warfare such as the Hundred Days. Care of the feet also helped the soldiers remain at duty. The issuance of dry and clean socks,<sup>478</sup> appropriate clothing like solid footwear and gum boots, and supplies like whale oil and trench pumps, to the extent that they worked, were also important. Idleness was poison for morale, so soldiers took actions to improve their lot even if they were of questionable effectiveness. Soldiers needed their feet to march, stand, and fight properly, so the importance of foot care could not be overlooked.

Perhaps the most important factor in the prevention of serious health problems and in mitigating the worst effects of war weariness was regular rest<sup>479</sup> and rotation out of the line. Time out of the line gave soldiers an opportunity to catch up on correspondence and sleep.<sup>480</sup> Troops out of the line might still be expected to undergo training and contribute to labour parties, but it also meant increased safety if they were out of range of enemy guns, though gas and aircraft could still reach them. For combat infantry, pilots, and other high-stress services, rest and time away from combat allowed for the quieting of nerves and the rejuvenation of health. Removing the soldiers from the cause of their stress, allowing their natural response mechanisms to relax, and providing them with an “absorbing environment free from flying [and other combat] associations” provided both physical and emotional, mental, and psychological rest.<sup>481</sup>

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<sup>477</sup> Canada, *Army Medical Corps Instructions*, 170.

<sup>478</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 87.

<sup>479</sup> Rest was important for individual soldiers and the wider military unit. Prior to attacks, for example, it was crucial that the units participating were well-rested and prepared for the operation. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4107, Folder 24, File 19, ‘Operations, Report On, 11 Canadian Infantry Brigade.’

<sup>480</sup> Climo, *Lively Letters from World War One*, 244.

<sup>481</sup> Bishop, *Winged Warfare*, 176 and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3493, 11-2-7 / 11-2-8, Reports MO DGMS, ‘Reports Medical Aspect Air Service,’ 20 August 1917.

As the war dragged on, it became increasingly evident among perceptive officers that there needed to be a better system of rest and rotation. Even hard-working and committed volunteers could breakdown after the cumulative exposure to stress and trauma. One officer wrote that “ever since Canadian troops have gone to France...there has been no systematic rest for the troops.” This was problematic, as “many battalions have been six, eight and even nine months on continuous duty in the trenches, or in immediate support, with only a few days rest...no troops can efficiently perform such continuous service.”<sup>482</sup> This is important for two reasons. First of all, even when soldiers were in immediate support, they were still exposed to stress and danger, and would be called into action if the occasion arose. This meant little genuine respite from the strains of war. Secondly, the reference to ‘systematic rest’ is telling, as a clear system of leave, known by the troops and adhered to, likely helped stave off the worst effects of war weariness. It also gave the soldiers something to look forward to and likely bolstered their endurance, knowing that if they did their duty just a bit longer they were entitled to a well-deserved and officially-sanctioned rest.<sup>483</sup>

In addition to rest and sleep, leave and increasing the physical – and perhaps also psychological – distance between the soldier and the sources of stress played an important role in staving off the worst effects of sustained combat. Simply being rotated between front, support, and reserve positions was helpful. Going on leave also offered an opportunity to ‘get away from it all,’ to return to civilised life, and to do things one was unable to do in the trenches. Families in Britain could be visited, as could pubs, tourist sites, theatres, shows, brothels, and prostitutes. Eating a meal that was not bully beef and without shells falling was also a welcome relief. Many soldiers took the war and its trauma with them on leave, undoubtedly, but it did have therapeutic potential. And yet, in terms of minimising or neutralising the worst effects of war weariness, leave could be a double-edged sword. It allowed for the recuperation and rejuvenation of the individual,

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<sup>482</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4676, Folder 3, File 1, ‘Canadian Corps Historical Records.’

<sup>483</sup> One soldier wrote in late 1917 that he wanted to avoid getting killed so he could go on leave. Rogers, ed., *Gunner Ferguson’s Diary*, 127.

but the return trip could also induce panic and reluctance,<sup>484</sup> and contribute to the onset of psychiatric casualties that were increasingly common. Nevertheless, lack of leave and rest was a common complaint at the front,<sup>485</sup> and leave did help many soldiers survive the war and minimised the damage done by the twin dangers of war weariness and shell shock. Rest and rotation out of the line were important for the long-term sustainability of the troops, but leave was even more beneficial. One MO argued that even behind the lines “there was no such thing as one moment’s complete security,” and thus the importance of and “healing effect” of leave.<sup>486</sup> And even if soldiers were unable to get extended leave to escape France and Belgium, there were other ways to provide them with recreation and time away from the front. Convalescent soldiers in hospital, for example, were sometimes allowed to go on day trips and sightseeing excursions,<sup>487</sup> often planned by members of the Chaplain Services or other support personnel.<sup>488</sup> Day trips and outings gave the soldiers some fresh air, allowed them to see the sights, provided a welcome distraction, and gave them something to look forward to.

In addition to rest and leave, food, water, and alcohol helped stave off the worst effects of war weariness by contributing to the health, morale, and overall endurance of the troops. Without proper food and adequate (clean) water, soldiers were more prone to disease and decline; and the shortage of rations and delays in food deliveries to the trenches reinforced the idea that the soldiers were mere cogs in the war machine, and their officers cared nought for them. The lack of proper supplies and sustenance also contributed to the grouching and grumbling of soldiers, and, combined with other grievances, could boil over into collective indiscipline. Blame was often placed on the officers in ‘bomb-proof’ jobs. For unit COs, this was unfair in some ways, as many cared deeply for their subordinates and approached their task with a paternalistic attitude; and

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<sup>484</sup> See Hesler, ed., *Interlude: 1916-1919*, 43 and Walsh, *The First World War Diary of Private Bert Cooke*, 147.

<sup>485</sup> One soldier wrote, for example, that he had gone without leave for roughly 20 months. Lamin, *Letters from the Trenches*, 158. 2<sup>nd</sup> Division documents for August 1918 also indicated that there were 4,100 men in France who had been over 18 months without leave. See LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4088, Folder 17, File 1 ‘Leave: 26-9-17 to 30-8-18,’ and Chase, “Unwilling to Continue, Ordered to Advance.”

<sup>486</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 76.

<sup>487</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3519, 2<sup>nd</sup> Folder, 21-1-0/CH1 to 21-1-0/CH4, ‘Accounts, Canadian Convalescent Hospital, Bromley.’

<sup>488</sup> Including the YMCA and other religious or charitable organisations.

there was not much that could be done about traffic congestion, pilfering along the lines of communication, and shortages. Some officers and COs also turned a blind eye to small-scale theft, ‘scrounging,’ and looting of the soldiers to supplement meagre and monotonous army rations.

Food provided the soldiers with calories, crucial for mental and physical activity. The soldiers were expected to make do on the rations provided by the authorities, but there were opportunities to get different and extra food as well. Packages from home, bartering with and purchasing from locals, dining at estaminets, and taking advantage of surplus or looted food also helped. Army rations included bully beef, biscuits, tea, jams and preserves, and the increasingly rare fresh meat, bread, or produce which helped sustain the soldiers, but had many detractors. The love/hate relationship that the soldiers had with bully beef, for example, is emphasised in a poem of the same name.<sup>489</sup> But despite these problems, Canadian soldiers were fed sufficiently throughout the war. And for soldiers recovering in hospitals or convalescent centres, it was even more important to provide them with healthy, ideally fresh, hearty foods. This aided in the recovery process, but also helped with morale. Major C.H. Reason of No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital noted that “patients at the front are men who have been living hard and at times on food which has lost much of its vitamine [sic] constituents,” and thus it was even more important for hospitals to compensate for that in recovering troops. Fresh fruit (apples, oranges, grapes) or lime juice, jams, fish, vegetables, bread, milk, and eggs were recommended, whereas “tinned food should be avoided”.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>489</sup> This poem included the following stanzas: Madly tore the tough old lid off,/ With your bayonet’s rusty blade,/ Gulpd it down in great big chunks,/ And cared not how it’s made. / It ironed out all the wrinkles,/ And for the likes of you and me,/ ‘Twas *Bully Beef* who licked the Kaiser,/ And he earned a D.S.C. Taken from Waters, *A Corner of a Foreign Field*, 136.

<sup>490</sup> Soldiers, of course, required sufficient food and water to carry out their duty. One army booklet acknowledged that the attack and consolidation phase of operations “entails great physical exertion,” and therefore an “ample supply of food and water is required, if physical energy is to be maintained.” The lack of food or water could hurt the ability of individuals and units to seize or keep their battlefield objectives. They also helped soldiers maintain focus, and helped prevent (further) exhaustion. See LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4546, Folder 7, File 5, ‘Training of Divisions for Offensive Action;’ LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 941, E-81-3, ‘Salvage Corps’ and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4553, Folder 5, File 8, ‘Water Supply, Reports On, 2-8-16 to 20-11-18.’ LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4562, Folder 3, File 2, ‘Daily Orders No. 123, by Major C.H. Reason, CAMC, O.C. No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital, 3-5-17’ and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602, 24-3-1 (Volume 1), ‘CAMC Journal.’

Alcohol, including the official rum ration, was also welcomed by many troops for its healing properties and its role in sustaining them. Alcohol such as spirits helped with the morale of the soldiers, contributed to their health, and assisted with sleeping.<sup>491</sup> It is important to note that not all soldiers consumed alcohol; there were numerous teetotalers. For the rest of the troops, alcohol was welcome in helping take the edge off, providing ‘liquid courage,’ and to help with the cold and damp. Private Southworth who went overseas with the 139<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote that at Vimy the soldiers were preparing to attack. At 4:30 am “one of the officers came along the trench with the rum and I took a dandy and by 5:30 I was all nerve” and ready to fight.<sup>492</sup> Many soldiers commented on the ability of alcohol to calm nerves; it played an important psychological role in the ability, and perhaps also willingness, of soldiers to continue with duty at the front. Artilleryman Ernest Black also referred to scotch as “that perfect medicine,” and claimed it cured him of influenza.<sup>493</sup>

And yet all the alcohol and food could not prevent some soldiers from breaking down and becoming susceptible to war weariness. It was thus crucial that officers and COs were acquainted with their men and practiced good leadership. Close contact and mutual trust were important, as was communication up and down the army hierarchy. The authorities needed to be familiar with the contributing factors toward and symptoms of psychiatric casualties, and be watchful for indicators that soldiers were not faring well. Exposure to intense stimuli, as well as the cumulative experience of the stresses of war, drove many troops to the very edge of breakdown; it was the duty of medical and military authorities to minimise the numbers that were pushed beyond the edge. It was important for commanders to identify the individual limits of ‘courage,’ and remove those soldiers from combat before reserves ran dry. Exhaustion and the lack of genuine respite also contributed to this draining of courage. To use Lord Moran’s analogy, every day the

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<sup>491</sup> One battalion MO provided wet, cold, and hungry troops with ‘hot toddies’ to make them more comfortable and help them sleep. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, 2-4-1, Major G.S. Strathy, ‘War Diary,’ August 1914 – February 1918.

<sup>492</sup> Climo, *Lively Letters from World War One*, 248, Letter of Pte. Southworth, from London, 18 April 1917 and Sherriff, *Journey’s End*, 54-56.

<sup>493</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 127-128.

soldiers withdrew more and more from their accounts until “the credit in his bank of courage had run out” and breakdown was imminent.<sup>494</sup>

It was thus essential that soldiers on the edge of breakdown were removed not only from frontline service, but from the battle area itself. This was done to prevent the transition from war weariness into shell shock, as “prolonged exposure to fear [and other aspects of service] leads to stress, which accumulates and causes the breakdown of a person’s normal performance.”<sup>495</sup> More specifically, there were certain indicators of impending breakdown that COs could look for in subordinates. For example, troops who had in the past withstood artillery bombardments and other stressful situations but had begun to be rattled and visibly shaken by these things might indicate they were being pushed beyond the limits of endurance. Moreover, heavy drinking, recklessness, loss of concentration, caution, and disproportionate fear over personal safety could also be considered warning signs, especially if such things diverged from past behaviour. Physically, there were also indicators of impending breakdown; trembling, irritability, nightmares or insomnia, ticks and twitches all could indicate a physical response to psychological and mental stress or trauma.<sup>496</sup> The need to intervene on behalf of the individual soldier *before* permanent debilitation ensured an important role for MOs, commanders, chaplains, and other authorities. Good leadership practices, close contact, trust, and familiarity with all ranks helped, as did a measure of sympathy and understanding toward those who were “mentally affected owing to the hardships of war.” It was important to identify and take action on those who had lost their “mental vigour and strength,” or who were not in their “right mind”<sup>497</sup> because of the strains of war, both acute and cumulative. Some authorities acknowledged the conditions of the war and its “physical and moral exactions” which placed an enormous burden on the soldiers. It was

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<sup>494</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, xii-xiii, xvi. Moran defined courage as “an individual’s exercise of mind over fear through self-discipline.”

<sup>495</sup> *Ibid.*, xiv-xv.

<sup>496</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-37. For pilots and other members of the flying services, these warning signs also included flying higher (to avoid contact with the enemy), lack of offensive spirit, too little or too much dash, loss of concentration, too much concern over own safety, and staying in flight rather than finishing off a foe.

<sup>497</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4649, Chaplain Service, A.D.C.S., Lines of Communication, France 1, File 2, ‘Letter to D.C.S., OMFC,’ 7 June 1918.

thus “absolutely necessary that the tension of trench life and army vigilance be relaxed on every suitable occasion”<sup>498</sup> with proper rest and respite, so as to prevent war weariness and breakdown.

## Morale, Combat Motivation and Effectiveness, Endurance, War Weariness

The medical aspects of service and the health and well-being of the soldiers, both physical and otherwise, had a profound influence on morale, combat motivation and effectiveness, endurance, and ultimately, war weariness. The links between morale and medicine were complex, and could be reinforcing. For example, a good military medical system, with effective preventative measures, concern over sanitation, treatment, evacuation, and care could reinforce and bolster morale. Prior to soldiers going into combat it was reassuring that if they were hit, they would be treated by a competent and caring medical staff. On the other hand, the ignorant, harsh, or unsympathetic attitude of more traditionally-minded MOs could undermine morale, as even loyal volunteers worried what would happen to them if they could no longer withstand shellfire or service, or if they suffered a medical problem beyond their control.<sup>499</sup> Service conditions conspired against the soldiers and their ability to endure indefinitely. Nearly-constant exposure to stress, fear, and trauma compromised both mind and body, weakened purpose, and sapped the will.<sup>500</sup> There were many occasions, moreover, where the military requirements took priority over medical ones. An officer of the Canadian Special Hospital at Witley wrote that “men were urgently wanted for the front,” and there was pressure on the medical services to ‘heal’ the troops and return them to their units as soon as possible. Furthermore, during periods of panic and military emergencies at the front,

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<sup>498</sup> Ibid, Biographies 1, ‘The Canadian Chaplaincy.’

<sup>499</sup> Graves argued that trench foot abounded in units which “had lost the power of sticking things out,” and only affected those who allowed it to. Moreover, trench foot was often interpreted as “almost entirely a matter of morale.” Battalions with good soldiers and good regimental spirit saw it as shameful to go sick, and poor units had many more cases of trench foot. Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 153.

<sup>500</sup> Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 88.

such as the German Spring Offensives (beginning March 1918), this pressure took on a more urgent tone. An officer at Witley argued that:

it was a time of stress at the front, and the number of days a patient spent in hospital was that number of days' delay in training and taking his place in the firing line. For this reason hospital days were carefully watched, and all attempts made not to lose time...it had been felt that patients were wasting a great deal of time while in hospital. The average stay in hospital of a patient at this time was about five weeks. Many patients, of course stayed longer...they tended to lose physical condition and morale.<sup>501</sup>

Sending troops back to the front prematurely encouraged relapse and further health problems, but also assaulted morale. An excessive emphasis on training and military discipline in hospitals and convalescent centres could also retard the healing process. And finally, as morale was often whipped up to a fever pitch prior to attacks and operations, there was often a negative letdown following these engagements. As one infantry subaltern argued, the "morale of the infantry was bought at a great price." These soldiers had been "keyed up to endeavour far beyond their normal powers, marching and fighting over great tracts of country throughout the last year, they suffered the *inevitable reaction* when their task was done and they might rest."<sup>502</sup>

There were also important links between the health and medical well-being of the soldiers and their combat motivation and effectiveness. A soldier who was shot through the legs and was unable to stand was clearly no longer effective as a soldier. There were more ambiguous cases, however, where the men had their soldiering abilities compromised, but were nevertheless kept in the line. This might include less serious medical problems, but also war weariness. Those removed from the line for shell shock and other war neuroses were a detriment to their unit, or who had sympathetic MOs or commanders. For the rest of these cases, however, they were expected to carry on until relieved in the line, killed, or (physically) wounded.

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<sup>501</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4717, Folder 110, File 22, Historical Records, 3-10-17 to 9-3-18, 'Canadian Special Hospital, Witley.' This report, however, later suggested that training in the hospital actually increased morale.

<sup>502</sup> The italics are mine, used to add emphasis on the inevitability of breakdowns following the nature, pace, and intensity of the fighting in the final year of the war. Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*, 16.



The realities of combat and life on the Western Front undermined the health and well-being of the soldiers on a daily basis. Life in the trenches could be dirty, claustrophobic, and terrifying, but also afforded some measure of protection and predictability. During the more open warfare of the final months of the war, on the other hand, the sense of confinement might have been less, but there were other dangers to contend with. Casualties related to VD or trench foot were directly and indirectly related to life at the front; during the wet and cold winter months, for example, the “number of men having to recover high and dry, out of the trenches, begins to grow.”<sup>503</sup> Other realities of combat also compromised the health of the soldiers. Overburdening the troops with too much equipment, for example, could undermine the ability of soldiers to seize battlefield objectives. Clothing and equipment were important parts of the soldier’s kit, but if it was too heavy it disturbed the “equilibrium between equipment and mobility,” a key factor in military success. Poor or damaged clothing could undermine fighting efficiency, and going into battle exhausted could mean defeat by an enemy with inferior “fighting qualities and equipment.”<sup>504</sup> Medical authorities recommended that the load carried should “seldom exceed” 55 pounds, and that a load above 66 pounds was “oppressive.” And yet according to the Infantry Field Service Manual, the soldiers were already required to carry approximately 59 pounds, and other equipment “generally carried by the soldier” included their steel helmet (over two pounds), SBR (over three pounds), and ground sheet (over two pounds). In winter they needed to carry even more.<sup>505</sup>

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<sup>503</sup> Moreover, “ill-fitting or tight shoes, with uncleanness of the feet, combine to disable the marching soldier.” Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 165 and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686, 30-0-0 (Volume 4), ‘Instructions for RMOs in Bramshott Area.’

<sup>504</sup> Carrying 70-80 pounds of clothing and equipment was “entirely too heavy for a long march.” In these marches, troops were falling out, to the wayside, and presumably “slept wherever they dropped.” This exhaustion affected all branches of service. For example, “the exhaustion of the crews of the tanks is very great after a heavy day’s fighting and if they are called upon again the next day, disappointment to the infantry may result.” See Macpherson et al., *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume I*, 302-304; Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 77 and LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3859, Folder 85, File 7, ‘Notes and Some Lessons Learned from the Experience gained during the Operations, August 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, on the Somme.’

<sup>505</sup> In winter and during cold weather, the soldiers would also need to have on their person or in close proximity a coat, extra clothing, gloves, a second iron ration, etc. Too much weight was detrimental to the “health and efficiency of the soldier.” This weight additions increased the “expenditure of energy,” unevenly distributed weight, and anything over 66 pounds entailed a “disproportionate expenditure of energy.” Muddy clothes and equipment only increased the weight. Excessive weight caused health problems, but also “lowers resistance and predisposes to disease of all kinds,”

Exhaustion, fatigue, the lack of respite, and the cumulative effect of the strains of war served to reduce the effectiveness of the troops. This was especially problematic in attacks, when all available strength was required to overcome enemy resistance. After Arthur Currie visited the French sector at Verdun, he argued that attacks would be more successful if they were made by “absolutely fresh troops who had been specially trained for the work in hand.”<sup>506</sup> Rest included both sufficient sleep, but also a lack of strenuous physical activity prior to going ‘over the top.’ Exhaustion in battle could mean the difference between success and failure, victory and defeat. To this end, it was crucial that troops went into the attack as light as possible, and did not bring any superfluous equipment. As the emphasis on firepower increased over time, there was unfortunately “a growing tendency to overload N.C.O’s and men in the attack,” but there were ways to lighten the load on infantry. It was possible, for instance, for troops to take less small arms ammunition with them than previously instructed, because ammunition could be taken from casualties; moreover, attacking troops should not be burdened with too many entrenching tools, as these could be left largely to the follow-up waves and consolidation troops.<sup>507</sup>

Exhaustion and other medical problems compromised the soldiers’ ability to carry out orders and attain battlefield objectives in other ways as well. For war-weary soldiers who had not yet become debilitated, and those wounded or ill but not removed from the line,<sup>508</sup> there were a host of problems to contend with. Some soldiers suffering from exhaustion, for instance, were described as having “marked impairment of judgment,”

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and “the evil effects are aggravated when men already fatigued both physically and mentally after duty in the trenches are called upon to carry an excessive load for many miles frequently under adverse conditions as regards both road and weather.” LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3894, Folder 59, File 25, ‘6272/1 (Q.A.1), First Army, by Lt-Gen. R.C. Maxwell, Quartermaster General, 27-2-17’ and ‘Memorandum on the Weight Carried in Relation to the Health of the Soldier,’ 27 January 1917.

<sup>506</sup> Currie was the CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division at the time. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3871, Folder 115, File 8, ‘Notes on French Attacks, Northeast of Verdun in October and December 1916.’

<sup>507</sup> It was important to lighten the load because they were already burdened with much equipment and weaponry. In May of 1917 the average weight carried by a non-specialist was 68 lbs; for a bomber and rifle grenadier, 78lbs; and for Lewis gunners 92lbs. Ibid, File 9, ‘First Army No. 1215 (G)’ and ‘Canadian Corps G.761 109/23, 23 May 1917.’

<sup>508</sup> The archival record contains a telling comment on a wounded soldier and his decreased abilities. This soldier “was wounded, and it is not possible for him to do very heavy work,” suggesting he was not yet fit to resume normal infantry work or trench duties. It is likely his physical abilities, including stamina, concentration, dexterity, and strength, were compromised. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 390, B-23-1, ‘Requests for Billeting.’

which could imperil the rest of the unit.<sup>509</sup> Hallucinations or falling asleep while on sentry duty could also put comrades in danger, and falling asleep at one's post was a courts martial offense. And yet, this behaviour was understandable considering the troops were "unavoidably exposed to conditions of extreme hardship, exposure and irregular diet" which negatively affected their health and effectiveness.<sup>510</sup> This was the reality faced by all soldiers on the Western Front, but not all commanders acknowledged this reality or were able to address these problems. The Corps commander Arthur Currie in October 1917, in preparation for the battles of Third Ypres, decided that "getting the troops up to the line, with the minimum [of] fatigue" was indispensable. Moreover, "it was essential that the troops detailed for the attack should be fresh," and not fatigued.<sup>511</sup> Talk was cheap, but changes to army policy were not always easy to implement, especially for a corps commander answerable to British superiors and political leaders in Ottawa. Worn out individuals and units coupled with heavy casualties could negatively affect the military situation by forcing them out of the line, or by being unable to participate in subsequent operations. This placed more of the burden on other troops still in the line.<sup>512</sup> A cycle of exhaustion and over-reliance on worn units resulted.

War weariness also undermined the endurance of soldiers, and hurt their ability to carry on at the front. Proper care contributed to health and overall well-being, strengthened resistance to illness, and helped sustain morale during difficult times. Rest prior to and following operations, sufficient sleep and food, hygiene, sanitation, and regular bathing, the quantity and quality of water, alcohol and estaminets, and proper medical care all contributed to endurance.<sup>513</sup> Lack of water could be detrimental to the troops and their ability to carry on. Poor and insufficient food in the trenches was

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<sup>509</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3493, 11-2-7 / 11-2-8, Reports MO DGMS, 'Reports Medical Aspect Air Service,' 20 August 1917.

<sup>510</sup> For hallucinations and falling asleep while on duty, see Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 146. For the quote on 'extreme hardship,' see Macpherson et al., *Medical Services – Hygiene of the War Volume I*, 2.

<sup>511</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3852, Folder 67, File 1, 'Notes on the Conference Held by the Canadian Corps Commander at 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division Headquarters Hazebrouck, October 14<sup>th</sup>, 1917.'

<sup>512</sup> After the heavy fighting at Third Ypres, some units moved to 'rest areas,' whereas others were relieved in the line but still needed near the front. In another situation, "General Odlum's forces had become so weakened that they could only be asked to play a secondary part in any future progress." See LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4689, Folder 43, File 17, '8<sup>th</sup> Brigade, October 1917' and Folder 45, File 1, '11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Historical Records.'

<sup>513</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4530, Folder 12, 'April 28<sup>th</sup> 1916 – O's C Field Ambulances and M.O's i/c Units.'

observed, as was the monotony of it outside the line. One soldier complained about the water situation, noting that “we never had water to drink,” or it was often tainted with gas, and they could also not drink the water collected in shell holes because it “was all full of blood and piss and shit.” Water, he concluded, “was a terrible thing” in the line.<sup>514</sup> And if the lack of sufficient food and water undermined performance and endurance, rum acted partly as an antidote to these troubles. One sergeant remarked regarding rum that “I often felt that that was one thing that kept them going,” despite all the problems on active service. In one example, a cold, tired, and wet soldier was given a double shot of rum and quickly went to sleep, even dozing through the firing of a fifteen inch howitzer in close proximity.<sup>515</sup> This speaks to the utter exhaustion plaguing the troops, but also the little fortifying forces that helped with endurance and perseverance.

The reality of combat and general service on the Western Front did not always allow the soldiers to be granted what they needed to carry on. At times, it was impractical to remove individuals and especially entire units from the line, even if they deserved a rest. Pushing both individuals to, and then at times beyond, the breaking point obviously did not bode well for effective long-term service. But military necessity took precedence over the health and well-being of the soldiers. One officer complained in October 1918 that “right in the midst of your big achievements, at a time when I thought you were all needing and entitled to a rest...you have had to go at it harder than ever around Cambrai.” This chaplain wrote, moreover, about the tenacity and endurance of the troops, thanking them and writing that “God bless you all for the way you stick at it and carry through...[during] the seriousness of the Spring situation” at the front.<sup>516</sup> This short-term thinking ensured that military requirements were at least partly addressed, but also undermined the endurance of both individuals and entire units, encouraging more permanent breakdown. And even for troops taking part in rest and regular rotation, simply

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<sup>514</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 152.

<sup>515</sup> Ibid, 153. See also Sassoon’s poem ‘Does it Matter?’ regarding the use of rum to help soldiers “forget and be glad.” Foreman, ed., *Poetry of the First World War*, 76.

<sup>516</sup> He was referring to the German Spring Offensives. He wrote also that these efforts and victories in 1918 had a “wonderful effect upon the civil and military morale” at the time. LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4674, Chaplain Service, N.F. Davidson, Letter from Toronto, dated 9 October 1918.

enduring duty was taxing. There were “physical and moral exactions,” the “tension of trench life” and service more generally, and it was often difficult for soldiers to endure and stay at their posts while “under constant shell fire.”<sup>517</sup> This was enough to drive anyone mad over time, not to mention contributing to the development of war weariness. Long-term service at the front wore down even the strongest and most committed troops. And this was also the case for members of all branches of the armed forces. For non-combatants it was particularly taxing, as service at the front “has been found to be extremely exhausting, even demanding the recall in some instances of men who were physically incapacitated by the strain and burden of it” all.<sup>518</sup> The health and medical reality of the troops on the Western Front had a direct bearing on the endurance of the soldiers, for both good and ill.

Though it is difficult to find direct references to the phenomenon of war weariness in the archival record, there are mentions of the physical exhaustion that contributed to it and the attendant problems related to the phenomenon. Private Robert Cushman wrote that he was “fed up with the Army” and continued service at the front, employing a common euphemism for war weariness. Moreover, he wrote that the military authorities could “put me down as a malingerer or send me to a ‘Nut house,’”<sup>519</sup> admitting that his behaviour bordered on criminal or irrational, but that he was unable or unwilling to continue service at the front, despite the consequences. Cushman had agency in this situation, and attempted to take fate into his own hands, even if it meant court martial or institutionalisation. Other soldiers, however, were not able to evade duty or escape further service.<sup>520</sup> Even when units were rotated out of the line, they were expected to continue with labour and training, despite the pleas of COs who knew their men needed genuine rest and respite.<sup>521</sup> This lack of rest and respite increased the vulnerability of both units

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<sup>517</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4649, A.D.C.S., Biographies 1, ‘The Canadian Chaplaincy.’

<sup>518</sup> This referred to a chaplain at the front. LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4669, Bramshott 1, ‘Miscellaneous Letters, 1915-1917.’

<sup>519</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, Folder 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘Medical Case Sheet.’

<sup>520</sup> And for Canadian soldiers seeking an escape from service in the form of desertion, they had few options. Travelling unnoticed to Britain and thence to Canada without being noticed or apprehended was remote.

<sup>521</sup> One CO wrote that his soldiers should have at least two or three days’ actual rest “before training was commenced” in earnest. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, File 3, ‘Canadian Corps G. 439 – Adv. First Army.’

and individuals to war weariness over long periods of time. Army authorities acknowledged the “weariness of war” and made references to “tired and worn out men,” suggesting two distinct phenomena: physical exhaustion (‘tired’) and war weariness (‘worn out’), or psychological exhaustion.<sup>522</sup>

Even with proper care, preventative measures, and effective treatment, the reality of combat on the Western Front, coupled with general service conditions, wore down even the best volunteers and experienced soldiers. The heavy casualties, the acute exposure to trauma, and the long-term and cumulative impact of the stresses of war contributed to the onset of both individual and collective war weariness. And though war weariness and shell shock debilitation were different phenomena, they exist on a spectrum. War-weary troops were often *reluctant* and well on their way toward serious and more-permanent shell shock which rendered them useless as soldiers, whereas shell-shocked soldiers could desire to carry on with service (be *willing*), but not physically or psychologically *capable* of continuing. The medical structures and aspects of service had a direct bearing on war weariness, and shaped how soldiers saw the war and their plight in particular. The medical and legal systems could contribute to these problems, and both these systems also had to deal with these issues once they developed. There were times, moreover, when the legal and medical realities of service actually exacerbated the problems of the soldiers, rather than helping alleviate them. For psychiatric problems like war weariness, an analogy could be made to physical ailments. If a soldier strained a muscle, for instance, it was likely understood by the medical and military authorities as a waste of resources to address this problem while it was relatively minor and did not prevent the soldier from carrying on with duty. If this strain led to a muscle tear or torn ligaments and the inability of the individual to carry a rifle or march, however, then it would be prudent for the army to address this problem as soon as possible. A soldier behind the lines in hospital was a soldier who could not directly contribute to winning the war. And just as war weariness did not necessarily preclude a soldier from pressing on, if

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<sup>522</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4663, Publicity, ‘Chaplains Serve up in the Front Line,’ newspaper article and Ibid, Volume 4675, Extracts from Chaplains’ Reports, ‘Work of Chaplains in France, R.C.’

a soldier reached the point of breakdown, then this would have to be addressed by the army authorities.<sup>523</sup> War-weary soldiers, though unhappy and discontented, could still continue at the front, whereas seriously shell-shocked soldiers were all but useless militarily. This was the situation that regular Canadian troops found themselves in during service on the Western Front, at Vimy Ridge and during Hundred Days campaign of the final months of the war.

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<sup>523</sup> The author would like to thank Dr. Vance for this idea and analogy, which captures the distinction between the inability and unwillingness to continue, and how the authorities chose to address existing problems with limited resources.

## Chapter 3 - War Weariness in the Canadian Corps, April-August 1917

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The introduction and the previous two chapters provide the foundation for our analysis of war weariness amongst Canadian troops during two distinct time periods: April-August 1917, and July 1918 to the signing of the Armistice in November 1918. During the April to August 1917 time period, the most important combat operation was the preparations, attack, and consolidation operations of the Battle of Arras, and in particular Vimy Ridge. The fighting around Vimy is a good place to start our analysis, and provides a useful opportunity to investigate the effects of combat on both the individual, and the collective (the military unit).

The Battle of Vimy Ridge and other operations around Arras is a starting point for our analysis of war weariness for a few reasons. First of all, the Vimy operations constituted the first large-scale set-piece battle of the war for the Canadian Corps, whereby all four Canadian divisions fought together in such close proximity with the same overall objectives. Second, the fact that the Corps was still under the command of a British General, Julian Byng,<sup>524</sup> reflects the reality of fighting on the Western Front for a multinational force that was the BEF.<sup>525</sup> The Canadians, though having seen action earlier in the war, were still undergoing the development of attack doctrines and absorbing lessons distilled from previous operations. In this sense, they were firmly in the middle of their 'learning curve' development, a process that would continue until the end of the war.

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<sup>524</sup> Born 1862 as Julian Hedworth George Byng. A soldier, he earned his commission in 1883, and served in the Sudan and South Africa. During the war he led the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Division at First Ypres, a Cavalry Corps by March 1916, the IX Army Corps in Gallipoli, the Canadians by March 1916 and at Vimy, and then the III British Army at Cambrai until the end of the war. Became 1<sup>st</sup> Viscount Byng of Vimy and Governor-General of Canada, 1921-1926. Died 1935. Magnus Magnusson, ed., *Chambers Biographical Dictionary* (Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd., 1990), 240 and Holger H. Herwig and Neil M. Heyman, *Biographical Dictionary of World War I* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 103.

<sup>525</sup> Vimy illustrates the problems of and advantages related to coalition warfare, and especially that the Canadians were but one aspect of a large multinational force that was the British Army in the war. Despite the increasing 'Canadianization' of the CEF, and Ottawa's increasing insistence on administrative control over its forces, the Corps was always reliant upon British staff work, artillery, the RFC, and later RAF, and other British arms, services, and support. This was evident at Vimy, and in nearly all Canadian operations.



Vimy is also a useful starting point for our discussion of war weariness in the Corps because, despite the battle being short,<sup>526</sup> especially compared with the drawn-out attritional struggles at the Somme and Verdun in 1916, it was an intense combat operation nonetheless. The Battle of Vimy Ridge and First Scarpe lasted from 9 to 14 April 1917, but also involved months of extensive preparations and follow-up, mopping-up, and consolidation operations afterwards. In addition to the intensity of these operations, for many soldiers at Vimy this constituted the first major sustained action, with attacks and counterattacks, death and disfigurement, and close quarters action. Many of the participating troops had been in trench warfare and participated in small-scale raids and patrols, but the Battle of Vimy Ridge was different. And finally, this period is fruitful for an examination of war weariness because by 1917 most other armies were showing significant signs of ‘wear and tear,’ and beginning to breakdown both collectively and individually. And indeed, some would in fact break in this period, both on the Western Front and beyond. This period is thus useful for an examination of war weariness as it allows a discussion of the Canadian Corps within the wider context of the war and how it affected the other major combatant armies. Why the Canadians were able to carry on without mutiny, widespread indiscipline, or a serious reduction in military effectiveness will be examined below.

The operations at Vimy allow the historian to identify some of the more important forces that contributed to, and helped mitigate, the worst effects of individual and collective war weariness. Factors that contributed to its onset and negative manifestations included heavy casualties,<sup>527</sup> a sense of disappointment or incomplete victory, and the wider military context in which these operations took place. Although the soldiers would not be familiar with all the developments outside their immediate area of operations, they

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<sup>526</sup> The Report of the Battles Nomenclature Committee of 1921 listed Vimy Ridge and First Scarpe as lasting between 9 and 14 April, both under the Battle of Arras 1917. There were also other operations associated with this battle, including Second Scarpe, 23-24 April; Attack on la Coulotte, 23 April; Arleux operations, 28-29 April; and Third Scarpe or the Capture of Fresnoy, 3-4 May 1917. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 555.

<sup>527</sup> April of 1917 was the third worst month of the entire war for the Corps in terms of overall casualties (the two worst were August and September 1918). These enormous casualties, and the inability of these operations to create a lasting strategic breakthrough, was likely a contributing factor to the onset of war weariness and a major source of discontent after the initial enthusiasm of this limited success wore off.

did receive information through newspapers, official announcements, and rumours.<sup>528</sup> And if the soldiers were unable to appreciate the ‘bigger picture’ at the time, hindsight and subsequent historical analyses allows a deeper contextual understanding of the period.<sup>529</sup> At Vimy, the Corps had fought effectively and achieved its objectives, despite heavy casualties and relative inexperience. Furthermore, the successes at Vimy illustrated, quite dramatically, that the power of the defensive could be overcome with existing and developing weapons systems and doctrines. There were also aspects of the operations that served to bolster morale and mitigate the worst effects of war weariness. The sense of limited victory and local success, coupled with an increasing sense of Canadian uniqueness or superiority, likely kept the growing war weariness at a simmer in the Canadian forces.

## Lessons and Implications of Home Front and War Weariness beyond the CEF

An important lesson to be learned from these experiences of war weariness was the crucial link between the home front and the battle front. And as it was for the other combatant nations, so it was for Germany. With millions of men under arms and the near-complete mobilisation of the economy and entire society to serve the war effort, problems emerging in one theatre could directly impact another. Firsthand accounts<sup>530</sup> and

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<sup>528</sup> See, for example, Hesler, ed., *Interlude: 1916-1919*, 36.

<sup>529</sup> The spring and summer of 1917 witnessed the failure of the French Chemin des Dames offensive, and the subsequent mutinies in the French Army reinforced the sense of Allied despondency in this period. Moreover, hindsight allows us to appreciate that the success at Vimy was of a limited nature and the outright failure of other operations at Arras ensured that the ‘victory’ was pyrrhic and fleeting at best, and a bloody waste at worst. As the British Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS) Sir William Robertson noted, with the British spring attacks of 1917 “we gained a great victory at Vimy,” but elsewhere the campaign was a disappointment. Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field-Marshal* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1921), 308. And the authors of the history of the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR) stated that the careful preparation of the Corps “had paid its usual dividends,” and that the victory at Vimy “shone the more brightly amid the general gloom of the Western Front.” Ken Bell and C.P. Stacey, *100 Years: The Royal Canadian Regiment 1883-1983* (Don Mills: Collier Macmillan Canada Ltd., 1983), 64. The failure of the attack elsewhere was due to the inability to bring up sufficient guns, or the proper time to establish communications and register targets, lack of tanks, poor weather, and a lack of carefully-prepared plans for subsequent days. Hart, *The Great War*, 337.

<sup>530</sup> Though there are some issues with her account, the views of Princess Evelyn Blücher are illuminating. She noted the anxiety over food supplies, the distribution of anti-government leaflets, increasing demoralisation, and the links between the two fronts, as men on leave informed regular Germans of the truth about the military situation. Evelyn Princess Blücher, *An English Wife in Berlin: A Private Memoir of Events, Politics, and Daily Life in Germany throughout the War and the Social Revolution of 1918* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Company, 1920).

subsequent literature<sup>531</sup> point to the increasing and detrimental connections between the home and battle fronts, as war weariness and the undermining of commitment to the war itself on the home front served to encourage this development on the battle front, and vice versa. This dynamic appeared to be mutually reinforcing and got worse over time in relation to the overall war situation, and the breakdown in control over soldiers and information. This war weariness was coupled with the decline of morale and discipline at the front, and the increase of strikes and eventually anti-government and anti-war protests (revolutionary rhetoric) at home. Allied military authorities also noted the onset of German war weariness on the battle front, identifying the increase in unwounded POWs, the breakdown of officer control over subordinates, and evidence of individual agency/protest to legitimate military authority. The disappointment with the failure of the German Spring Offensives, equipment and supply shortages, the loss of faith in ultimate victory and increasing political aspects<sup>532</sup> of protest were other indications of an increasing – and increasingly harmful – and widespread war weariness. War weariness afflicted all the major combatants and national armies on the Western Front, certainly by 1918 if not earlier.<sup>533</sup>

The problems affecting other armies largely goes beyond the scope of this project, but a brief analysis of war weariness in other formations helps illuminate the problems facing Canadians. For the French Army, military action in the field affected morale and

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<sup>531</sup> German disintegration in 1918 included the decline of motivation, the onset of war weariness, disillusionment, and exhaustion which seriously compromised fighting effectiveness. Watson, *Enduring the Great War*.

<sup>532</sup> Political aspects of protest included calls for a new government making peace at all costs, or even the overthrow of the German Imperial government altogether. The inspiration, literature, and symbols of the Bolshevik Revolution in Russia also came to play an increased role in uprisings as time went on.

<sup>533</sup> In the Russian Army there was an enormous gap between officers and ORs, and the harsh conditions facing the regular infantryman eroded confidence in the officer corps. These issues were also compounded by other deep-rooted problems in the army, and wider society. The Belgian army and its soldiers experienced the negative long-term effects of war and occupation, and the Italian and Austro-Hungarian armies also exhibited growing signs of war weariness by the 1918. And though the American forces were likely not experiencing *collective* war weariness on the same scale as its counterparts by 1918, there were indications of *individual* and small-scale war weariness due to sustained combat and the lack of proper coping mechanisms discovered by the other long-serving combatants. As the US case demonstrates, all major armies experienced some level of collective and widespread war weariness provided they had fielded military units for a sustained period of time. Historian Philpott argued that despite perceptions of relative strength “the reality was that all armies were on their last legs come 1918, with the exception of the slowly growing and green American army.” See Fiona Reid and Christine Van Everbroeck, “Shell Shock and the Kloppe: War Neuroses amongst British and Belgian Troops during and after the First World War,” *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, 30, 4 (2014): 252-275; Herwig, *The First World War*, especially chapter 9 and Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 311.

motivation, but orders, attitude, and expectations played an equally important role in determining the *perception* of success or failure. Expectations of victory in the Chemin des Dames offensive came to naught, and the large-scale collective indiscipline of mid-1917 (the Nivelle mutinies) erupted as a result of this failure. Disciplinary problems were “magnified by previous expectations of victory,”<sup>534</sup> and just as a disproportionate rise in morale can accompany successes on the battlefield when achievements surpass expectations,<sup>535</sup> the opposite can also result. For the French *poilus*, hopes for a substantial breakthrough were dashed, they had been deceived by their own leaders, and expectations clearly did not match reality. In fact, the “great optimism that had swept over so many French soldiers helps to explain the disillusion that came next”<sup>536</sup> in the form of combat refusals and other forms of collective indiscipline. This disillusion and sense of futility suggested war weariness, and were a main contributor to the mutinies that resulted.<sup>537</sup> Without the antidote of at least local successes to neutralise growing discontent in the ranks, it became evident “the ordinary French soldiers were becoming war weary,”<sup>538</sup> and facing the prospect of further suffering with no end in sight. The attacks led to heavy casualties, and results did not match the rhetoric used prior to the offensive. And this failure was doubly dreadful “because of the damaging hyperbole he [Nivelle] had used to promote it.”<sup>539</sup> Ultimately, the offensive was “psychologically disastrous,” and French morale was “shattered” by spring 1917.<sup>540</sup> This was a perfect state of affairs for the spread of collective war weariness, which only further fuelled the morale and discipline problems plaguing the French at this point.

With proper rest, leave, and rotation policies coupled with more effective tactics, a crisis might have been averted. And yet the “offensive turned what had been occasional

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<sup>534</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 262.

<sup>535</sup> Ibid, 258. A sense of success or victory can raise morale and there is a “tonic effect of victory on exhausted troops.”

<sup>536</sup> Michael S. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War: A Global History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006), 242.

<sup>537</sup> Gwynne Dyer, *War: The New Edition* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2005), 266.

<sup>538</sup> Hart, *The Great War*, 342 and 339.

<sup>539</sup> Ibid, 340-341. Hart also noted that the presence of tanks “raised the spirits of the long-suffering *poilus*” prior to the attack, but because they were largely ineffective led to further disappointment.

<sup>540</sup> Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 265 and DUASC, Folder MS-2-432, SF 44-1, *Clearing: The Tale of The First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, B.E.F., 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith.

localised indiscipline among battle-weary troops...into a crisis for the French army,”<sup>541</sup> a development from individual and local war weariness into more general and collective manifestations. Continued costly attacks without adequate redress of grievances, these “fed up” men eventually refused to advance, commenced strikes and protests, while a growing number of homesick and hungry soldiers initiated a mutiny.<sup>542</sup> Shell shock led to the increasing *inability* to carry on in combat, but there were also indicators of a developing *unwillingness* and *reluctance* to endure continued war and combat, an important distinction to make.<sup>543</sup> Ultimately “defeat, failure, and even a prolonged absence of obvious success can have a devastating impact on morale,” resulting in further problems. Lack of success undermined combat motivation and willingness to endure at the front, and hence the chances for military success; it called into question belief in the cause, weakened faith in leaders or the army, lessened the sense of self-confidence and respect, undermined discipline, eroded group bonds, and had detrimental tactical repercussions.<sup>544</sup> War weariness did not necessarily preclude soldiers from carrying on in combat, but did make their service increasingly contingent and conditional, to mention nothing of their attitude toward the war and their enthusiasm in its prosecution. It was the inability of the French military authorities to address legitimate soldier grievances<sup>545</sup> that allowed the simmering war weariness to boil over into mutiny.<sup>546</sup>

Regarding the Nivelle mutinies, there were both official and unofficial responses to war weariness, discontent, and disillusionment. With the problems afflicting the French Army by mid-1917 it was clear that military morale was an important factor. And though

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<sup>541</sup> Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 290. Moreover, the Nivelle offensive showed “cracks...in French morale,” which led to open protests and eventually mutiny. Norris, ed., *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold McGill*, 287.

<sup>542</sup> Hew Strachan, ed., *World War I: A History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 197.

<sup>543</sup> For the soldiers themselves, it could be difficult to distinguish between the inability and unwillingness to continue with duty. One soldier wrote, for instance, that going up the line some casualties “and others [were] so badly shaken and shell-shocked that they were either unfit or unwilling to proceed on the following night.” Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 313. See also Reid, *Broken Men*, 29-40 on shell shock and war weariness.

<sup>544</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 260-261.

<sup>545</sup> The strikes, mutinies, and disorders facing the French Army and nation arose primarily from “the circumstances of the war.” The grievances facing the troops included problems with the quality and quantity of food and drink, including wine, important for morale; pay and allowances problems; issues with a lack of clothing, shelter, warmth and other comforts; and especially a lack of rest and leave. See *Ibid*, 201.

<sup>546</sup> Of course hindsight allow us to appreciate that the French did not collapse into complete disintegration and revolution, which was partly explained by the timely and effective intervention on the part of France’s military leaders.

morale is an amorphous and complex subject, often difficult to pin down,<sup>547</sup> we can narrow it down with definitions and by looking at the factors that contribute to (and compromise) morale. Laurence and Matthews in *The Oxford Handbook of Military Psychology* provide a specific, military understanding of morale, as “the emotional bond that holds the group together and is a result of unit cohesion and esprit de corps.”<sup>548</sup> Importantly, this links the individual to the group. One edited collection defined morale as a “spiritual quality...desirable in soldiers,” and “a sublime, self-denying state of being that transpires when groups such as mobs or armies imbibe a sense of purpose that transcends the personal welfare of their members,”<sup>549</sup> again stressing the links between the individual and collective. Both individually and collectively, the prerequisites for strong morale were sorely lacking in the French Army by the mid-1917. Army life in general and combat specifically exposed the soldiers to the cumulative strains of war, including sleep deprivation, exhaustion, fear of mutilation or death, survivor guilt, and anxiety over friends and family. By 1917 infantry units also had their morale negatively affected by insufficient motivation and training, the lack of comforts and supplies, and the “lack of confidence in officers” or superiors.<sup>550</sup> While the needs and respect afforded a soldier continued to be neglected, could the French troops really be expected to endure at the front, suffer, and ultimately die at the hands of a cold and callous high command with little regard for human life and no attendant compensating military successes?

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<sup>547</sup> Indeed, morale is “easier to detect than define,” and the term is complex, fluid, and contextual. Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front*, 94. Moreover, “morale considered as a psychological condition was not tangible, measurable or localizable.” Englander ‘Discipline and Morale in the British Army, 1917-1918’ in *State, Society and Mobilization* ed. by Horne, 128.

<sup>548</sup> One historian wrote that “in the broadest terms, morale is concerned with the way in which people react to the conditions of their existence.” Baynes, *Morale*, 92. Janice H. Laurence and Michael D. Matthews, eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Military Psychology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 3. A similar definition can be found in Richardson, quoting Field Marshal Slim: “high morale means that every individual in a group will work – or fight – and, if needed, will give his last ounce of effort in its services.” Major-General F.M. Richardson, *Fighting Spirit: A Study of Psychological Factors in War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1978), 3.

<sup>549</sup> Robert Cowley and Geoffrey Parker, eds., *The Reader’s Companion to Military History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company and The Society for Military History, 1996), 311. Strachan also defined morale in terms of the link between the individual and the collective. Morale as “an action-based, group-centred concept that summarized the relative combat-willingness of individuals *and* units.” [The italics are mine] Strachan, *World War I*, 191. James Ulio also describes military morale as connecting the individual soldier with the collective group (the military unit). He defines military morale as “that conditioned quality, in the individual soldier and the in the unit of command, which holds the soldier, holds the unit, to the performance of duty despite every opposing force or influence.” James A. Ulio, “Military Morale,” *American Journal of Sociology* 47, 3 (November 1941): 321-330.

<sup>550</sup> Beckett, *The Great War*, 303.

As soldier morale, enthusiasm, and uncritical acceptance of duty waned, disciplinary problems increased in the French Army. In response to collective indiscipline and insubordination, authorities relied upon a mixture of carrots and sticks<sup>551</sup> to keep men loyal and units cohesive. In this sense, the French command employed a two-tiered approach, punishing the worst offenders or ‘ringleaders’ of the mutiny with the firing squad (although many death sentences were commuted), while implementing long-overdue reforms on important matters such as tactics and leave policy. One of the first actions taken by the newly-appointed Philippe Pétain was to issue Directive No. 1, to restore order, discipline, and morale.<sup>552</sup> The Directive ordered officers to keep track of their men and the conditions under which they served; to appear in the trenches regularly; to improve the food situation, including the provision of more fresh vegetables; and to “regularize furloughs and to grant extended leaves after long periods of combat.”<sup>553</sup> As the nation was left increasingly vulnerable<sup>554</sup> by dozens of striking or mutinying divisions, the military leadership sought to induce men back into their units – and into the firing line – by any means necessary. The most reasonable soldier grievances were addressed, coupled with a firm hand towards the worst mutineers in an effort to reassert a measure of top-down control. This mixture of positive inducements to behaviour and punishments for a select minority ensured the semblance of military cohesion,<sup>555</sup> the maintenance of at least some divisions in the line, and the preservation of Allied unity. This top-down intervention was crucial, and it seems the regular French soldiers simply wanted to maintain their sense of humanity, be treated with respect, and for their officers

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<sup>551</sup> ‘Carrots,’ or positive inducements to behaviour, included promises of leave and other ways to address soldier grievances. The ‘sticks,’ disincentives, or punishments and the threat of punishment, included the use of courts martial and capital punishment for the most egregious offenders of military law.

<sup>552</sup> DUASC, Folder MS-2-432, SF 44-1, *Clearing: The Tale of The First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, B.E.F., 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, 218. Pétain combined heavy-handedness with concern over the men’s legitimate grievances. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 247.

<sup>553</sup> Herwig, *The First World War*, 321 and Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 248. As Captain McGill also noted, “long overdue reforms” quelled the situation. Norris, *Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 287.

<sup>554</sup> The French Army was “paralyzed” in this time period. Adam Tooze, *The Deluge: The Great War and the Remaking of the Global Order* (London: Penguin Books, 2015), 74.

<sup>555</sup> Though the veracity of his account and his motivation needs to be considered, German General Erich Ludendorff noted in his Memoirs that after the Nivelle Offensive he noticed a weakening of attacks and that many French units were inactive. Though why he did not take advantage of this apparent opportunity to exploit the enemy’s weakness is anyone’s guess. Ludendorff, *My War Memories – Volume II*, 424 and 428.

to acknowledge and ultimately address their genuine and long-standing grievances. Directive No. 1 also promised a change in tactics. There would be an end to unlimited, attritional-style attacks, and the French command promised to postpone any major offensive until the arrival of the vast American armies and mechanical implements to overwhelm the Germans.<sup>556</sup> Attacks that were ordered, and deemed necessary to uphold the Coalition or to stabilise or consolidate the line, would be of only a limited nature, with set objectives, be well-planned, and supported by heavy firepower.<sup>557</sup> These tactical adjustments proved a stimulus to morale and acted as a partial antidote to collective war weariness; and successful limited attacks at Verdun and Malmaison helped restore esprit de corps.<sup>558</sup> Though limited attacks and changes in leave policy prevented further outbreaks of collective indiscipline, the French Army continued to deteriorate over time. Indeed by 1918, and certainly by the final months of the war, the troops were exhausted, “tired of life at the front,” but many troops were “sustained by a desire for retribution” which only increased as more areas of Belgium and especially France were liberated.<sup>559</sup> And thus despite the continuing and collective war weariness of the French soldiery, the desire for revenge allowed them to carry on and provided sufficient combat motivation and willingness to stagger to the finish line.

An examination of the French mutinies provided lessons for other Allied forces, and helps us comprehend the phenomenon of war weariness, its origins, impact, and potential neutralising factors. First of all, this episode highlights that there is a perceptible and important link between the home front and battle fronts, especially in an occupied nation experiencing total war. These connections can help explain the expansion or transmutation of war weariness as a largely local or individual phenomenon, to a more collective and general one. Problems on the home front could ‘contaminate’ the fighting front, and vice versa, and issues at home were often directly related to the war effort.<sup>560</sup>

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<sup>556</sup> In other words, to wait for the ‘Tanks and the Yanks.’ Herwig, *The First World War*, 321.

<sup>557</sup> Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 249 and Herwig, *The First World War*, 321. Moreover, Pétain’s motto apparently was ‘le feu tue,’ or ‘fire[power] kills.’ Foley, “Verdun,” 36.

<sup>558</sup> Strachan, *World War I*, 202 and Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 290.

<sup>559</sup> Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 211.

<sup>560</sup> There were links between problems at the front and subsequent worker unrest in Europe. Tooze, *The Deluge*, 74.



Second, leave was a key component of soldier life. Troops experiencing the hardships of war required not only physical rest from combat, but also psychological respite from war itself, and hence leave and the return to the interior was important, despite the obvious (and potentially dangerous) connections between the home and battle fronts. Third, this deterioration of soldiers and units, even in victorious armies, was all but inevitable after years of total war and the enormous investment of lives and treasure. By 1918 the French Army was but a pale shadow of its former self, only capable of limited operations and holding the line. As the French approached total exhaustion, the lingering, collective war weariness<sup>561</sup> undermined the ability *and* willingness of soldiers to seize objectives and contribute positively to the war effort. Luckily, France was part of a wider coalition that defeated the Germans in the field and forced its surrender. Fourth, the French mutinies illustrate the importance of maintaining a committed, healthy, and happy soldier as the means to attaining victory in war. A key role is played by medical services, who are partly responsible for matters of rest, convalescence, and the health and sanitary requirements of those expected to fight and if necessary, die in the service of their country. The supply and support services also played a significant role in their health and well-being. Ensuring that proper food, water, alcohol, equipment, and other supplies made it to the troops ensured they had the resources to carry out their duties. Bands, concert parties, chaplains and padres, and similar services also helped bolster the troops' spirits and helped them endure the sometimes admittedly terrible conditions of service. Moreover, in order to feel respected and more than just a cog in the vast war machine, proper and attentive leadership helped the soldiers carry on with duty. Pétain tried to address this disconnect between the officers and ORs, and encouraged a "more open command style" with his Directive No. 1.<sup>562</sup> Leadership was vital, and the onus was on the officers to know their men, address their grievances, look for signs of 'wear and tear' amongst subordinates, explain orders, and maintain cohesion and continuity. Moreover, the rhetoric and orders of the high command, and the propaganda given to the troops, had

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<sup>561</sup> The French mutinies were but "one manifestation of the general war weariness that gripped Europe during 1917," suggesting the widespread nature of this phenomenon at this stage in the war. Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 291.

<sup>562</sup> Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 290.

to be grounded in reality and the experiences of the common soldier. The large gap between the expectations and promises of victory and the subsequent disappointment of the troops on the battlefield played an important role in precipitating the Nivelle mutinies.

And finally, war weariness, collective indiscipline, and discontent in the French Army also illustrate the importance of an awareness of the changing circumstances and fortunes of war. The act of liberating long-suffering civilians from occupation acted as a boost to morale and combat willingness. The changing circumstances in the final months of the war affected the motivation of those taking part in these final campaigns. The changing conditions provided a new sense of urgency; and the prospect of victory and battlefield success could bolster soldier endurance. The authorities needed to be cognizant of these changing circumstances, as during times of high morale or during successful military operations, a heavy-handed approach to discipline might be unwarranted, even counterproductive. And finally, this provides insight into the interplay and connections between the individual, collective, and the overall military situation, especially regarding war weariness and its impact on military operations. It is worth reiterating here that war weariness developed even in victorious armies, as was the case with the French. It did not preclude individuals from carrying on in combat, though it did compromise military effectiveness and commitment to the cause.<sup>563</sup> French acute or long-term collective war weariness and decline was problematic in the second half of the war, especially in the spring of 1918 when the Germans were preparing their final offensives, but their erosion occurred in tandem with other armies.

The British Army was eventually victorious in the First World War *despite* its own experience of war weariness and its detrimental effect on soldiers. After years of war, heavy casualties, and daily ‘wastage,’ by 1918 the BEF was composed “mainly of youthful conscripts.”<sup>564</sup> And though a soldier’s commitment and dedication were not

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<sup>563</sup> The Russian Army also experienced substantial war weariness by 1917. See, for example, Beckett, *The Great War*, 521-522; ‘Fraternization on the Western Front, April 1917,’ ‘Revolutionary Demands of the 202<sup>nd</sup> Gori Infantry Regiment,’ 4 November 1917 and ‘A Soldier Rails against Officers and Elites,’ 14 November 1917, in Daly, *Russia in War and Revolution*, 86-87, 115 and 129-130; Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 238, 119; Hart, *The Great War*, 247 and Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 105-106.

<sup>564</sup> Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 275.

necessarily suspect simply because they were conscripted, the Army had lost much of its veteran and long-serving soldiers.<sup>565</sup> The nature of the fighting, the wider war situation, and the heavy casualties and conscript replacement help explain some of the disciplinary problems affecting the British Army by 1917. Historian Gerard Oram pointed out that by late 1917 there was much evidence of a deterioration of morale, but no corresponding increase in death sentences.<sup>566</sup> This is curious, but courts martial death sentences are but a rough proxy of morale and discipline. Moreover, a ‘Report of British Armies in France,’ dated December of 1917, made explicit reference to the phenomenon of war weariness, relatively rare for contemporary and especially official documents. The report concluded:

War-weariness there is, and an almost universal longing for peace but there is a strong current of feeling that only one kind of peace is possible [a peace of victory] and that the time is not yet come.<sup>567</sup>

This is important for a few reasons. First of all, the report made direct reference to the phenomenon, acknowledging it as a widespread reality at the front. Second, it illustrates that war weariness involved an end to the war, the ‘longing for peace,’ or at least an end to an individual’s participation in the war. The men were fed up and frustrated with the slow progress of the war; the next step was to take action to remedy or address this situation. And finally, the report recognised that war weariness did not necessarily preclude soldiers from pressing on in combat, especially at this juncture of the war when the desire for victory and defeat of the enemy trumped the desire for an exit from the war. In this sense it might be said that at this point the British Army exhibited signs of individual war weariness, but had not progressed toward collective war weariness.

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<sup>565</sup> One of the negative aspect of an increasing proportion of conscripted troops was that because of the top-down dissemination of knowledge and lessons learned from previous attacks, much of this experience was lost as veterans died or were invalided out of the ranks. A constant influx of new troops might also compromise unit cohesion and trust in small group settings. Having a new CO, for example, could engender feelings of suspicion or resentment at the impositions of this ‘outsider’ or ‘newcomer,’ unfamiliar with the past glories and hardships of the unit. The constant influx of new men also complicated group morale and bonding. On the other hand, the fact that the army was composed increasingly of conscripts meant that these men were relatively fresh and new to the front, acting as a brake or mitigating factor on the development of war weariness. Moreover, because these conscripts were former civilians and not professional soldiers, it may have meant a more sympathetic or understanding attitude on the part of the high command or the officer corps. Minor breaches of discipline, for instance, might have been more leniently dealt with compared with a hardened veteran with much service experience.

<sup>566</sup> Gerard Christopher Oram, *Military Executions during World War I* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 96.

<sup>567</sup> Oram, *Military Executions*, 96.

The strength, will, and commitment of soldiers could be destroyed suddenly, such as by undergoing heavy, prolonged shelling or by a bloody battle, like the Somme.<sup>568</sup> More problematically, however, was that one could also be worn down in a cumulative process after facing many stressful events and situations. As one historian put it, a soldier's will "is gradually used up by monotony, by exposure, by the loss of the support of stauncher spirits on whom he has come to depend, by physical exhaustion, by a wrong attitude to danger, to casualties, to war, to death itself."<sup>569</sup> There were both external factors in the erosion of will and strength, such as exposure and heavy casualties, but also internal, more human factors.

This wearing out of individuals was a problem faced by all armies undertaking sustained combat operations. Some military authorities believed that an army's recruitment and training systems could watch for predisposition, or identify those most liable to break down. Major-General F.M. Richardson argued that even veterans and volunteers committed to the cause, and with good service records could erode to the point of military ineffectiveness. These "seasoned soldiers, often an NCO, who has sustained others, perhaps through several campaigns, but at the cost of drawing too heavily on his own reserves," was liable to break down. He concluded that these soldiers are "just worn out,"<sup>570</sup> a probable reference to war weariness. And as individual and unchecked war weariness entrenched itself in the British Army by the latter half of the war, the conditions were appropriate for the progression into more general and collective war weariness, which had a direct impact on military effectiveness. This could involve a wider collapse of military units. When the Germans launched *Operation Michael* on 21 March 1918 in a bid to end the war, there was indeed evidence of collapse, at least in some units. And after years of hard fighting, enormous casualties, and insufficient gains on the battlefield, this type of collapse was all but inevitable; moreover, a "major crisis in

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<sup>568</sup> Martin Gilbert, *The Battle of the Somme: The Heroism and Horror of War* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 246.

<sup>569</sup> Ibid. And Moran also wrote that "men wear out in war like clothes" wear out over time. Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, xiii-xiv and xxii. See also Major-General F.M. Richardson, *Fighting Spirit: A Study of Psychological Factors in War* (London: Leo Cooper, 1978), 77.

<sup>570</sup> Richardson, *Fighting Spirit*, 75-77. Richardson also made the point that "the wise use of rest" was a key factor in the prevention of battle exhaustion, a concept closely linked with that of war weariness.

morale,” like the French mutinies or the collapse of the British Fifth Army, “tended to occur in all armies...between two and a half and three years after real entry into the war,”<sup>571</sup> suggesting a cumulative and long-term process after prolonged exposure to war and combat. Furthermore, the loss of some unit COs, and the death of ten infantry lieutenant-colonels at this battle suggested “a collapse of morale at the lower level or a failure to provide support for higher authority,” both of which were present in the Fifth Army.<sup>572</sup> This was a collapse akin to those experienced by the French Army in the spring of 1917 (during the mutinies), the Russian breakdown after the Kerensky offensive, and Italian collapse after Caporetto. There were also both individual and collective aspects of this disintegration, as “many of the units, worn down by the attrition battles of 1917,” were in a poor state for effective defence, and individuals “may simply have passed beyond the point of what was bearable by flesh and blood.”<sup>573</sup>

Collective war weariness, however, did manifest itself in the British Army by 1917-18.<sup>574</sup> Inconclusive fighting, fear and discomfort, death and mutilation “had taken its toll of even the stoutest constitutions,” and when enough individual soldiers suffered in such a way, collective war weariness was but a small step away.<sup>575</sup> This was marked by “collective defiance” among certain units, which was a clear threat to legitimate military authority, and was liable to spread to others. There was a mutiny at the base at Étapes and other “unruly incidents” at British base camps in France, some soldiers established councils (on soviet lines), and political subversion led to the collapse of the 16<sup>th</sup> Division, which all “seemed symptomatic of a loss of élan and a will to win,”<sup>576</sup> both hallmarks of war weariness. The ultimate fear for British authorities, however, was likely that this defiance, disgruntlement, and war weariness would lead to collective, organised, and

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<sup>571</sup> Beckett, *The Great War*, 308. This also helps explain why the Corps was able to maintain coherence in 1917 compared to the other armies on the Western Front.

<sup>572</sup> John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000), 401.

<sup>573</sup> Keegan, *First World War*, 401.

<sup>574</sup> See, for example, Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 74, 176; Baynes, *Morale*, 101; Richardson, *Fighting Spirit*, 121-122; Holmes, *Firing Line*, 325; Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 135 and Englander, “Discipline and Morale in the British Army,” 141.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid.* See also Englander, “Mutinies and Military Morale,” 197.

violent rejection of the war.<sup>577</sup> And though the authorities never had to deal with this consequence, there is no doubt the British Army experienced a crisis in morale and discipline, especially with the collapse of the Fifth Army during *Operation Michael*.

And yet the British Army did not totally collapse, and was able to recover from its military reverses and problems during the spring and summer of 1918. Indeed, the British Army, in tandem with its various Entente partners and associated powers, were able to rebound in strength and cohesion to defeat the Germans in the field, despite the fact that war weariness and logistics were a serious problem by the Hundred Days.<sup>578</sup> In fact, some historians have argued that not only did it rebound, but that its morale actually surged with the victories of the final months. One asserted that “however war-weary British troops were during the Hundred Days, they had a morale advantage which only grew with every successful attack.”<sup>579</sup> And yet, if morale did surge in the final months of the war, it was because the urgency of the campaign, evidence of German decline, and the prospect of military success and ultimate victory acted as powerful antidotes to the collective war weariness.

For the German Army in the final years of the war the connections between the home and battle fronts were a key feature in the development of war weariness.<sup>580</sup> As

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<sup>577</sup> Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 77.

<sup>578</sup> Tim Travers, “The Allied Victories,” in *World War I: A History*, ed. by Hew Strachan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 288 and Travers, *How the War was Won*. Travers used the term “war weariness” when describing the problems facing the Allied armies in the final months of the war. Moreover, Lloyd argued that by November 1918 both the British and French armies were “approaching total exhaustion (not to mention logistical overstretch),” compromising their ability to carry on much longer. Military units were lacking men, and soldiers themselves were “increasingly unhappy at being asked to keep going, and, perhaps most importantly, [were] approaching the limit of their physical capacity” to endure. Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 277. Another historian noted that there were in fact “times of profound war-weariness in the British Army.” Oram, *Military Executions during World War I*, 169.

<sup>579</sup> Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front*, 15.

<sup>580</sup> For German war weariness in this period and top-down responses from authorities, see Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 225, 287, 306-307, 324-325; LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4546, Folder 6, File 2, ‘The Impressions of a German of the Attack of the 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1916;’ Dennis Showalter “World War I,” in *The Reader’s Companion to Military History* ed. by Cowley and Parker, 524; Arthur, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, 257; Peter Leese, *Shell Shock: Traumatic Neurosis and the British Soldiers of the First World War* (Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 29; Horne, *Source Records of the Great War*, xxxiii, 281; Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 53, 68; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 585, 611, 642-644, 683, 740; Nieberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 317-318, 322; Strachan, *World War I*, 280; Hart, *The Great War*, 323; Dyer, *War*, 266; Stephenson, *The Final Battle*, 12-13, 47-48; Herwig, *The First World War*, 405-406; Stephenson, *The Final Battle*, 296 and 316, and Horn, *The German Naval Mutinies of World War I*, ix, 219-221.

some historians<sup>581</sup> have pointed out, the problems facing the Germans on the battle front might have been endured were it not for the simultaneous deterioration on the home front. Soldiers were used to withstanding hardships in the service of their nation, but the inability of the government to care for its citizens at home put in peril the very people they were trying to protect. This connection between the home and battle fronts, and especially between material realities and commitment to the war effort, was explored by historian Holger Herwig. He noted that there was an increasingly evident connection between “hunger and peace,” as “hunger was gnawing at the nation’s social fibre, that war weariness had gripped large segments of the population” and that the uneven distribution of food was made worse by inefficient central control.<sup>582</sup> This state of affairs thus compromised the ability to make war (on the home front), as well as prosecute the war effort (on the battle front). The troops were thus exposed to the problems of the home front, whether that be through leave, propaganda,<sup>583</sup> rumour, or in the reality of daily shortage at the front. In a sense, then, the problems on the home front both reflected, and reinforced, the sense of war weariness on the battle front.

The reality of the situation at home undermined the ability and willingness of German soldiers to endure in other ways as well. With the problems at home becoming ever more evident to soldiers in the line, this served as a constant distraction.<sup>584</sup> As the Entente forces advanced and the food situation grew steadily worse in Germany, soldiers at the front was given no peace of mind, no reassurance that all was well and his family

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<sup>581</sup> Without victory on the battlefield, and “particularly when want and deprivation were presenting the home front with such a prodigious struggle” it was clear that the armed forces “were unable to withstand such a long war.” Hart, *The Great War*, 324.

<sup>582</sup> Herwig, *The First World War*, 287. Philpott also argued that the sorry state of the German Army by late 1918 reflected the growing problems of the home front, for instance the blockade. By 1918 the German people were facing shortages and hunger back home. Philpott, *War of Attrition*, xv-xvi.

<sup>583</sup> The problems on the German home front was a theme and topic exploited by Allied intelligence and propaganda personnel, especially in the final year of the war. Entente propaganda sought, for example, to drive a wedge between the German people and the government, in part by emphasizing the militaristic nature of the regime. Pamphlets and propaganda leaflets thus encouraged the people and soldiers to rid themselves of the Kaiser and his autocratic regime, stressing that the current war was against the German leaders and militarism, not the people. And finally, Allied propaganda sought to exploit and highlight the poor food situation and the hopelessness of the situation. Roetter, *The Art of Psychological Warfare*, 71, 84, and 82.

<sup>584</sup> Food shortages not only undermined the health and morale of the civilian population and sparked protests and peace demands, it also hurt soldiers who came to worry about their families back home and suffered malnutrition themselves. Morrow Jr., *The Great War*, 283.

was being adequately cared for. This is important for a few reasons. First of all, the deterioration taking place could not be masked by propaganda or censorship efforts, ensuring that soldiers became aware of the reality sooner or later. This could, amongst other things, result in a decline in faith or trust in authorities. A regular soldier, for instance, might start to question the government's war aims, or the war itself, wondering why he should continue to suffer and die to uphold a regime that lied (or at least misled), could not care for its civilians, and was unable to exploit battlefield success and transform them into peace or victory. Second, this awareness of the situation at home speaks to the limits of blind loyalty and obedience. As knowledge of the reality of the problems of the home front became more widespread, regular troops could no longer ignore the plight of their family back home. If an individual determined that their current participation in the war helped prolong the conflict, they might conclude that their removal from the war - through the act of surrender or desertion - might hasten the end of the war and thus help alleviate the problems at home. Third, the links between the home and battle fronts emphasize the requirement of political and military authorities in wartime to ensure the proper focus on both guns *and* butter. There was a need to guarantee sufficient production of both military requirements and food and consumer goods for the home front.

A final lesson to be distilled from German Army war weariness was that the morale and discipline problems in the final months were widespread, and not easily resolved. More important, however, was the fact that these problems affected previously loyal soldiers and effective units, suggesting that war weariness was a growing and prevalent phenomenon after years of brutal warfare. All individuals had their breaking point, and by the summer and autumn of 1918 many German soldiers had been pushed to, if not beyond, this breaking point. And contrary to the views of some subsequent commentators, these disciplinary problems such as desertion and other evasion strategies affected more than just 'bad apples' and troublemakers. In the words of the Crown Prince Wilhelm (the eldest son of the Kaiser and commander of German forces in the war), these stragglers and those "sick and tired of the war" represented a growing proportion of the German infantry. He wrote that these men

...scarcely made an effort to hide their disinclination to rejoin their units. Nor were they all rascals; there was many a face there which showed that the nerves



had given way, that energy was gone, that the primitive and unchecked impulse of self-preservation had got the mastery over the recognition of the necessity for holding out or resisting.<sup>585</sup>

It thus seems the Crown Prince was referring to both shell-shocked soldiers *and* war-weary veterans. His comments also illustrate the importance of medical services; individuals, worn down by the cumulative effect of combat and exposure to trauma, needed to be monitored for signs of wear. The onset of individual, and then collective war weariness, illustrates the need for effective and equitable rest and leave policies. Respite for both individuals and military units acted as a mitigating factor for the worst and most pernicious effects of war weariness. The inability to tackle this growing collective war weariness, coupled with battlefield failures, ensured that it manifested itself in increasingly disruptive acts of indiscipline, ultimately undermining Germany's ability to win the war.

A victorious army required the fortitude of its own personnel, and the endurance of the home front and its civilian population. And the strength and ability to endure the cumulative stresses and strains of war on the home front was indispensable for its army fighting in close proximity to its parent society. Moreover, the onset of war weariness could have real-world implications for both the soldier and the unit in which they served. It could compromise combat units to the point of ineffectiveness, and even lead to battlefield reverses or defeat. Certain ideas and attitudes, such as anti-war perspectives or defeatism, could spread and have an effect out of all proportion to the actual numbers involved. Ultimately, all major armies on the Western Front were experiencing collective war weariness by 1917. But the Canadians were largely spared this at the time, in part because they did not field a massive army in Europe until much later than the other nations,<sup>586</sup> and hence delayed their disintegration by over a year.

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<sup>585</sup> Crown Prince Wilhelm, *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany* (London: Thornton Butterworth, 1922), 203, quoted in Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 110.

<sup>586</sup> The Canadians only arrived as a single division in Western Europe in April 1915, much later than other armies. The Corps itself fought together for the first time at Vimy Ridge.

## Vimy Ridge in Context

The attacks on Vimy Ridge by Canadian and British forces were part of a much larger campaign, the Battle of Arras. These attacks were also loosely coordinated with the French Chemin des Dames offensive, which began 16 April. The new French commander, General Robert Nivelle, “sought a major offensive in 1917 to pressure the Germans on two fronts,” with the British attack in the north near Arras, and the French attack between Reims and Soissons, along the Chemin des Dames ridge.<sup>587</sup> The problems, however, were manifest. The Germans had already withdrawn much of their forces beyond the Hindenburg Line, and had solid defensive positions and undertaken thorough preparations in the area of attack. The offensive “proved to be a disaster,” and Nivelle was replaced by Pétain, “who inherited an army with a massive morale problem.”<sup>588</sup>

Other developments also had a direct impact on the war. The return of Vladimir Ilyich Ulyanov (Lenin) to Russia ensured the fall of the Provisional government and the nation’s exit from the war,<sup>589</sup> and worker strikes and demonstrations in Germany indicated the erosion of the pro-war consensus there.<sup>590</sup> In both Germany and Russia these events reflected and reinforced the destabilizing and war weary mood present there by the

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<sup>587</sup> For maps, unit dispositions, and other information on this offensive, see Michael S. Neiberg, *The Military Atlas of World War I* (London: Amber Books, 2014), 81.

<sup>588</sup> The British and French sustained roughly 750,000 casualties in the operations between April and July 1917. And for French Army morale, discipline, endurance, and war weariness, and how these problems were addressed, see Hart, *The Great War*, Chapter 15 and pages 339-351; LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 4-3, ‘Engagements, 1917,’ File ‘Major Strathy’s Personal Diary,’ Battle of Flanders, 9 August 1917; RG 9 III C15, Volume 4664, Extracts [from the Diary of] – Captain Adrien Beausoleil, ‘How Morale can be Built-Up;’ Herwig, *The First World War*, 321; Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 19, 20-26; Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 262; Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 239-249; Dyer, *War*, 266; Arthur, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, 195; DUASC, Folder MS-2-432, SF 44-1, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith; Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 265, 290; Strachan, ed., *World War I*, 200-202; Babington, *Capital Courts Martial*, 117 and Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>589</sup> For Lenin’s return to Russia and his impact on the deepening revolution, see Roy Bainton, *A Brief History of 1917: Russia’s Year of Revolution* (London: Constable & Robinson Ltd., 2005), 99-105; Ronald Grigor Suny, *The Soviet Experiment: Russia, the USSR, and the Successor States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 41-42; Robert Payne, *The Life and Death of Lenin* (New York: Avon Books, 1964), 285, 333-334 and Magnusson, *Chambers Biographical Dictionary*, 882. For Russian Army decline, dissent, and war weariness, see Hart, *The Great War*, 107, 247, 363; Beckett, *The Great War*, 312, 521-522; Daly, *Russia in War and Revolution*, xxiv, 9, 11-13, 70-72, 86-87, 115, 129-130; Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 119, 238, 288-289; Morrow Jr., *The Great War*, 233-235; Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics*, 114-118, 119-120; Holmes, *Firing Line*, 44 and Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 105-106.

<sup>590</sup> This is a concept borrowed from David Stevenson in *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

early months of 1917. War weariness could be detected in the Russian and German armies by 1917 as well.<sup>591</sup> And on 13 June, the first heavy bomber raid on London was launched. This, along with the ongoing zeppelin raids, reinforced the sense of total war in Britain and likely contributed to the developing war weariness on its home front. In this total war, the interplay between the civilian home front and the battle front(s) were complex, and ultimately crucial to the outcome of the war. Both home and battle fronts needed to maintain coherence, and be resilient in the face of strains associated with the war effort. These events reinforced the sense of despondency found in both soldiers and civilians of the major European armies by 1917, after having endured the stresses of war from the beginning (August of 1914).

The high casualty rate suffered in active operations and trench warfare, and the heavy casualties experienced by the major combatants on the Western Front also illustrate the stresses and strains placed on individuals during war, and during combat more specifically. But it also highlights the cumulative nature of war weariness and a loss in collective morale. Heavy casualties had a multi-faceted impact: the loss of friends and comrades hurt individuals, whereas the loss of leaders and important team-members compromised the cohesion and military effectiveness of units. These losses also undermined the power of the armed forces more generally, as morale and enlistment were negatively affected by news of military disasters, units destroyed, and the death and suffering of soldiers. And finally, the entire nation itself could be undermined by heavy losses and consistent casualties, especially if civilians and workers came to question whether it was all worth it. And 1917 was a bloody year indeed. The British on the

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<sup>591</sup> For German Army war weariness, see LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4546, Folder 6, File 2, 'The Impressions of a German of the Attack of the 2<sup>nd</sup> June, 1916' and 'Copy of a Diary of a Corporal of the 25<sup>th</sup> INF. REGT.:' RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, Operations Valenciennes, November 1918, 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 'Narrative of Operations' and 'Report,' of 13-11-18; RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 4, 'Summary of Intelligence,' and 'Information from Prisoner of 4<sup>th</sup> Grenadier Regt., taken April 20<sup>th</sup>;' Philpott, *War of Attrition*, xiv-xvi, 287, 306-307, 313, 324-325, 332; Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 38-39, 53, 68, 214; Hart, *The Great War*, 315, 322-325, 446; Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 317-318, 322, 335-338, 355; Herwig, *The First World War*, 365, 405-406, 410, 427; Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 25; Charles Roetter, *The Art of Psychological Warfare 1914-1945* (New York: Stein and Day, 1974), 22, 69, 71, 81, 83-85; Horne, *Source Records of the Great War*, xxxiii, 281-285; Ludendorff, *My War Memories*, 451-462, 585, 611-613, 642-644, 683, 699, 740; Scott Stephenson, *The Final Battle: Soldiers of the Western Front and the German Revolution of 1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 12-13, 46-48, 296, 316, 326, and Crown Prince Wilhelm, *The Memoirs of the Crown Prince of Germany* (London: Thronton Butterworth, 1922), 203.

Western Front suffered 120,070 casualties in April 1917; 76,040 in May; 75,123 in June; 84,695 in July; and 81,080 in August of 1917. This combined for a total of 437,008 casualties over this five-month period.<sup>592</sup> The numbers for the French and Germans in this period illustrate that high casualty rates plagued all major combatant armies on the Western Front, regardless of offensive or defensive posture at any particular time.<sup>593</sup> The total strength of the Corps in this period also fluctuated, based largely on casualties, but also on transfers and other administrative changes. The total strength of the Canadian Corps at the end of each month reflects the offensive and defensive actions that affected the casualties and thus overall strength of the Corps in that particular month.<sup>594</sup> One reality of the war was that understrength units tended to take heavier casualties than full-strength ones, even if objectives were seized and held.

## Training and Preparations for Vimy Ridge and Affiliated Operations

Training and preparation for major offensives in the First World War did not always pay off for the attacking forces. The power of the defensive, and the sheer number of variables ensured complexity, confusion, and that things did not always go according to plan. The weather could turn, supplies could fail to arrive, weapons systems could become inoperable, and thousands of other variables could directly affect the outcome of the battle, for good or ill. Much in war cannot be controlled, no plan ever survives contact

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<sup>592</sup> Churchill, *The World Crisis, 1911-1918*, 845, citing *The Military Effort*, 253.

<sup>593</sup> In this period roughly 87,000 French troops were killed on the field of battle, went missing, or were taken prisoner. A further 15,000 died in hospitals near the battlefield, and another 8,000 in hospitals in the interior. 169,000 ORs were evacuated to the interior, presumably wounded and ill. This totalled 279,000 OR casualties in this period alone. German losses opposite the combined French-Belgian-British fronts (between April and July 1917) amounted to 67,754 dead, 89,081 MIA and prisoner, and 257,226 wounded, for a total of 414,061 casualties. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 846, citing *Journal Officiel, Documents parlementaires, Session Extraordinaire 1920, Annexe 633, Séance du 29 Mars, 1920, proposition de résolution Marin* and Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 847, from the *Statistics of the Reichsarchiv*.

<sup>594</sup> In March of 1917 the total strength of the Canadian Corps was 304,585 all ranks (with 17,458 officers and 287,127 ORs). By April of 1917, however, the Corps' total strength was down to 301,296 all ranks, a decrease of 3,289 soldiers, enough for several infantry battalions. After the heavy fighting and casualties of the Vimy operations, moreover, the Corps total strength began to creep back up again. In May of 1917 the total strength was 303,184 all ranks; by June, 305,032; by July, 305,633; and by August of 1917 it was 303,214 reflecting the fact that the Corps could largely make good on its losses at this juncture of the war. Appendix "C" in Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 547.

with the enemy, and war is necessarily the realm of uncertainty.<sup>595</sup> Nevertheless realistic, thorough, and extensive training and preparations could certainly improve the chances of success, as well as provide the attacking troops, especially ‘green’ ones, with an understanding of what might be expected regarding the mechanics of combat and the dynamics of human beings under hostile fire. And though no training course or teaching syllabus could adequately prepare for the horror of the modern battlefield, work on tactics and technology could be useful. These preparations inform our discussion of war weariness in two related, yet seemingly contradictory ways. On the one hand, the thorough preparations prior to the offensive contributed to the fatigue suffered by troops undertaking these operations, encouraging the onset of war weariness at a local and individual level. On the other hand, these preparations helped mitigate the worst manifestations of war weariness and prevented its transformation into a more collective or general expression. It must be emphasised that these preparations were not about combatting war weariness – they were about increasing the chances of success and ensuring victory. But they did have a direct, positive impact on the soldiers, which helped with the embryonic war weariness.

As the section on the disciplinary and legal aspects of Canadian Corps made clear, much training and preparation for combat was based on the “immediate and implicit obedience to orders,”<sup>596</sup> both in and out of action, on the parade ground and in the midst of combat. This was designed to increase the likelihood that when soldiers were in combat they would remember their training and follow orders without hesitation, not allowing their biological fight or flight response to override their duty; the entire notion of military obedience depended on it. Aside from instilling basic discipline, there was specialist and tactical training in the lead-up to Vimy. The Corps Commander in this

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<sup>595</sup> All of these concepts, including the intangibles of war, the dynamics of interaction, and the fog of uncertainty are explored in Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* – Edited and Translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976). Moreover, the historian of the Canadian Grenadier Guards noted that at Vimy all the practice and preparation, after the first five minutes, was useless. Unit cohesion was lost, and the survivors reached the enemy line as individuals. Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid, *History of the Canadian Grenadier Guards 1760-1964* (Montreal: Gazette Printing Company, 1965), 145.

<sup>596</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3868, Folder 109, File 3, ‘Canadian Corps G. 439, 137/7, Adv. First Army,’ dated 10 May 1917.

period, Julian Byng, ordered that units slated to take part in the upcoming attack were to be relieved in the line prior to operations, to ensure adequate training and preparation. For units still in the line, they were to take over frontage similar to that of the Vimy sector, and “partially trained” officers and ORs were to receive a minimum of three weeks additional training prior to the offensive.<sup>597</sup> This individual training sought to instill in the officers and men the confidence and skills required to succeed in combat.

This supplemental training included both individual and unit preparation for the coming attack. Training schedules were organised at the divisional, brigade, battalion, and down to the company and platoon level weeks and even months in advance. The CO of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade (CIB), for example, wrote that after he assumed command in February 1917, preparations for the attack on Vimy had already begun. The Brigade was holding trenches to the left of the Ridge (with Brigade HQ at Aix Noulette), and “during the month of March the Brigade was withdrawn for training in anticipation of the attack”<sup>598</sup> on Vimy. Moving units to the sector during the planning phases was also important, as it allowed the different branches and services to acclimate to the region and its various features. Aerial photos needed to be taken, barrage maps drawn up, ammunition and supplies stockpiled, and the location of RAPs and headquarters determined. All of these preparations took time, but were crucial. Infantry had to work in harmony with the other infantry units, especially those on the flanks and who would leap-frog them in the attack; the infantry would also have to coordinate their attacks with artillery, engineers, CAMC,<sup>599</sup> and other services. Only through this thorough planning and cooperation could an operation of this magnitude hope to succeed against a well-entrenched enemy dominating the high ground.

As attack doctrine, tactics, and technology evolved throughout the war, there was an increasing emphasis upon all-arms cooperation, and the coordination of the different branches of the armed forces. This allowed the Entente to play to their strengths, and

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<sup>597</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3844, Folder 48, File 2, ‘Vimy Operations, Canadian Corps Scheme (Correspondence).’

<sup>598</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4687, Folder 40, File 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, Historical Records, G.656-11, dated 7 June 1918.

<sup>599</sup> G.W.L. Nicholson, *Seventy Years of Service: A History of the Royal Canadian Army Medical Corps* (Ottawa: Borealis Press, 1977), 101.

ensured that each service would complement the others and contribute positively to the overall goal of the operation. This developing attack doctrine and the competent use of technology were important to the ultimate success at Vimy Ridge.<sup>600</sup> And yet, despite all the efforts at all-arms cooperation and use of all means at one's disposal to increase firepower, the First World War remained a largely infantry-artillery conflict. Field and siege artillery, howitzers, and mortars accounted for the vast majority of casualties during the war,<sup>601</sup> despite the popular notions of the war as one of MGs, gas, tanks, and aircraft. In a sense, then, the success of Vimy was based not so much on mastery of all-arms cooperation, but on proficiency in artillery and infantry cooperation. For the Battle of Arras, and Vimy in particular, there was an increased emphasis upon counter-battery and suppressive fire.<sup>602</sup> The former was designed to locate the presence of enemy artillery batteries, and then systematically destroy them prior to or during the attack itself.<sup>603</sup> Suppressive fire, on the other hand, was predicated on the idea of neutralizing the enemy by forcing him to take cover during bombardments. An enemy taking cover in trenches, or finding safety and refuge in deep bunkers/tunnels, was hindered in his ability to operate MGs and defensive positions promptly. The outstanding work of the artillery (and gas services) contributed positively to the ability of the infantry to seize their objectives,

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<sup>600</sup> Nicholson, *The Royal Army Medical Corps*, 101 and Travers wrote extensively on the role of tactics, technology, and all-arms cooperation in the winning of the war. Tim Travers, *How the War was Won: Factors that led to Victory in World War One* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2005). Other important works on this subject include: Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); Paddy Griffith, ed., *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1996); Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: The British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2004). For a German study, see Bruce I. Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army, 1914-1918* (New York: Praeger, 1989).

<sup>601</sup> Chris Chant *Artillery: Over 300 of the World's Finest Artillery Pieces from 1914 to the Present Day* (London: Amber Books Ltd., 2005), 7-8. Moreover, in the "deep battle artillery plays its part in deception; in direct preparation for the breakthrough; and in 'offensive support,' using indirect long-range fire to shock and dislocate the enemy by hitting headquarters, logistics and communications, by blinding observation, preventing enemy artillery from responding, and destroying reserves." Artillery also "seals off the battlefield, stopping the enemy from moving forces in or out." Dale Clarke *World War I Battlefield Artillery Tactics* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2014), 5.

<sup>602</sup> Hart, *The Great War*, 331. And according to the famed Canadian pilot William 'Billy' Bishop, the artillery attack prior to Vimy was the greatest, "most intense" artillery bombardment of the war up to that point. Preparations for the attack included counterbattery fire and the careful registration of guns, attacks on observation balloons, and similar operations. Major William Bishop, *Winged Warfare: Hunting the Hun in the Air* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1918), 94 and 66-80. In terms of counterbattery fire, aerial reconnaissance and sound ranging allowed for the identification of German gun batteries. And ultimately 80% were systematically destroyed by the Canadian/British fire plan. Bercuson, *The Patricias*, 97.

<sup>603</sup> See, for instance, Dale Clarke, *World War I Battlefield Artillery Tactics* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2014).

and ultimately to the success attained at Vimy. And after the Ridge was seized, the artillery and gas services then turned their attention on German reinforcements and counterattack staging areas as well as on enemy communications systems, to great effect. The training of the Corps was but one aspect of the thorough preparations that took place prior to the Vimy attack. As with any large operation, preparations were of a myriad sort, covering medical, administrative, personnel, intelligence, and other aspects of a major attack involving thousands of soldiers. For the Vimy operation, an extensive set of tunnels<sup>604</sup> was dug to shelter troops and provide jumping-off points for the infantry in closer proximity to the enemy lines. Moreover, equipment had to be accumulated, orders issued, ammunition stockpiled, and the launching of artillery and gas to wear down the German defenders before the troops even went over the top.

An important aspect of preparation was ensuring that soldiers going in were well-prepared, and units well-trained and at or near full strength. The Canadian staff, infantry and other units involved had roughly three full months to prepare for this operation.<sup>605</sup> Some units had more time than others, but the experience of the 11<sup>th</sup> CIB seems typical. For this unit, preparations for Vimy began in February, and “continued without interruption”<sup>606</sup> right up until the attack itself. This is also compared favourably to the amount of time afforded Canadians for future operations, such as in later 1917 and into 1918. Sometimes the staff had only a few weeks to prepare complex operations, and at times during the final months of the war they were only given a few days; this put added stress on those forced to carry out these complex and dangerous operations. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the months prior to Vimy were used to gain and acclimate reinforcements for the unit, and there was a period of “comparative inactivity” to get the battalion up to

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<sup>604</sup> Chaplains also worked in the tunnels at Vimy, tending to wounded and “helping to keep the lists.” LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4664, ‘Battle of Vimy Ridge,’ 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division. The role of caves and tunnels at Vimy was also invaluable for the success attained there, especially in the preparation phase. Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 143; Bercuson, *The Patricias*, 97; Tim Travers, “Vimy Ridge,” in *Reader’s Companion to Military History* ed. by Cowley and Parker, 495; Hart, *The Great War*, 334 and Pierre Berton, *Vimy* (Markham: Penguin Books Canada, 1987).

<sup>605</sup> Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 108.

<sup>606</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4689, Folder 45, File 1, 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, Historical Records, including ‘Synopsis of Operations.’ This document also indicated that the “severe weather and discomforts of wet, cold trenches served rather to steel the youthful Canadians for the supreme effort [rather] than damped their spirits.”



strength and provide rest.<sup>607</sup> This final point was crucial, as infantry units up to strength generally took fewer casualties than worn, depleted, or understrength units. For the PPCLI, this meant the promotion of officers through the ranks to compensate for casualties, and the return of wounded men to the unit.<sup>608</sup> Returning soldiers to the unit from hospital or convalescent camp, provided they were able to carry on, was perhaps preferable to incorporating entirely new troops into the group.

Plans for Vimy also included the preparation of defensive features, jumping-off points, artillery battery platforms, and communications. And though Canadian troops entering the sector were taking over from British troops, and before them French forces, there was much work to be done for a large set-piece attack. Infantry of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, for example, contributed to large working parties prior to the offensive,<sup>609</sup> ensuring that there were sufficient personnel to construct important positions and physical structures required for an attack of this nature. When units entered the frontline trenches or came to a new section of the line for the first time, there was often much to be done to improve the positions. Units engaged in working parties, digging new trenches, repairing older sections of the line,<sup>610</sup> and generally shoring up the positions in front of Vimy. Even when the PPCLI were out of the line, its members took part in working parties. There was much to be done in terms of labour and construction, and little was left to chance. Much labour was conducted under the supervision of units of engineers. The engineering corps made use of additional labour in the form of infantry working parties, pioneers, as well as their own Labour Corps units. One important task was the establishment of adequate sources of water and distribution channels<sup>611</sup> for the troops and draught animals taking part in the assault. Without sufficient water, any sustained effort would quickly break down, and

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<sup>607</sup> Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 155.

<sup>608</sup> The return of PPCLI men to their own unit, rather than being funnelled through the Canadian Corps reinforcement depot and assigned to a more or less random unit, meant that “traditions were maintained.” PPCLI Archives, 16-1, World War I Battles, File #: 16 (20)-1, Section 10: Vimy Ridge.

<sup>609</sup> H.M. Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion (The Canadian Scottish) Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1932), 207. The PPCLI also engaged in working parties after they moved into the Vimy sector. PPCLI Archives, World War I Battles, File #: 16 (20) – 1, Section 10: Vimy Ridge.

<sup>610</sup> PPCLI Archives, First World War, Regimental History and Summary, Part IV, File #: 16 (1.6) – 1.

<sup>611</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3844, Folder 47, HQ General Staff, File 2, Engineers, Medical and Transport, 6-1-17 to 7-4-17.

good sources of water were important for both the health and morale of the troops.<sup>612</sup> In addition, there was also an emphasis upon communications<sup>613</sup> networks, the ability of different groups to send messages to one another, and the movement of supplies and other important material across space. The labour and working parties were involved in burying cables, and ensuring alternative means of communication such as visual, wireless sets, pigeons, and preparing for runners and dispatch riders.<sup>614</sup>

Communications were crucial during all phases of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, from preparation and planning through to the consolidation and mopping-up operations. One key element of any battle plan was the artillery preparation – the development of fire-plans and timetables; the working out of which field and siege guns, mortars, and howitzers would fire and when, the different types of ammunition employed; the identification and elimination of enemy batteries (counterbattery fire), with the assistance of the RFC;<sup>615</sup> and plans for wire-cutting,<sup>616</sup> destructive, neutralizing, and creeping barrages to assist the advance. Communications were crucial to the preparatory bombardment phase,<sup>617</sup> as forward artillery observers needed to be in direct contact with the batteries they were directing fire for. Delayed information in the form of handwritten notes might be hours out of date, and thus erroneous. Moreover, efforts were made to *prevent* the Germans from having a clear picture of the developments and preparations on the Allied side of the line. To this end, patrols and outposts were established to thwart

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<sup>612</sup> Shortages of food and water during the Vimy operations saw some soldiers scrounging water from corpses or food from fields. This might have been interpreted as a breach of discipline and soldierly conduct. Duguid, *History of the Grenadier Guards*, 153. Others noted that soldiers purchased food behind the lines, ‘acquired’ food from local farms, stole from comrades, or looted stores or corpses to supplement official rations. Nic Clarke, John Cranfield and Kris Inwood, “Fighting Fit? Diet, Disease, and Disability in the CEF, 1914-18,” *War & Society*, 33, 2 (may 2014): 80-97.

<sup>613</sup> Communications in this sense refers not only to the transmission of messages between two or more parties, via telegraph, telephone, wireless messaging sets, letter, carrier pigeons, or other means, but also the infrastructure to transmit these messages, such as roadways, telephone wires, and the like.

<sup>614</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4678, Folder 11, File 11, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, April 1917, ‘Battalion Narratives,’ including Arleux Operations, Fresnoy and Vimy Front. Regarding communications and carrier pigeons, see also Tim Cook and Andrew Iarocci, “Animal Soldiers: Whether they were Mascots, Beasts of Burden, or Pets, Animals brought Solace to the First World War Soldiers serving at the Front,” *Canada’s History* (October-November 2013): 20-27.

<sup>615</sup> Preparations prior to Vimy included attempts to try and gain air superiority over the sector, and then artillery spotting. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 237-238.

<sup>616</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4680, Folder 18, File 13, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division, April 1917, ‘Vimy – Communications and Intelligence.’

<sup>617</sup> Ibid, Volume 4678, Folder 11, File 11, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, April 1917, ‘Battalion Narratives,’ including Arleux Operations, Fresnoy and Vimy Front.

enemy efforts to ascertain assembly locations, to discourage German working parties, as well as to allow for the artillery observers to be as far forward as possible.<sup>618</sup>

The artillery plan for Vimy, furthermore, was designed to protect the element of surprise. To this end, the preparatory artillery and MG barrage would not increase prior to zero hour and the launching of the infantry attack proper.<sup>619</sup> In the past, an increase in fire had alerted the Germans that an attack was imminent, and the planners at Vimy wanted to avoid tipping the enemy off.<sup>620</sup> The successful artillery plan was also predicated on the notion of near-perfect timing; the guns would have to fire according to a carefully calculated timetable, and the infantry would have to advance in synchronicity with the creeping barrage and its various ‘lifts.’<sup>621</sup> The plan also relied on the stockpiling of supplies and ammunition for months prior to April 1917, and sought to degrade German morale<sup>622</sup> and defensive capabilities over time. It also needed to protect the infantry in its

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<sup>618</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3844, Folder 48, File 3, Canadian Corps Scheme (Correspondence), ‘Notes on Conference held at Canadian Corps Headquarters.’ See also LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4680, Folder 18, File 13, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division, April 1917, Vimy – Communications and Intelligence.

<sup>619</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3844, Folder 48, File 3, Canadian Corps Scheme (Correspondence), ‘Notes on Conference held at Canadian Corps Headquarters.’

<sup>620</sup> Despite attempts at maintaining surprise, the defenders opposite the Canadian front could not fail to notice an increase in activity. The German 79<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division in a report dated 30 March 1917 stated that there was a “very marked concentration of British troops,” and expected an Entente spring offensive “in this vicinity.” This report also stated that opposite the 79<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division “are Canadian troops” of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, who entered the line at Vimy in mid-March, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division were to the left of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. In addition to these warning signs, the Canadians now occupied a smaller frontage and “echeloned” in depth and “this formation points to operations on a large scale.” The report continued, arguing that “Canadians are known to be good troops and are, therefore, well suited for assaulting. There are no deserters to be found amongst the Canadians.” And in addition to this, a Canadian POW confirmed to his captors that the attack would be launched between 20 March and 6 April. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3844, Folder 47, File 4, ‘Translation of a Captured Secret Document.’

<sup>621</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3845, Folder 50, File 5, Vimy, 4<sup>th</sup> Division (“B” Division), ‘Summary.’

<sup>622</sup> Anecdotal evidence suggests that the preparatory bombardment phase of Vimy was at least partly effective in undermining German health, morale, and combat motivation. Documents of the No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance indicated the week leading up to the attack on Vimy was known as ‘Hell Week’ for the defenders. German POWs told their captors that during this period two men “driven mad by the strain [of the bombardment] shot themselves dead.” LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, Historical Records, ‘Synopsis of Operations.’ Others attested to increasing German dissatisfaction in some units. According to captured German POWs, discipline was becoming more lax, drunkenness had become a problem, and the clear disobedience of orders had been observed. The interrogating officer, however, suggested caution, stating that the “prisoner’s morale is poor, but this should not be taken to apply to his regiment as a whole.” Nevertheless, the German divisions holding the line at Vimy suffered heavy casualties before and during the attack. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3854, Folder 23, File 4, Intelligence Summaries, April 1917, ‘Information from other Sources,’ including ‘Laxity in Discipline.’

attack, and to work in conjunction with MGs, tanks, aircraft,<sup>623</sup> gas, and smoke.<sup>624</sup> After the identification of German artillery batteries, Allied guns were concentrated, there was a preparatory bombardment of several days, attempts to cut wire, and the effective use of gas and artillery killed enemy horses and forced German commanders to move their reserves back.<sup>625</sup> This artillery and gas bombardment also wore down the health and morale of the German troops forced to endure these attacks. As a communique of 18 April 1917 by the Corps General Staff attested, German POWs captured at Vimy reported a “great falling off in the morale of the 1<sup>st</sup> Guard Reserve Division.” There were, moreover, references to a ‘laxity of discipline’ in the German forces.<sup>626</sup>

Raids and patrols launched prior Vimy also served an important role in the preparation phase, for a few reasons. First of all, these patrols and especially raids allowed for the acquisition of knowledge unattainable in other ways. Observation from the air was limited, and inclement weather could ground aircraft and stymie aerial observation efforts.<sup>627</sup> Ground-based patrols, however, could monitor German activity, making note of enemy movements, defensive positions, and barbed wire.<sup>628</sup> When the PPCLI moved into the sector they almost immediately undertook aggressive patrols and

<sup>623</sup> Attempts to gain air superiority over the Vimy sector came to be known as ‘Bloody April,’ as the RFC sought to control the skies and protect the troops below. There were complications and setbacks, but the Vimy offensive was marked by “careful planning, meticulous preparation, and effective air-artillery cooperation.” Strong air support was a factor in success on the battlefield, and there was a ground-support role for aircraft, especially in harassing German artillery and infantry below. These air-to-ground attacks of the war were rudimentary by later standards, but reflected the desire of Allied planners to employ as much firepower as possible, and to use an all-arms approach to overwhelm the enemy. Having Entente aircraft overhead might also have reinforced the confidence of the infantry below. S.F. Wise, *Canadian Airmen and the First World War: The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force – Volume I* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press in cooperation with the Department of National Defence and the Canadian Government Publishing Centre, 1980), 405, 401, 410-411.

<sup>624</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3846, Folder 51, File 5, ‘Report on Operations of the Canadian Corps against Vimy.’

<sup>625</sup> Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 237-238. The widespread use of gas and artillery in preparation for the infantry attack had the added advantage of preventing the Germans from using roads and known communication paths too liberally. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4680, Folder 18, File 13, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division, April 1917, Vimy – Communications and Intelligence.

<sup>626</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 4, April 1917, Canadian Corps (General Staff), Unit Narrative, Communique 18 April 1917, report entitled ‘The Capture of Vimy Ridge,’ Intelligence Summaries, Intel Report 27 April 1917. It is also important to point out here that by April of 1917 the German Army designation of “Reserve” Division was largely meaningless. Dr. Holger Herwig Address, *The 28<sup>th</sup> Canadian Military History Colloquium*, held at Wilfrid Laurier University, hosted by the Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, 5 May 2017.

<sup>627</sup> By 1917 the RFC was engaged in attacking observation balloons, bombing rail centres and aerodromes, and carrying the fight into German territory. Bad weather, however, could restrict flying and visibility. Wise, *The Official History of the Royal Canadian Air Force*, 398-401.

<sup>628</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4680, Folder 18, File 13, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division, April 1917, Vimy – Communications and Intelligence.

trench raiding; good intelligence on enemy defences would be crucial for the upcoming attack.<sup>629</sup> The regimental historians of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalions also recalled sorties and raids launched in the weeks leading up to Vimy.<sup>630</sup> Second, aside from knowledge gained from observation, patrols and raids were to capture German POWs to gain important intelligence which could assist in the forthcoming assault. Prisoners might, for instance, be persuaded to divulge important information to their captors related to potential artillery targets, such as communication trenches, company and battalion headquarters, assembly and rest areas.<sup>631</sup> Moreover, prisoners might contain written intelligence or documents that could be useful to Allied staffs and intelligence officers. And losing soldiers to enemy raids might undermine the morale of defending troops still in the line. Third, these raids and patrols were useful in testing German defensive capabilities, the strength of their positions, and the response time of local units to threats on their front.

And finally, raids allowed for lessons and refinements to new tactical ideas and methods of organisation. An officer of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion wrote in his memoir that tactical organisational changes in this period included the incorporation of “so-called specialists” such as machine gunners and rifle grenadiers into infantry platoons;<sup>632</sup> they would no longer remain a wholly separate branch of service. The idea was to make use of fire and movement tactics, to bring as much firepower to bear on the enemy without sacrificing the power of manoeuvre and flexibility. These new organisational principles of the platoon were designed to allow for the close cooperation between riflemen, Lewis gunners, bombers, and rifle grenadiers.<sup>633</sup> The different arms and services would work in conjunction with one another, seeking to achieve common goals with complementary technology and tactics.

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<sup>629</sup> PPCLI Archives, First World War, Regimental History and Summary, Part IV, File #: 16 (1.6) -1; World War I Battles, File #: 16 (20) - 1, Section 10: Vimy Ridge; and 34 (8) – 8, General Operations, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, Vimy.

<sup>630</sup> Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 159 and Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 205.

<sup>631</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3844, Folder 48, File 3, Canadian Corps Scheme (Correspondence), ‘Notes on Conference held at Canadian Corps Headquarters.’

<sup>632</sup> Norris, ed., *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold McGill*, 262.

<sup>633</sup> Different infantry ‘specialists’ would also work in close conjunction with other technologies such as artillery and the more mobile Stokes Mortar. PPCLI Archives, 34 (8) – 8, General Operations, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, Vimy.

In addition to organisational, tactical, and technological changes, preparations took other forms as well. In order to increase the chances of battlefield success and to give participating troops as much information as possible about the terrain and landscape, scale models were built. Captain Walter Moorhouse of the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMRs) remembered that in preparation for Vimy, plaster models of the battlefield were constructed, and every officer and OR studied them.<sup>634</sup> In addition, soldiers were guided over taped courses in which routes and pathways were outlined on terrain similar to that of the upcoming attack.<sup>635</sup> One regimental historian described this battle practice as “arduous training” for the Vimy operation, which also included thorough explanations as to what was expected of each unit and individual. Just as important events require practices and controlled run-throughs, members of the PPCLI remembered that reconnaissance, training, and “meticulous rehearsal”<sup>636</sup> contributed materially to the success at Vimy. And though it was risky to do so, maps of the sector with unit dispositions, tentative objectives, and other important features, as well as aerial photos, were distributed to the lower echelons of the military hierarchy by mid-February.<sup>637</sup> This allowed even more time for the dissemination of important information and the proper preparation and planning of the complex operation that was the attack on Vimy Ridge.

The preparations went beyond the material, however. For any large-scale military operation, it was important for the troops to have the right frame of mind going into action, and to believe that their participation would positively contribute to objectives. To this end, the leadership had a duty to impress upon all ranks the reality of the situation, and be honest about what they would encounter, without intimidating them. In a sense,

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<sup>634</sup> Reid, ed., *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 143; Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 157 and Bercuson, *The Patricias*, 96.

<sup>635</sup> Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 208. The PPCLI, moreover, was engaged in thorough training and preparation for Vimy, which included practice over models and taped courses. PPCLI Archives, 34 (8) – 8, General Operations, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, Vimy.

<sup>636</sup> PPCLI Archives, World War I Battles, File #: 16 (20) - 1, Section 10: Vimy Ridge. In addition to these preparations, there was much explanation and practice prior to the attack itself. The success was based on “the faith they had in this plan, every detail of which had been explained to and practised by them.” The men knew the ground and the objectives as well. Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 212.

<sup>637</sup> Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 206 and Bercuson, *The Patricias*, 96.

the psychological preparation was as important as the material preparation.<sup>638</sup> This psychological preparation oftentimes took the form of expressions of confidence in the soldiers and their ability to overcome the obstacles in their way. Prior to the attack the GOC 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade visited each of his Battalions (the 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, and 31<sup>st</sup>) for some final words of encouragement and reassurance.<sup>639</sup> This personal, paternalistic touch was intended to be inspiring and comforting for the troops preparing for the assault. And the men were also given a hot meal and some rest leading up to the attack, which helped as well. In this type of preparation, the role of chaplains and padres was indispensable. Captain Frank Buck of the Canadian Chaplain Service, for instance, recalled prayers and hymns prior to the attack acting as a sort of spiritual and psychological preparation, steeling the men for the coming storm.<sup>640</sup> Conversely, however, too much reflection or rumination prior to a large-scale attack could also be detrimental. One veteran recalled that before Vimy he and nearly everyone else were “mainly thinking of whether I might be killed or wounded,”<sup>641</sup> which could be demoralizing at the worst possible moment. Ideally, the high command and officer corps would seek to inculcate a positive attitude amongst the troops, and a “spirit of confident expectation” during preparation.<sup>642</sup> The soldiers needed confidence in the attack plan, their leaders, the system of resupply and

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<sup>638</sup> With both the French and Russian Army in 1917, the substantial gap between the orders, rhetoric, and attitude of the high commands with the reality on the ground caused serious disciplinary, morale, and motivational problems. In the case of the French, the mutinies of 1917 represented a serious threat to the authority of French leadership, whereas the revolutions in Russia swept aside the old Tsarist system entirely and eventually led to withdrawal from the war itself.

<sup>639</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4688, Folder 42, File 20, 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade, April 1917, ‘Unit Narrative, Operations Vimy Ridge.’

<sup>640</sup> The chaplains played an important role regarding the morale of the soldiers, prior to, during, and after attacks. Chaplains held Easter services before the attack, but also worked at field ambulances, conducted battlefield burials, worked in the tunnels, helped with MOs and stretcher-bearers, established coffee stalls for wounded and those marching into and out of the line, ran canteens, etc. Their work was invaluable. LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4666, Vimy Ridge, Canadian Chaplain Service, Report – ‘During Vimy Operations’ and Volume 4664, Extracts – Captain Frank H. Buck. The historian of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, moreover, argued that both physical and mental preparations prior to battle were key. Bernier, *The Royal 22e Regiment*, 55.

<sup>641</sup> Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 225. See also Cate, ed., *A Soldier’s Memoir of World War I*, 59 and Teed, ed., *Uncle Cy’s War*, 12. And James Adams wrote that “this is the most trying thing imaginable as it is better not to have time to think of the possible consequences of what is to come.” Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 138. Bourke also argued that imagination can contribute to soldiers “going all to pieces.” Those who could imagine their own death very vividly might therefore become paralysed by fear. Bourke, *Fear*, 216. And imagination is in part a “generator of ideas,” and that imagination “creates potentiality, and often creates the very means whereby potentiality is brought into actuality.” David Bakan, “Some Philosophical Propadeutics toward a Psychology of War,” in *The Psychology of War and Peace: The Image of the Enemy*, ed. by Robert W. Rieber (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1991), 57.

<sup>642</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, Historical Records, ‘Synopsis of Operations.’

medical evacuation, in their weapons, and, ultimately, in themselves and their ability to seize the objectives.

The final aspect of preparation was the stockpiling of supplies, and the distribution of equipment to those taking part in the assault.<sup>643</sup> The accumulation of important equipment and supplies needed for a set-piece attack, on a fortified position like Vimy, began months in advance. The CASC and infantry quartermasters worked in conjunction with their British counterparts to ensure that supplies were ordered, transportation arranged, and the paperwork was in order. Planners and staff had to ensure adequate supplies of ammunition (in dumps), water, and military stores, and for the establishment of supply refilling points.<sup>644</sup> Plans and routes for bringing forward supplies during the attack were also arranged, and an emphasis placed on ensuring that extra rations were provided for the troops.<sup>645</sup> A dearth of supplies, food, or clean water could undermine even the strongest and most steadfast of soldiers, imperilling an otherwise well-prepared attack.

And immediately before the attack was launched on the morning of 9 April, troops awaiting the order to proceed were busy with last-minute checks and preparations, and were to assemble in silence. For the infantry, rifles would have to be cleaned and loaded, with plenty of ammunition and bayonets fixed for the attack.<sup>646</sup> The thorough training, preparations, and instructions issued for the attack on Vimy illustrate the enormous complexity of the operation.<sup>647</sup> These preparations also served to help stave off the worst

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<sup>643</sup> The troops were equipped with supplies such as Mills bombs, flares, shovels, picks, wire-cutters, S.O.S. signals, iron rations, ammunition (170 rounds for small arms), sandbags, and water. See LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4688, Folder 42, File 20, 6<sup>th</sup> C.I.B., April 1917, Unit Narrative, 'Operations Vimy Ridge;' RG 9 III C1, Volume 3845, Folder 50, File 5, Vimy, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division ("B" Division), 'Summary' and LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3845, Folder 49, File 5, Vimy Operations, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, Instructions for Brigades, 'Dress and Equipment.'

<sup>644</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3846, Folder 51, File 5, 'Report on Operations of Canadian Corps against Vimy' and Beadon, *The Royal Army Service Corps*, 132.

<sup>645</sup> Ibid, Folder 52, File 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Division Report on Vimy Operations, 'Willerval-Arleux and Fresnoy Operations.'

<sup>646</sup> Ibid, Folder 50, File 5, Vimy, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division ("B" Division), 'Summary.' And at Hill 70 in August 1917, the attacking infantry were loaded down with even more weight in the form of weapons, clothing, and equipment. Each soldier was expected to carry a gas mask or SBR, helmet, at least 120 rounds of small arms ammunition, two No. 5 Mills hand bombs (grenades), two flares, three sandbags, one iron ration, one water bottle and "special parties" had to carry even more, such as wire-cutters, S.O.S. rockets, entrenching tools, etc. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3851, Folder 64, File 3, 'Instructions for the Offensive Hill 70 – July 1917.'

<sup>647</sup> Instructions issued to the 1<sup>st</sup> Division indicated all the myriad aspects that planners and staff officers would have to be aware of in an operation of this complexity. There were instructions for: artillery, communications, MGs, engineers, assaulting troops, tram lines, dumps, water, medical aspects, battle stops, POWs, salvage and burials, craters in no



effects of embryonic war weariness. Plans and thorough preparations were not designed to counter war weariness, but they had this unintended effect nonetheless.<sup>648</sup>

## The Battle of Vimy Ridge, Arras, and other Operations

Justification for the attack on Vimy began with the fact that it was an important position, in an important sector of the Western Front. The Ridge was key to the French city of Arras and the Douai Plain, and it was also an important feature of German defensive positions in the theatre.<sup>649</sup> After all the preparations, training, and preparatory bombardment, the attack on Vimy Ridge itself began at 5:30 am on the morning of 9 April, 1917. In terms of dispositions, the Canadian infantry were organised with the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division on the left (or northwest end) of the line, and then the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions in the centre of the line, and the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division on the right (or southeast) end of the line.<sup>650</sup> Nearby British units also helped bolster the attack and provided much needed support and firepower.<sup>651</sup> But the main attack would be in the centre of the line, conducted by the Canadians there.

To better understand these dispositions, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division will be examined more closely. At Vimy, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division attacked with infantry of two leading brigades, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigades, with the 1<sup>st</sup> in reserve. Each brigade in turn attacked with three battalions, and one in reserve. The 2<sup>nd</sup> CIB sent in the 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 10<sup>th</sup> Battalions, with the 8<sup>th</sup> in reserve, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade slated the 15<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalions for the attack, with the 13<sup>th</sup> in reserve. After the first objective was reached (the 'Black Line'), the next two objectives were assaulted with the reserve brigade, the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, and the 1<sup>st</sup>, 3<sup>rd</sup>,

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man's land, reliefs, transport, maps, preparation and planning of RAPs, collecting posts, advanced and main dressing stations, evacuation routes and plans, battle and straggler stops, and collecting posts. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3845, Folder 49, File 4, Vimy Operations, "X" Division (1<sup>st</sup> Canadian), 'Instructions.'

<sup>648</sup> In the final months of the war, on the other hand, the Canadians would not be granted such comprehensive preparations, which contributed the onset and development of war weariness in that period.

<sup>649</sup> Prior to April 1917 there were three separate battles for the Ridge, and in 1915 the French alone lost nearly 150,000 troops in a "futile attempt to retake" the position. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War*, 234-237. British C-in-C Douglas Haig also saw value in Vimy, and assigned the job of seizing the Ridge to Henry Home's First British Army.

<sup>650</sup> Cook, *Shock Troops*, 95.

<sup>651</sup> To the south/right of the Canadians were the British 51<sup>st</sup>, 34<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions, just north of the town of Arras itself. Other British units were placed south and east of the Arras railway, and south of the Scarpe River. For a map and unit dispositions at Vimy Ridge and Arras, see Neiberg, *Military Atlas of World War I*, 83.

and 4<sup>th</sup> Battalions.<sup>652</sup> By the end of the attack, all brigades of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division were used in the assault and consolidation operations at Vimy, though not all at once or at the same time. In another area, a brigade of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division used its battalions a bit differently, with two sent into the attack, one kept in reserve, and one battalion used as “moppers up” and for carrying parties.<sup>653</sup>

The story of the successful Canadian attack on Vimy Ridge has been told by different historians, participants and others in the years since April 1917,<sup>654</sup> so there is little sense in covering this well-trod ground here. To better understand the problems facing the troops at Vimy, however, a closer examination of some difficult aspects will be examined. Two geographic and defensive features of the Ridge, ‘The Pimple’ and Hill 145, provided the attackers with extra problems beyond those typical of First World War attacks. These positions directly contributed to the problematic assaults on soldier morale, combat motivation, and endurance, but thorough training, all-arms cooperation, and effective supply management helped overcome these issues. These two positions offered the stoutest German resistance to the attack, and both had the potential to compromise the attack at Vimy. These positions were ultimately overcome, but at high cost.

At the most northerly section of the Canadian line, the terrain rose even above the heights of Vimy to a geographic point colloquially referred to as ‘The Pimple.’ This was in the sector tasked to the 4<sup>th</sup> Division, and lay between Souchez and Givenchy-en-Gohelle. This position dominated the surrounding areas, and with excellent vantage points the German defenders could rain fire down on the attackers. The 4<sup>th</sup> Division, moreover, was the most recent addition to the Corps, and though was composed of some seasoned units, many of its troops were experiencing sustained combat for the first time. To make matters worse, the weather of early 1917 was not conducive to complicated military operations. The cloud cover and precipitation meant little to no visibility for

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<sup>652</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3844, Folder 48, File 7, ‘Vimy Scheme;’ Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 544-545, Appendix “B;” Chartrand, *The Canadian Corps in World War I*, 14 and Cook, *Shock Troops*, 95.

<sup>653</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3844, Folder 48, File 7, ‘Vimy Scheme.’

<sup>654</sup> Some good works on Vimy Ridge, and with various perspectives, include: Ted Barris, *Victory at Vimy: Canada Comes of Age April 9-12, 1917* (Toronto: Thomas Allen Publishers, 2008); Tim Cook, *Vimy: The Battle and the Legend* (Toronto: Allen Lane Canada, 2017) and Geoff Hayes et al., eds., *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007).

aircraft, and there were accounts of both rain and snow during the attack itself.<sup>655</sup> A General Staff officer stated that the “very trying weather has imposed a severe strain on our troops and has considerably retarded progress.”<sup>656</sup> Military combat is stressful and difficult in the most ideal conditions, and inclement weather only added to the complexity and strain of this operation. The 10<sup>th</sup> CIB was originally tasked with seizing ‘The Pimple,’ but the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade was forced to take over from the 10<sup>th</sup>. One problem was that the soldiers of the 11<sup>th</sup> were less familiar with this sector of the line, and because of the urgency of the situation and the need for haste – the position was causing problems for units in other parts of the line and impeding progress – there were no written orders issued, only verbal.<sup>657</sup> Nevertheless, despite difficulties and the intense strain imposed on the troops of multiple brigades, the position was seized and consolidated.

The feature of the Ridge known as Hill 145 also imposed substantial strain on the attacking troops. Units of the 11<sup>th</sup> CIB were tasked with the capture of Hill 145, as well as the “labyrinth of trenches” which converged on this position. In the end the CO of the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Brigadier-General Victor Odlum, was forced to use all the battalions under his command in the attack. Ultimately the 102<sup>nd</sup> Battalion “went forward with characteristic dash”<sup>658</sup> and eventually seized the position. This comment on the attitude and morale of the soldiers, of their ‘characteristic dash,’ allows us to consider the veracity of comments on combat.<sup>659</sup> The men of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Battalion were often, if not always, flush with morale and enthusiastic to go forward in battle or ‘over the top.’ The truth, however, is often

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<sup>655</sup> An account by Philip Gibbs referred to poor weather and rain. The Official Announcement by the CWRO, moreover, referred to three waves of an infantry attack, a rolling barrage, and snow. Horne and Austin, eds., *Source Records of the Great War: Volume V – 1917*, 154 and 159.

<sup>656</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 4, April 1917, Canadian Corps (General Staff), Unit Narrative, ‘Communique’ 18 April 1917, report ‘The Capture of Vimy Ridge,’ and ‘Intelligence Report,’ 27 April 1917.

<sup>657</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4689, Folder 44, File 10, 10<sup>th</sup> C.I.B., April 1917, Unit Narrative, Vimy, Arleux, Fresnoy, ‘A Summary of Operations.’

<sup>658</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4689, Folder 45, File 1, 11<sup>th</sup> C.I.B., Historical Records, ‘Synopsis of Operations.’

<sup>659</sup> Problematically, during the war itself commentaries and operational reports were often written to highlight the positive aspects, whilst downplaying the negative. This also explains the tendency to ignore, sanitise, or neglect to fully explore more unseemly, yet realistic, aspects of the war, pertaining to myriad issues such as VD, the killing of prisoners, shell shock, alcoholism, looting, theft and the like. And sometimes these accounts of combat were downright fanciful. The regimental historian of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, for instance, wrote that the men attacking at Vimy advanced “stolidly and imperturbably; indifferent to the bullets which sang and hummed” all around them. J.A. Holland, *The Story of the Tenth Canadian Battalion: 1914-1917* (London: Charles and Son, n.d.), 29. Moreover, the report writers usually did not want their unit or its officers depicted in a negative light.

more nuanced and complicated than that; in operations at Vimy, for instance, the casualties, problems, and frustration related to the inability to seize objectives may have undermined the morale and compromised the attitude of attacking troops, forced to fight an intense battle, in a disadvantageous position, especially after the benefit of surprise was lost. However in this situation, the men of the 102<sup>nd</sup> Battalion did indeed seize ‘The Pimple,’ though it took longer than anticipated<sup>660</sup> and may not have reflected the rosy interpretation offered by Odlum and his staff. This also highlights the importance of hindsight and historical analysis, especially in fleshing out ideas and trends that may not have been discernable to contemporary participants and observers. War weariness is certainly one of those ideas that was not fully understood at the time, but historians can now gain a better understanding of it with careful research and reflection.

The capture of the strong defensive positions on Vimy did not herald the end of the battle for Canadian and British troops involved, however. After these objectives were seized, the participants were required to ensure the safety of the battlefield by ‘mopping up’ the area and neutralising any remaining pockets of resistance. Prisoners were collected, defensive positions cleared, and the area made safe for additional troops. This phase was also responsible for clearing out dangerous areas, and dealing with hazardous devices left behind by withdrawing German forces. The 2<sup>nd</sup> CIB, for instance, established a special party of infantry to investigate former German dugouts, especially for delayed-action mines and booby traps.<sup>661</sup> To make use of these shelters and defensive positions, they would have to be made safe for occupation first. Moreover as German doctrine dictated, immediate counterattacks were launched against the recently-lost positions at Vimy, and the Canadians would have to fight off these responses as well. Much work, however, needed to be done to prepare for these counterattacks. The capture of the Ridge

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<sup>660</sup> Horne, *Source Records of the Great War: Volume V*, 157.

<sup>661</sup> LAC, RH 9 III C1, Volume 3851, Folder 64, File 6, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, ‘Operational Order No. 212.’ Because of the hasty and “disorderly retreat” of the German forces, they left behind guns and were unable to destroy everything. Moreover, a report of one sector found the Germans had no time to “leave behind the cunning and fiendish traps in which the German mind delights.” The report noted, though, that there were fires and explosions in German positions which suggested withdrawals. Yet another report claimed that according to ‘prisoners’ statements,’ the Germans had mined many of the cellars they were using prior to retirement. See LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 4, April 1917, Canadian Corps (General Staff), Unit Narrative, ‘Communique’ 18 April 1917, report ‘The Capture of Vimy Ridge,’ and Intelligence Summaries, ‘Intelligence Report’ 27 April 1917.

was crucial to the overall operation, but the consolidation phase was just as, if not more, important than the actual capture of the Ridge. Destroyed defensive positions would have to be repaired, new trenches and communications networks established, fire-steps reversed, and other activities designed to make the newly-won positions impervious or at least defensible to countermeasures and attacks in the future. Units of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division took part in consolidation, and beginning on 13 April sent patrols to extend the line and gather intelligence. In addition, the units that had actually fought at Vimy were relieved in the line and subsequently went into support and reserve.<sup>662</sup> These exhausted soldiers certainly deserved a rest and respite from combat, especially if war weariness was to be checked. In this period immediately following the capture of Vimy one of the main goals was to advance and consolidate the gains made at much bloody cost. This “skillful patrol” fighting was important in this regard, as the Corps had to ensure hostile enemy units could not exploit defensive weaknesses. Consolidation entailed digging new trenches, repairing roads, bringing up guns, and advancing buried cable and communications.<sup>663</sup> And as an integral aspect of First World War defenses, copious amounts of barbed wire<sup>664</sup> were also positioned in front of the newly-capture Ridge.

As part of the larger Battle of Arras, the Corps assisted in further operations on the flanks of Vimy and in other sectors. To help with these attacks, Canadians brought up guns and stockpiled ammunition, contributed working parties, and even launched their own attacks on the British flanks on 23 April, and then again on 28 April. During the attack on 23 April,<sup>665</sup> however, instead of facing a beaten and demoralized enemy, the Canadians found themselves facing “determined resistance” by the German forces and “severe fighting” ensued.<sup>666</sup> This British attack made little headway against “stubborn resistance,” and therefore the success of the Canadian units was “the more remarkable”

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<sup>662</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4679, Folder 15, File 7, April 1917, Battalion Narratives, ‘Vimy.’

<sup>663</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 4, April 1917, Canadian Corps (General Staff), Unit Narrative, ‘Communique’ 18 April 1917, report ‘The Capture of Vimy Ridge,’ and Intelligence Summaries, Intelligence Report 27 April 1917. On 11 April a request was made for 500 additional trench boards, likely for shoring up defences in the process of consolidation. LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4533, File 6, ‘Army Book 152.’

<sup>664</sup> LAC, RH 9 III D1, Volume 4689, Folder 44, File 10, 10<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, April 1917, Unit Narrative, Vimy, Arleux, Fresnoy, ‘A Summary of Operations.’

<sup>665</sup> The Second Battle of the Scarpe. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 555-556, “Appendix F.”

<sup>666</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 7, ‘Operations of the Canadian Corps during April, May, and June.’

because of this.<sup>667</sup> Again on 28 April Canadians attacked and made an “important advance...at light cost, across ground that presented great difficulties to the attacking forces and corresponding advantages for the defence.” Local successes like this, in the wake of a victory like Vimy, against heavy odds, and in contrast to other non-Canadian units, served to reinforce the sense of Canadian difference, and ultimately, sense of superiority. These successes also acted as a mitigating factor for the onset of war weariness. If gains were made and tangible results achieved, and the thorough preparations and training for attacks seemed to pay off, war weariness might be kept at bay, at least for a time and provided rest followed these operations. In many ways the Canadians were fortunate at Vimy, though this luck would not last.

There were, however, operational aspects that assaulted the morale and motivation of the soldiers of the Corps, and thus contributed to war weariness. During the Canadian attack on Fresnoy, for example, its seizure was short-lived.<sup>668</sup> Losing key positions, especially in combination with the death and wounding of good and effective soldiers in the capture of these positions, could be demoralizing, to say the least. In these situations, the casualties suffered and stresses imposed on the surviving soldiers all seemed for naught – this was the nature of indecisive fighting on the Western Front.<sup>669</sup> Perhaps it is not surprising that the battle around Fresnoy resulted in the loss of the position. A Canadian Corps communique of 13 May 1917 made reference to “some of the bitterest hand-to-hand fighting which has yet occurred.”<sup>670</sup> This type of close-quarter fighting whipped up the emotions of participants, and the sheer violence involved was not easy to endure. Adrenaline and exhilaration only went so far in neutralising the negative effects of violence and trauma. And even for veterans and those who had previously been in combat, this was a new type of fighting, which required them to kill, neutralize, or capture their opponents at close-range. Moreover, the use of close-range weapons had a

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<sup>667</sup> Ibid. The Germans had also used the improving weather to strengthen their defences all along the line.

<sup>668</sup> The British unit which replaced the Canadians in the line subsequently lost this position. Ibid.

<sup>669</sup> This situation was again repeated in March and April 1918, as Entente forces fell back in the face of the German *Kaiserschlacht* offensives. One such position that was abandoned at this time was Passchendaele Ridge, captured at the cost of roughly 16,000 Canadian casualties, and 10,000 of others, just months prior.

<sup>670</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 7, April, May, June Summary of Operations, ‘Canadian Corps Communique,’ 13 May 1917.

deeper impact on attacking (and defending) troops; the need to drive the bayonet home, to shoot someone point blank, or to throw Mills bombs a few metres ensured this was a more intimate way of killing.<sup>671</sup> Looking into the eyes of your victim and witnessing their last breath was certainly traumatic, regardless of the loyalty, experience, comradeship, sense of duty, training, or any other factor associated with army service. Sooner or later soldiers broke down as a result. And the greater the distance between attacker and victim, the easier it was to kill – and to live with this killing. Range provided both emotional (psychological) and empathic distance,<sup>672</sup> and served as a kind of protection against trauma and negative consequences. Moreover, soldiers in battle can intellectually understand horror and what they are participating in, but emotionally, the distance allowed them to deny this to a great extent. At closer ranges, initial feelings of euphoria for having done your duty and contributed to group objectives quickly give way to guilt and remorse; having to kill at close-range served to increase the trauma on the attacking soldier. And in closer and especially hand-to-hand combat range, it was difficult to deny the humanity of your enemy, greatly increasing the chances of psychological trauma.<sup>673</sup> Though this psychological trauma is more often associated with shell shock and war neurosis, it was also a contributing factor toward war weariness, as soldiers who had not yet broken down from combat sought to avoid this all but inevitable fate. The health and well-being of the troops had a direct impact on their ability and willingness to endure.

In the end, German counterattacks eventually seized Fresnoy and drove the British and Canadians from the position. Some German POWs informed their captors that they were to re-capture lost positions at Fresnoy “at all costs, and were warned that they would not be relieved until they had done so.” This acted as a powerful motivator, and it is thus no wonder that the Germans were desperate and determined to effect an Allied withdrawal. The possession of the trenches and positions went back and forth, but in the

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<sup>671</sup> This was the subject of historian Joanna Bourke’s *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare* and is also a theme discussed by Grossman in *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*. In the latter book, moreover, Grossman examined killing at different ranges, including maximum and long-range, mid and hand grenade range, close range, edged-weapons range, hand-to-hand combat range, and killing at sexual range. See Section III, Chapters 2-7.

<sup>672</sup> Grossman, *On Killing*, 97-98.

<sup>673</sup> *Ibid*, 112, 119 and 122.

end the Germans retained control of Fresnoy. Both sides suffered heavy casualties, but the Germans also seemed “greatly demoralized”<sup>674</sup> by the end of the battle. This is important, as in an attritional and largely static struggle that was the war on the Western Front, even victorious and successful armies could become demoralized and have war weariness affect them, both individually and collectively.

Following the capture of Vimy and the First Battle of the Scarpe, the Corps was involved in operations designed to assist British attacks elsewhere, but more importantly to support French attacks to the southeast, and keep the pressure on the enemy.<sup>675</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, for example, participated in operations at Willerval-Arleux and at Fresnoy to straighten out the line after Vimy and to consolidate the area.<sup>676</sup> Trenches and lines needed were extended, flanks secured, and defensible positions attained. The actions and operations of the 1<sup>st</sup> CIB are instructive. The Brigade went into the Vimy attack on 9 April, and after its successful operation was relieved in the line. Following this, it was ordered “back into the line again on several tours of duty,” and were at the Battle of Fresnoy. After this attack there followed a period of “ordinary trench duty interspersed with periods of relief and rest”<sup>677</sup> until 15 August, when the attack on Hill 70 began. The Army attempted to minimise casualties and maintain the striking power and cohesion of units by rotating infantry units between the front line, support, and reserve trenches. The 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade was in the line for eight days, reserve for eight days, in support for eight days, and then back into the line for another tour of over a week.<sup>678</sup> Yet even while units were in ‘ordinary trench duty’ or in supposedly ‘quiet’ sectors, they were still exposed to the strains of war, and continued to suffer daily casualties.<sup>679</sup> This the army called ‘wastage,’ and it served to slowly bleed units to death. This also negatively impacted the

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<sup>674</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 7, April, May, June Summary of Operations, ‘Canadian Corps Communique,’ 13 May 1917.

<sup>675</sup> After Vimy the Corps was engaged in the operations at Second Scarpe, the attack on la Coulotte, Arleux, Third Scarpe (capture of Fresnoy), “affairs south of the Souchez River,” the capture of Avion, and the Battle of Hill 70. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 555-556, “Appendix F.”

<sup>676</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3846, Folder 52, File 1, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division Report on Vimy Operations, ‘Willerval-Arleux and Fresnoy Operations’ and LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3847, Folder 54, File 1, ‘Arleux-Acheville Operation.’

<sup>677</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4687, Folder 40, File 1, 1<sup>st</sup> C.I.B., Historical Records, document dated 7 June 1918.

<sup>678</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3849, Folder 60, File 4, ‘Proposed Relief of Brigades.’

<sup>679</sup> Steward, *An Infantryman on the Western Front*, 165 and Brandt, “Sky Above, Sea Below,” 38.



health and morale of individuals – there never seemed to be any genuine respite from the mortal dangers of duty,<sup>680</sup> and even careful and veteran soldiers could be killed by a stray shell or sniper, gas or air attack. The allotment of replacements certainly helped units sustain losses, but these troops were inexperienced, and perhaps unfamiliar with the traditions of the battalion. In the ranks new troops could compromise unit cohesion, and comradeship might also suffer with the loss of trusted leaders and friends; some veterans and ‘old hands’ simply did not trust new troops.<sup>681</sup> Moreover, by 1917 enlistment numbers were drying up, to say nothing of the declining medical standards for infantry combat service.<sup>682</sup>

And yet despite manpower issues the Corps did not remain idle during the spring and summer of 1917. Aside from the operations at Vimy, the Corps began preparations for Lens and Hill 70. The Battle of Hill 70, 15-25 August,<sup>683</sup> saw a preparatory phase between May and July, whereby the Corps began to threaten the German hold on the city of Lens. By June 1917, Canadian infantry were trying to maintain continuous and harassing pressure on the enemy, to prevent the enemy from thinning his line in this sector and sending reserves elsewhere; coordinated attacks with other forces were designed to put maximum pressure on the enemy. The Canadians were tightening their grip on Lens, or “rather the shattered remains of the city,” after all the destruction caused by artillery.<sup>684</sup> Other preparations included attacks southwest and west of the city (for

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<sup>680</sup> This war was unprecedented in terms of the stress imposed on the troops, as “soldiers were hardly ever completely out of danger, even in reserve areas.” This meant they wore down more quickly. Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 273.

<sup>681</sup> One soldier stated that he did not trust the new men in his unit, and simply hoped that they would not get killed or get the rest of the men killed. And the CO of the PPCLI argued that due to heavy casualties his unit was “short of men.” At Passchendaele they had to fill the NCO ranks with “inexperienced youngsters who do not know the job, either in or out of the line.” Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 255 and Christie, *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 331.

<sup>682</sup> Canada’s *Official History* outlined the appointments and enlistments in the CEF by month. The totals for each year are as follows: in 1914 59,144 soldiers and officers enlisted in the CEF; in 1915 158,859; by 1916 this had risen to 176,919; by 1917, however, the numbers were only 63,611 enlistments and appointments. The numbers for 1918 were better at 156,441, but this is misleading, as of this figure a total of 142,588 were “enlisted under the provisions of the Military Service Act.” Without these conscripts, the figure for 1918 would have been a mere 13,853, totally inadequate to deal with the enormous casualties suffered by the CEF, and especially the Corps as the war dragged on. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 546-548, Appendix “C.” For information on the declining standards of medical requirements, see Nic Clark, *Unwanted Warriors: The Rejected Volunteers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2015), especially Appendices A-C.

<sup>683</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 555-556, Appendix “F.”

<sup>684</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 7, ‘Operations of the Canadian Corps during April, May, and June’ and *Ibid*, Folder 7, File 9, June 1917, Unit Narratives.

instance on 28 June), followed by a “period of comparative quiet” used for the improvement of roads and communications, patrols, and the use of MGs and snipers in an effort to “let slip no opportunity to inflict casualties on the enemy.”<sup>685</sup> The nature of trench warfare and adherence to an attritional strategy ensured this. The lull in the fighting and preparatory phase was also used for counter-battery work, wire-cutting, and destructive artillery and gas bombardments on dumps, roads, and communications infrastructure. This thorough preparation suggested that the Corps and its staff officers had learned a great deal about how to deal with German defences, especially from the recent Vimy operations.

Despite the dissemination of lessons in both a top-down and bottom-up manner, the fight for Hill 70 was a bloody,<sup>686</sup> confused, and exhausting affair. There were, of course, many difficulties encountered by attacking troops. In July and especially August 1917, the infantry and other arms of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade were involved in “very desperate fighting”<sup>687</sup> both prior to, and during, the attack on Hill 70. Some of its constituent units were able to seize their objectives, despite heavy casualties which, over time, eroded their fighting power. In an attack on a single strongpoint, for example, three officers were killed trying to take the position.<sup>688</sup> The loss of leaders and officers was especially difficult for small units to deal with; they provided leadership and a sense of continuity, helped maintain unit traditions, and were the linchpin of cohesion. Soldiers often looked up to these leaders, and sought guidance and strength from them. The loss of a particularly well-liked officer or charismatic personality might very well demoralize an infantry unit when it needed strength and solidarity the most.<sup>689</sup> The lack of sufficient

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<sup>685</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 8, File 1, July 1917, Unit Narratives, ‘Operations of the Canadian Corps: July 1917.’ A Major-General of the British First Army praised plans, preparations, and the “soldierlike determination and devotion” as responsible for the capture and retention of Hill 70. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3850, Folder 61, File 2, ‘Army File 7-7-17 to 21-9-17.’

<sup>686</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Divisions suffered roughly 3,500 casualties on 15 August alone. Bercuson, *The Patricias*, 104.

<sup>687</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4125, Folder 5, File 1, Operations, Hill 70, July and August 1917, including ‘Narrative of Operations.’

<sup>688</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>689</sup> At Vimy Ridge, for example, in the first six minutes 10 of the 11 officers in the attack were hit. Duguid, *History of the Canadian Grenadier Guards*, 142. The strong sense of comradeship also helps explain why some soldiers refused transfers to safe or ‘bomb-proof’ jobs, or felt out of place while on leave. The loss of officers and comrades hurt morale as well. See Arthur, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, 200; Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 75; Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*, 2; Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 180-181; Cane, ed., *The*

communications networks, moreover, meant that it was exceedingly difficult to bring up the required amount of ammunition and supplies to sustain the attack.

Perhaps it was some consolation for the attacking troops that “very heavy casualties were inflicted on the enemy during this fighting.”<sup>690</sup> It was perceived that this would compensate for the heavy casualties and loss of trusted leaders and close friends in combat. This comment also indicates that even successful and ultimately victorious armies suffered appalling loss of life and other casualties, and the enormous difficulties in overcoming entrenched and prepared defences, especially against a committed and alert enemy. Moreover, after the war of movement and flanking attacks broke down in 1914, many attacks were designed to inflict casualties on the enemy, as well as erode their *will to fight*, even if they were officially designated as breakthrough attacks. By late 1917, though the Germans had suffered hundreds of thousands of casualties already, the Entente was still a long way from defeating the enemy’s armies in the field. The question seemed to be, which side would break first?

The operations of the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion also illustrate the enormous difficulties facing attacking troops, and the stresses of combat which, over time, eroded the will to fight and endure. The 27<sup>th</sup> suffered casualties<sup>691</sup> even before the assault began, which reduced the numbers in each attacking party, and therefore diminished the striking power of these units. Early casualties also had the potential to negatively affect the morale of the troops; things seemed to be going awry even before the operation began, and this was not a good portent for things to come. The 27<sup>th</sup> had a tough task, and faced German defences and concrete-fortified houses, stoutly defended by MGs, snipers, and bombing parties. Hard fighting and heavy casualties were the order of the day, and due to persistent and strong counterattacks, the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion was ultimately forced to withdraw from Cinnabar

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*Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes*, 235 and Christie, *The Memoir of John Harold Becker*, 205; the Letter of Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, 13 August 1918, at <http://www.shiawasseehistory.com/cox.html>.

<sup>690</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4125, Folder 5, File 1, Operations, Hill 70, July and August 1917, including ‘Narrative of Operations.’

<sup>691</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4125, Folder 5, File 2, Operations, Hill 70, 27<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, August 1917, including ‘Narrative of Operations.’

Trench.<sup>692</sup> And in an attempt to put a positive spin on the operation, the author of the Battalion Narrative wrote that

The spirit and drive shown by all ranks during this operation which included the hardest and most difficult fighting ever encountered by this Battalion was conclusive evidence of the confidence of the men in themselves and their Officers...[and that] the cheerfulness and untiring energy

of carrying parties allowed the infantry to carry on and repel counterattacks.<sup>693</sup> This confidence in the officers, however, might very well have been shaken after realising that not all objectives could be seized, and certain attacks ended in failure. When the 27<sup>th</sup> was withdrawn from the line it had suffered 306 casualties, including fourteen officers, a substantial percentage of the nominal strength of a battalion. The unit also captured forty-one German POWs.<sup>694</sup> But were these captures worth the hundreds of casualties to experienced veterans? This is a question that many soldiers perhaps dwelled on as the units were withdrawn to lick their wounds, and begin the process of reconstituting the battalion from the left out of battle (LOB) group. And despite the manpower advantage of the Entente, an attritional strategy would need to inflict far more casualties on the Germans than suffered by the attacking forces.<sup>695</sup> This could not be guaranteed.

In tandem with the problems of the 27<sup>th</sup>, each company of the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion had its own difficulties in the attack on Hill 70. These problems, both acute and cumulative, contributed to the onset of war weariness as well. “A” Company, for instance, discovered that mist, dust, and smoke obscured the battlefield and increased the problems for attacking troops.<sup>696</sup> The training, preparation, and issuance of maps prior to the attack were for naught if the troops were unable to see the terrain they were to be attacking over. Shell craters, outdated maps, and the destruction of landmarks all exacerbated this

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<sup>692</sup> This was an important position and objective of the attack. Ibid and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4125, Folder 5, File 1, Operations, Hill 70, July and August 1917, including ‘Narrative of Operations.’

<sup>693</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4125, Folder 5, File 2, Operations, Hill 70, 27<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Battalion, August 1917, including ‘Narrative of Operations.’

<sup>694</sup> Ibid.

<sup>695</sup> One historian argued that “Germany succeeded far better than the Entente in inflicting ‘maximum slaughter at minimum cost.’” Ferguson, *Pity of War*, 336-337.

<sup>696</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4125, Folder 5, File 3, Operations Hill 70, Report on 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion, including ‘Narrative of Operations.’

problem. These environmental factors also contributed to the enormous confusion on the battlefield, and this and uncertainty could be a disorienting and stressful. This, combined with a sense of helplessness to remedy the situation, were contributing factors toward war weariness. For “B” Company of the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the problems facing the unit served to compromise the ability –and perhaps willingness – of the troops to seize objectives. On this front, for instance, the lack of Mills bombs, small arms ammunition, and equipment imperilled the advance. And as the author of one report stated clearly, “...a retirement took place shortly afterwards, owing to failure of supplies.” This comment directly linked the failure of logistics with failure on the battlefield, but this is also perhaps reductive, as combat is complex and can be explained by both material and non-material factors. Nevertheless, not having the proper equipment and in sufficient numbers could drive a wedge between the planners of attacks, and those actually ordered to carry them out. Supply problems were often well beyond the control of staff officers and COs, but for the ‘poor bloody infantry’ at the sharp end, this might be tantamount to abandonment. Heavy casualties and a lack of sufficient reinforcements could also stymie even the best planned attack. Ultimately, “B” Company was forced to retire and fall back, which no doubt undermined the already-fragile morale of the unit.

The experiences of “C” Company were much the same: heavy casualties and sustained attacks on morale, combat motivation, and endurance. “C” Company was ordered to move up and join another unit to assist in tackling a particularly difficult position, but there was a failure in seizing objectives. Owing to heavy shelling and the absence of cover, one officer explained that “it was unnecessary at that time to take the risk of moving the company through very heavy shell fire,”<sup>697</sup> despite orders to do so. This suggests that the problems encountered on the battlefield and the mortal danger facing the troops induced a sense of reluctance or unwillingness to follow orders to the letter. This may have been prudent, but the high command expected bold attacks and the adherence to plans, regardless of the circumstances on the ground. This also suggested a measure of agency exercised by officers, who decided that the casualties in this case were

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<sup>697</sup> Ibid.

simply not worth the potential gains. The Lens and Hill 70 operations were designed to keep pressure on the Germans, inflict casualties on them, and ultimately seize all objectives in the assault. Attacks on 21 August were planned to seize, consolidate, and hold Green Crassier and the city of Lens. The problem, however, was that the German defenders were keen on withstanding the attacks and were not giving up Lens. Counterattacks, moreover, forced the retirement of some Canadian units. And yet, “nevertheless, our progress continues and at very moderate cost to ourselves the circle is being drawn ever tighter and tighter around Lens,” though the understanding of ‘very moderate cost’ might have been disputed by the infantry actually take part in these costly attacks. In the week of 23-30 August, for instance, the Corps suffered a total of 2,962 casualties, including 68 officers and 2,894 ORs.<sup>698</sup> These casualties, with little appreciable gain, could reinforce a sense of futility amongst the infantry, no doubt contributing to the war weariness simmering below the surface of both individuals and military units.

In addition to the Battles of Vimy Ridge and Hill 70/Lens undertaken by the Corps between April and August of 1917, Canadian units were also engaged in smaller-scale raids, patrols, and other actions. These sought to prepare troops for further combat, to test out new weapons systems, equipment, and refine tactics; to assess and gain intelligence on German defences; to support flanking units; and to keep the enemy off balance and inflict casualties at every opportunity. The problem, of course, was that these raids and patrols, even if executed perfectly, still resulted in casualties for the Canadians. Between 28 June and 5 July, for example, consolidation operations, raids, patrols, sniping, and trench mortar (TM) activity resulted in forty-two officer and 1,029 OR casualties.<sup>699</sup> Raids on German lines opposite the Canadian front were also designed to inculcate the offensive spirit, and to contribute positively to the development of morale. Successful raids could reinforce a sense of confidence, assurance, and trust, whereas unsuccessful raids could result in a sense of demoralization; the key question being, were

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<sup>698</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Folder 8, File 2, August 1917, Summary of Operations, Hill 70, ‘Report on, and Summary of.’

<sup>699</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 8, File 1, July 1917, Unit Narratives, Summary of Operations.

these casualties worth it? Could the High Command justify these casualties for limited military intelligence and intangible gains on a relatively narrow front? On the evening of 22/23 July, a large raid was launched with the intention of destroying enemy dugouts and capturing POWs. A report on the raid indicated that “our casualties were very light, being little greater than the number of prisoners captured,” suggesting that on balance, these casualties were in fact worthwhile. But unless the experience or intelligence gained proved decisive, there was no way these types of costly attacks could win the war by themselves. This kind of cold calculation contributed to the onset of war weariness after years of attritional warfare on the Western Front.

If raids were specially designed actions launched through No Man’s Land and into the enemy lines with clear purposes and objectives, patrols were more regular operations to monitor and, if need be, defend certain sections of the front. In this period, there were times when patrols were sent out every night, to observe No Man’s Land and to gather intelligence.<sup>700</sup> In the immediate aftermath of Vimy, these patrols were often launched in conjunction with consolidation operations, designed to ensure German counterattacks and hostile parties were kept at bay. Patrols also served to keep the enemy off-balance on the opposite side of the line. By May 1917 these patrols were having a direct impact on enemy activity. Patrols in connection to the Arleux and Fresnoy operations, for example, fired on German communications networks in the evening, and kept a close watch on enemy guns and defensive positions. And patrols launched into No Man’s Land itself meant that “the enemy appeared to be very nervous and threw several bombs in front of his own posts.”<sup>701</sup> Because of these aggressive patrols, Canadian outposts could be pushed forward and connected up with trenches to assist with the defence of the area.

The experience of the 11<sup>th</sup> CIB in June 1917 illustrates the daily stresses facing the soldiers. In order to maintain the initiative and prevent German working parties from operating too freely, units were involved daily in artillery, TM, and MG firing. And though there is some historical evidence suggesting daily firing took on a more theatrical,

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<sup>700</sup> Ibid, Volume 4679, Folder 15, File 7, April 1917, Battalion Narratives, ‘Vimy.’

<sup>701</sup> Ibid, Volume 4680, Folder 18, File 14, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, May 1917, ‘Intelligence Summary for Arleux-Fresnoy Operations.’

unenthusiastic, or perfunctory element in certain sectors and at certain times,<sup>702</sup> these hostile actions did contribute to frequent casualties and daily wastage. Snipers and distance weapons, such as rifle-grenades, ensured that there was little respite for a soldier during a tour in the frontline trenches, even during supposedly quiet periods or in quiet sectors of the line.<sup>703</sup> Boredom and monotony, routine and work, combined with periods of mortal danger and trauma, characterised soldier life during trench warfare. And it was this lack of genuine rest for regular soldiers that wore so heavily on the troops, and contributed to cumulative stress experienced by all combatants during the war. These patrols had multiple functions; they could act in both a reconnaissance and offensive role. Patrols were at times tasked, for example, with preparing and cutting gaps in enemy wire, often a prelude to subsequent infantry operations. The 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade in the week ending 13 June conducted several raids and minor operations, capturing seventy-two German POWs and three MGs, and destroying other enemy mortars and MGs in the process. In addition, Canadian raiding parties also bombed or destroyed sixty enemy dugouts, at times with mobile charges. Perhaps most important, according to German prisoners artillery and attacks cost them roughly 460 casualties in this period alone.<sup>704</sup> Inflicting casualties and destroying weapons and equipment were worthwhile, but whether the information gained during these raids was worth the casualties is another question. This reality also reflected the limitations of Entente strategy, the problems inherent in trench warfare, the power of the defensive, and the fighting prowess of the German Army.

Both acute and cumulative stresses contributed to the onset and eventual manifestation of war weariness on both an individual and collective level, especially after years of attritional and indecisive warfare. Private Fraser of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, for

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<sup>702</sup> See, for instance, the concept of the ‘Live and Let Live System’ in Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980). Moreover, at Vimy a captured German prisoner stated that “there is a silent compact among the men to shoot as little as possible,” likely enacted in an attempt to avoid retaliation. The prisoner also spoke of “deliberately” neglecting to pull pins out before firing bombs, presumably hand bombs or grenades. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3845, Folder 23, File 4, Intelligence summaries, April 1917, ‘Information from Other Sources,’ including heading ‘Laxity of Discipline.’

<sup>703</sup> The Grenadier Guards in one sector, for instance, suffered 21 killed and 36 wounded in 30 days, mostly from shelling and sniping, though this was “rated as a quiet front.” Duguid, *History of the Canadian Grenadier Guards*, 137.

<sup>704</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4689, Folder 45, File 6, 11<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, June 1917, Unit Narratives, ‘Summary of Operations, Week ending 13 June.’



instance, wrote on 9 April that the experience at Vimy “proved a trying ordeal and called up all the stamina and perseverance which the body and mind could muster.”<sup>705</sup> Infantry unit accounts, in the form of war diaries and regimental histories, provide the historian with an understanding of how these groups experienced and overcame the difficulties inherent in combat. Colonel Murray, for instance, outlined some of the difficulties facing the soldiers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, which, over time, undermined the morale, endurance, combat motivation, and military effectiveness of this unit. These included the fact that heavy casualties and unforeseen difficulties could slow, and even imperil, the entire attack. Problems during the advance led to much anxiety on the part of the troops, and the loss of respected leaders and officers could be devastating and demoralizing.<sup>706</sup> When certain individuals came to be seen as symbols of the regimental spirit, these losses weighed particularly on others in the battalion. Murray admitted regarding the loss of one particularly well-liked member of the team that “the unit without ‘Tubbie’ was simply not the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion.”<sup>707</sup> These losses undermined unit cohesion, contributed to demoralisation, and put added pressure on the surviving soldiers of the unit. And over time, the loss of these indispensable personnel was a direct contributing factor to the onset of war weariness.

The experience of the PPCLI also provides some insight into the difficulties inherent in offensive operations at this phase of the war. Even with thorough preparation and precautions taken to preserve secrecy, there were concerns that the Germans would be prepared for the attacking troops. There were worries that “leakage of information through documents falling into the hands of the enemy or of enemy agents”<sup>708</sup> would reveal the objectives, start date, or plans of attack. In the end, these concerns were largely

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<sup>705</sup> Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 263.

<sup>706</sup> Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 166, 169, 180. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, in five days of operations, suffered 112 casualties, with one officer and 27 ORs killed, and three officers and 73 ORs wounded.

<sup>707</sup> Ibid, 180-181. The use of a nickname also suggests familiarity, camaraderie, and shared hardships among this primary group. During and following battles soldiers grieved for fallen friends and comrades. These losses could also render units “handicapped” and in a “crippled condition.” See Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 105-106, 124; McGrath, *World War I Diary of William Ball*, 147 and Teed, ed., *The First World War Letters of Major Cyrus F. Inches*, 252. In the PPCLI prior to the attack on Vimy officers were promoted through the ranks, and wounded men were returned to the unit from hospital and convalescent centres. Because of these factors, unit “traditions were maintained,” key for the unit cohesion and continuity. PPCLI Archives, 16-1, World War I Battles, File #: 16(20)-1, Section 10: Vimy Ridge.

<sup>708</sup> PPCLI Archives, Sub-Series 34, 34(3)-5, Battalion Orders, 1917.

groundless, but highlight the difficulties in organising such a complex operation, the uncertainties, and the myriad things that could go wrong right up until zero hour, to say nothing of the problems that could materialise after the attack was launched.

Nevertheless, according to unit records the assault was “a model of” a limited set-piece attack, that succeeded due to thorough reconnaissance, training, and “meticulous rehearsal.”<sup>709</sup> Moreover, the new flexibility in tactics, and especially fire and movement,<sup>709</sup> allowed the companies of the PPCLI to carry the day. And yet, even in a successful attack like that of the Princess Pats, casualties were inevitable. By the time the unit was withdrawn it had suffered 222 casualties, including eighty-three killed. In 1917 each battalion had a nominal strength of roughly 1,000 troops, and thus hundreds of casualties could have an impact on the performance of the unit out of all proportion to the actual numbers involved. The casualty list for 9/10 April, inclusive, also listed those who had died of wounds (six), were missing (ten), or other types of casualties. One wounded soldier George Blanchard, for example, was listed as invalided with Shell Shock.<sup>710</sup> This suggests that even in successful attacks, war neuroses and psychiatric casualties still occurred. Sometimes these numbers were staggering, too. The cumulative pressure placed on individuals, and the strains imposed on military units over time led to the onset of war weariness, but also the more debilitating and potentially permanent shell shock.

The experiences of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigades also provide some insight into the reality of fighting at Vimy. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, in the southern section of the line and attacking toward Thélus, suffered casualties to its infantry battalions (14<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> Battalions), MG companies, and TM batteries.<sup>711</sup> Despite these and the difficulties encountered, the Brigade and its constituent units were able to seize their objectives of the

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<sup>709</sup> PPCLI Archives, 16-1, World War I Battles, File #: 16(20)-1, Section 10: Vimy Ridge.

<sup>710</sup> Ibid, PPCLI Archives, Sub-Series 34, 34(3)-5, Battalion Orders, 1917, and George Green Blanchard, Regimental Number 474776, Attestation Paper found online at LAC website. <http://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=48228>

<sup>711</sup> The 14<sup>th</sup> Canadian Battalion was the Royal Montreal Regiment; the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders of Canada, out of Ontario; and the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion was the Canadian Scottish, of Manitoba. All three of these units had been in France since February of 1915. There were roughly 993 casualties for the 13<sup>th</sup> – 16<sup>th</sup> Battalions. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3846, Folder 51, File 4, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, ‘Operations Vimy,’ Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 544-545, Appendix “B,” and Chartrand, *The Canadian Corps*, 14.

Black and Red Lines,<sup>712</sup> and capture enemy positions and dugouts. Upon the capture of these, however, some important observations were made. The enemy, apparently, had been “well fed and cared for, and seem[ed] to have plenty of food, cigars, trench cookers,”<sup>713</sup> and other conveniences that made life in the trenches more bearable. This was often also in stark contrast to British trenches and positions. Reports and assurances that the Germans were suffering badly and lacking in morale might have been exaggerated, or perhaps applied only to certain units or sections of the line. Many of the dugouts captured, moreover, were of excellent design and construction, were deep and formidable; some even had electric lights. But instead of negatively affecting morale, reports indicated that “our troops are in good spirits...the enthusiasm and vim displayed were excellent.”<sup>714</sup> Understandably, this ‘enthusiasm’ might not have persisted had the attack not been so successful and swift. In later phases of the war heavy casualties and hard fighting, with little attendant military success, acted as a demoralizing force, greatly contributing to war weariness and other problems. In the words of the historian of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Germans made use of clever tactics, such as the use of gas and artillery barrages and feigned counterattacks, to undermine the ability and willingness of the attackers to attain their objectives. These tactics and ruses were a “policy well calculated to undermine fighting morale.” And yet, despite the opposition and heavy casualties suffered by the 16<sup>th</sup>, this “neither impaired Battalion morale nor depressed the spirits of the men;” the soldiers of the unit came to believe that “the gains [at Vimy] had justified the losses.”<sup>715</sup> But dissent, doubt, war weariness, and worse set in when this rational calculus failed and the soldiers started to believe that the fighting and heavy casualties *were no longer worth it*. At this point, the military reliability of both individual soldiers

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<sup>712</sup> Cook, *Shock Troops*, 95.

<sup>713</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3846, Folder 51, File 4, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, Operations Vimy.

<sup>714</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>715</sup> Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 217-219. Moreover, after action reports, lessons learned documents, and post-battle analyses often sought to justify the heavy casualties on the attacking troops by highlighting the territorial gains of the attack, or the prisoners and war material captured. A report on the operations at Lens/Hill 70, for instance, stated that the casualties were “not excessive,” though they did lose 887 evacuated, presumably wounded, by 15 August 1917. The report also stated that German POWs amounted to 9 officers and 230 ORs. And though these prisoners might be useful for intelligence purposes, the 239 prisoners taken was dwarfed by the number of Canadian wounded alone. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3850, Folder 61, File 1, ‘Summary of Operations.’

and entire units were called into question. Though there is a lack of substantive evidence for this at Vimy, it played a larger role in later operations, most notably at Third Ypres and during the final campaign of the war.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade at Vimy also suffered heavy casualties, but had some compensation as well. The Brigade suffered heavy casualties in only two days (8-10 April) of initial fighting, with 1,109 casualties. And after the early fighting at the Ridge, the Brigade suffered a further 218 casualties in the operations between 10 and 20 April. Brigade strength was 3,479 soldiers during the attack, meaning roughly 38% of the unit became a casualty.<sup>716</sup> These losses were (apparently) compensated for, however, by the captures made, including 779 POWs seized, five guns, eighteen MGs, nine minenwerfers, 975 rifles, three listening sets, and copious amounts of engineering material seized by the infantry. These were also tangible reminders of a successful attack, which could act as a buoy to morale and help offset the worst aspects of war weariness. It was compensating aspects, the capture of war material and objectives, and the casualties and suffering inflicted on the enemy,<sup>717</sup> which made these attacks seem worthwhile to the troops actually tasked with the assaults. The loss of a trusted leader or comrade could perhaps be made more bearable, and provided some consolation, if the objectives were seized and the enemy undermined, physically or psychologically. Of course everyone dealt with grief differently, but it would have been even worse if these casualties were suffered without the military successes. But did these local actions really contribute to the ultimate defeat of the German Army? Both propaganda and military policy dictated that Allied soldiers were informed the enemy was suffering from the attritional nature of the fighting, and the German Army itself was certainly but a pale shadow of its former strength. The Allied

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<sup>716</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 3846, Folder 51, File 2, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, 'Operations Vimy.'

<sup>717</sup> Indeed, some soldiers came to see the suffering and dying of German soldiers as an end in itself. There is anecdotal evidence and firsthand accounts, at the very least, of men who actually came to enjoy the fighting and killing. Sometimes, these men were driven by a sense of revenge, bloodlust, or based on the dehumanization of the enemy. The famous 'Billy' Bishop, for instance, remarked that "we love to see the Kaiser's proud Prussian running for cover like so many rants," or continued references to German ruses, treachery, tricks, or unsportsmanlike behaviour (pages 34, 39, 46, 58, 256) seemed to justify this hatred and penchant for revenge. He wrote, moreover, that "with hate in my heart" he dove at a German MG nest; that "to see an enemy going down in flames is a source of great satisfaction;" and that "Hun hatred had become a part of my soul." Bishop, *Winged Warfare*, 98, 101, 105. And Grossman argued that only approximately 2% of all soldiers could actually endure combat indefinitely, and even come to enjoy it. Grossman, *On Killing*, 179-185.

adoption of a defensive posture after the Third Battle of Ypres and the failure of the Cambrai attack<sup>718</sup> belied this view, however, and the fact that the German Army made substantial progress during the *Kaiserschlacht* offensives made it difficult to reconcile the reality on the ground with the rhetoric of the High Command. Losing a close friend to ‘the cause’ was difficult; but losing a close friend to a cause that seemed no nearer completion was more difficult still.<sup>719</sup>

The death of a close friend, or the heavy casualties suffered during operations as a matter of course, might have elicited a different response from soldiers, however. Instead of demoralization in response to the death of comrades, one might also respond in a way that actually encouraged subsequent aggressive behaviour. Numerous firsthand accounts included remarks related to wrath, and the desire to avenge fallen mates as a motivating factor and an impetus for behaviour.<sup>720</sup> This phenomenon was noted by serving infantry, as well as in other services and amongst other combat arms, such as the air services.<sup>721</sup> Though blood-lust and a desire for revenge might act as a motivator factor for combatants, it could also compromise decision-making and encourage reckless, undisciplined, even suicidal behaviour. This behaviour might very well reflect the war-weary soldier who was pushed to the edge, and decided that these actions were preferable to a continued existence under the status quo.<sup>722</sup> Boldness, aggression, and confidence can

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<sup>718</sup> Brock Millman, *Pessimism and British War Policy, 1916-1918* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 132; John Terraine, *The Western Front: 1914-1918* (London: Hutchinson & Co., 1964), 155; David Lloyd George, *War Memoirs - Volumes IV and V* (London: Ivor, Nicholson & Watson and The Chapel River Press, 1933); Churchill, *The World Crisis, 753-759* and Field-Marshal Sir William Robertson, *From Private to Field Marshal* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1921), 313-325.

<sup>719</sup> There was also the fear that the British leadership was callous and incompetent, making these losses particularly hard to swallow. There is also an historiographical trend that suggests British soldiers of the First World War were ‘Lions led by Donkeys,’ which is also related to the mud, bloody, folly, and futility thesis in the literature.

<sup>720</sup> One infantryman at Vimy wrote that rum and adrenaline could overwhelm the feelings of fear. This soldier wrote in a letter that “...fear never enters your mind. All you look for is [to] go ahead and *blood*. You just go *insane* and that is all.” The italics here are mine, to highlight his bloodlust and compromised decision-making. Climo, *Lively Letters from World War One*, 248. See also Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 250.

<sup>721</sup> The famed Canadian flyer William ‘Billy’ Bishop, for example, wrote that one of the main factors that allowed him to endure the incredible stresses and strains associated with flight and aerial combat was a desire for revenge and wrath. Moreover, avenging the death of comrades may have convinced many that their mates did not die wholly in vain. Bishop also mentioned being driven by revenge on more than one occasion in his memoir. See Bishop, *Winged Warfare*, 40, 98, 285. Another famous Canadian pilot also wrote that flying left the men both physically and emotionally drained. Raymond Collishaw and Ronald Dodds, *The Black Flight: The Story of a Great War Fighter Ace* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2008), 107.

<sup>722</sup> Bishop made reference to his state of mind driving him to throw caution to the wind, writing that the enemy aircraft he was duelling with conjured up feelings of hate, and he subsequently engaged in reckless behaviour to continue the

certainly be positive attributes in combat, but reckless or individualist behaviour could also undermine leadership and discipline, and increase the danger on comrades through irresponsible behaviour that invited retaliation or put them in vulnerable positions. Furthermore, some were able to endure the stresses and strains of combat by coming to enjoy the action.<sup>723</sup>

Compensating factors, and other aspects that helped stave off the worst effects of war weariness, were also found at Vimy. Seeing the attack pay off, and the important gains made, acted partially as a mitigating force which allowed infantry to endure the conditions of frontline service a little longer.<sup>724</sup> By the end of the Battle, the Corps had consolidated their gains and sent out patrols, defeated at least three German counterattacks, captured three battalion COs, fifteen other officers, and over 2,000 NCOs and other ranks.<sup>725</sup> The reality of the victory and the physical spoils of war<sup>726</sup> perhaps compensated for the heavy casualties sustained by the attacking troops. Despite the bloodshed, the attack was a great success and proved that limited, set-piece attacks could prevail over an entrenched enemy.

## Medical Aspects and Arrangements, April-August 1917

The medical realities of the war, including the near-constant threats to life and limb, created numerous problems for armies. The true nature of warfare and especially combat on the Western Front, and how the authorities dealt with certain types of

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attack. In another section, he wrote about another unnecessary risk, wondering how long he could stay in the air before a thunderstorm rolled in. Elsewhere, Bishop admitted that he often ignored his own rules regarding positioning and tactics, if only to get that last 'kill.' Bishop admitted that when he was not able to engage enemy planes that he sought out, "I get in a tremendous temper and am very apt to run unnecessary risks when I meet another enemy." Bishop, *Winged Warfare*, 45, 274, 251, 162.

<sup>723</sup> This phenomenon was also observed amongst infantry and other soldiers. Dissociation and dehumanisation also aided in this process. Beckett, *The Great War*, 304.

<sup>724</sup> The official announcement of the Canadian War Records Office (CWRO), for instance, indicated that hundreds of German prisoners, grateful to be alive, "surrendered promptly and willingly," and that the more the troops advanced, the quicker the enemy was to give up. Horne, *Source Records of the Great War: Volume V*, 160.

<sup>725</sup> Ibid, 161.

<sup>726</sup> These included both souvenirs and prisoners of war. See, for instance, Climo, *Lively Letters from World War One*, 247. This letter was published in *The Cobourg World* newspaper, Friday 11 May 1917, page 1:4; Ibid, 253, letter published in *The Cobourg World*, Friday 8 June, 1917, page 6:2; Ibid, 285-286, letter published in *The Cobourg World*, Friday September 20, page 1:4.

casualties had the potential to undermine morale, reinforce war weariness, and directly contribute to the onset of shell shock. The medical arrangements and evacuation procedures during operations, however, helped with the morale of the troops taking part; knowing that one would be cared for if wounded acted as a bolstering force, instilling a sense of confidence in the medical system.<sup>727</sup> And prompt medical attention could reduce suffering and save lives.<sup>728</sup> For COs, manpower was paramount, ensuring that military medicine was an integral aspect of any battle plan. The reality of combat in this period, including shell shock, can help inform our discussion of war weariness because, although they were different phenomena, they existed on a continuum and there was some overlap between these two ways of understanding the impact of combat on the individual. Much historical writing on shell shock has focussed on its contributing factors, responses, and ways to mitigate this problem, and these same approaches can also be applied to war weariness.

One of the first tasks prior to any battle or impending operation was to select sites for collection and medical treatment areas. During the preparation phase sites would be identified, and equipment brought up. RAPs, advanced and dressing stations, divisional walking wounded collecting stations, and rest stations would all have to be established and stocked, in addition to larger facilities such as casualty clearing stations, medical stores depots, and laboratories all before evacuations reached the railhead behind the lines. Ambulance trains would take more seriously wounded to more permanent facilities behind the line, and eventually to base hospitals on the coast. For the Arleux operations, casualties were funnelled to the advanced and main dressing stations, and separated by mobility and severity, with walking wounded sent to one location, and stretcher cases to

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<sup>727</sup> A prompt and efficient military medical system helped with the morale of troops, especially when it came to treatment of comrades. As one historian argued, the “abandonment of comrades does not enhance dedication to duty.” Robert J.T. Joy, “Medicine, Military,” in *Reader’s Companion to Military History* ed. by Cowley and Parker, 294.

<sup>728</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4125, Folder 5, File 4, ‘Report on Operations,’ Hill 70, 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

another.<sup>729</sup> Evacuation routes<sup>730</sup> were also identified in an attempt to avoid confusion and congestion after zero hour. Following the launch of the Vimy attack, further aid posts were established and dressing stations moved up as the infantry attacked, advanced, and ultimately consolidated positions.<sup>731</sup> The medical system needed to have flexibility and mobility, and respond to changes in the wider military situation.

Thorough preparations, however, could not prevent problems arising, or the overwork and exhaustion of medical personnel. In anticipation of a battle leave and passes were often cancelled, ensuring that with staff ‘all hands were on deck’ for the upcoming attack.<sup>732</sup> During large operations, which resulted in heavier casualties concentrated into a relatively short time period, medical personnel became fatigued both physically and mentally, both of which could negatively affect performance and decision-making. And with the stakes so high, a bad decision or mistake could be fatal. Officers of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division wrote that at Vimy this frontline and “forward work is the most trying from a physical as well as mental standpoint,”<sup>733</sup> which could compromise the health and effectiveness of individuals, and affect the wider military situation. A battalion lacking in healthy soldiers might very well fail to take its objectives, even if it had the willingness to do so. And even after a unit seized its objectives and was looking forward to relief, further medical duties remained. For the 1<sup>st</sup> Division at Vimy, it was clear that:

If a unit is relieved [in the line], it is still responsible for the evacuation of its own wounded from the Front Line and should leave behind the Regimental Medical Officer and sufficient personnel to carry out this duty.<sup>734</sup>

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<sup>729</sup> Stretcher cases were collected at the ADS, placed on trench tramways, and conveyed to the main dressing station further to the rear. Walking wounded cases, after being processed, were collected and then “conveyed in horsed [ambulance] wagons” to the main dressing station. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3847, Folder 54, File 5, Arleux-Acheville Operation, ‘Miscellaneous.’ For information on the use of trench tramways, see Steven Trent Smith, “Narrow Path to Victory,” *Military History*, 34, 2 (July 2017): 54-61.

<sup>730</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3845, Folder 49, File 4, Vimy Operations, “X” Division (1<sup>st</sup> Canadians), ‘Instructions.’

<sup>731</sup> Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 164 and LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, Historical Records, Synopsis of Operations, Mt. Sorrell to Mons.

<sup>732</sup> This was to ensure that all medical personnel were available for duty, as well as to deal with any emergencies and expected heavy casualties. LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4562, Folder 3, File 2, No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital, ‘Daily Orders No. 98,’ 9 April 1917.

<sup>733</sup> See a report on the role of chaplains and padres in medical treatment and evacuation work. LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4664, ‘Summary of Work done by Chaplains During Battle of Vimy Ridge: Second Canadian Division.’

<sup>734</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3845, Folder 49, File 4, Vimy Operations, X Division (1<sup>st</sup> Canadian). And furthermore “there was but little time for rest in the strenuous few weeks after April 9<sup>th</sup>” 1917. See LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume



Stretcher bearers and other staff were often assisted by infantry, especially during engagements with heavy casualties. This ensured that even after the achievement of objectives, there was much work to be done which only increased the strain placed on infantry and others. This reality also reinforced the sense that there really was no genuine respite on the Western Front, for soldiers to recuperate properly.

Yet despite thorough planning of medical arrangements and evacuation, confusion, and congestion did occur at Vimy. Partly, this was inevitable, considering the casualties required to overcome entrenched defensive positions, and the power of the defensive, generally, in the war.<sup>735</sup> Another problem was that during the preparatory bombardment as well as during the attack itself, destruction compromised the ability of medical units to reach and evacuate casualties. Roads became churned up by bombs and shell explosions, and shell fire itself compounded the problems facing medical workers.<sup>736</sup> With the sheer number of personnel in the immediate vicinity, coupled with the destruction of roadways and other communications, congestion and delays were the result. This increased the time required to evacuate casualties, but also ensured difficulty in bringing up rations and medical supplies through mud, shell holes, and “crowded and fiercely shelled roads.”<sup>737</sup> Without sufficient supplies, the potential for casualties only increased. Congestion was partly overcome by the use of light railways and trench tramways, but, according to the records of the No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, “it was extremely hard to avoid congestion of wounded.”<sup>738</sup> Any added problems to the medical services could result in further casualties.

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4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, Historical Records, Synopsis of Operations, Mt. Sorrell to Mons.

<sup>735</sup> For tactics and technology to overcome defensive positions and attain success in the War, see Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918*; Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-18*; Griffith, ed., *British Fighting Methods in the Great War*; Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics: Innovation in the German Army*; Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power: The British Army Weapons and Theories of War 1904-1945*; Travers, *How the War Was Won: Factors that Led to Victory in World War One*; and Clarke, *World War I Battlefield Artillery Tactics*.

<sup>736</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4714, Folder 106, File 4, ‘Operations Vimy Ridge: Report on the Collection and Evacuation of Wounded,’ 9 April 1917.

<sup>737</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, Historical Records, ‘Synopsis of Operations, Mt. Sorrell to Mons.’

<sup>738</sup> Armies more generally also made use of light railways and tramways. Ibid; Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front*, 162; Smith, “Narrow Path to Victory,” and Hesler, ed., *Interlude: 1916-1919*, 25.

Medical personnel at Vimy also faced other issues based on the reality of combat. For example, medical personnel lacked adequate stretcher bearers. This was compounded by the fact that German POWs used as bearers only made one-way trips;<sup>739</sup> at the end of their journey they were escorted to POW cages (or concentration areas). This shortage of medical personnel during attack and follow-up operations ensured that those MOs, orderlies, medics, and bearers who did remain were driven to the point of exhaustion. Some medical units worked for twenty-four hours straight, before given a “short and [much] needed rest.”<sup>740</sup> Exhaustion can lead to mistakes, and mistakes on the operating table could be fatal. Amongst medical personnel, the work of a stretcher bearer was exhausting,<sup>741</sup> dangerous, and often thankless. Carrying a soldier over shell holes and through mud was fatiguing at the best of times, but under shell fire this job was even more dangerous and arduous. Medical personnel, moreover, as non-combatants were unable to retaliate against the enemy, the source of the mortal danger they confronted.<sup>742</sup> The ability to shoot back at the enemy served as “a psychological release if nothing else,” and bearers were also unable to duck for cover when under fire.<sup>743</sup> The inability to

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<sup>739</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4714, Folder 106, File 4, ‘Operations Vimy Ridge: Report on the Collection and Evacuation of Wounded,’ 9 April 1917.

<sup>740</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, Historical Records, ‘Synopsis of Operations, Mt. Sorrell to Mons.’ The medical facilities themselves also became overwhelmed with wounded, especially during sustained and intense operations. At Vimy, accommodation at the main dressing station was “taxed to the utmost,” which caused further delays and problems.

<sup>741</sup> *Ibid.* At Vimy Ridge even with six-man stretcher bearer teams “frequent reliefs were necessary.”

<sup>742</sup> This was also the case with other non-combatants, such as those from the Service Corps. The historian of the British RASC wrote of the “specially strenuous nature” on logistics, transport, and supply troops. Moreover, “the fact that there could be no respite made that task a heavy mental and bodily strain – mental, because whatever punishment it received from the enemy it had no opportunity to retaliate, but had to deliver its loads to the troops – physical, because of the long hours over difficult ground added to what every mounted man knows, that with animals to be cared for, the work is but half done when he re-enters his billet or bivouac.” Colonel R.H. Beadon, *The Royal Army Service Corps: A History of Transport and Supply in the British Army – Volume II* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 129. And some argued that non-combatants suffered the highest level of psychological breakdown, because they had little outlet for aggressive behaviour. The opportunity to strike back and kill the enemy was linked to better ability in “coping with fear on the battlefield.” Striking back also allowed for the release of adrenalin and glycogen. And if a “combatant could not act, he was more susceptible to fear,” and thus breakdown over time. Joanna Bourke, *Fear: A Cultural History* (Emeryville: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2006), 206-210. And the ASC personnel were “within a few hundred yards of enemy trenches,” but generally these units “do not have the same chances of military ‘glamour’ on the battlefields, theirs is a story of endurance and determination.” Graeme Crew, *The Royal Army Service Corps* (London: Leo Cooper Ltd., 1970), 129.

<sup>743</sup> When carrying a stretcher and under fire these bearers “literally had to stand and take it.” Gaudet, ed., *The World War I Journal and Poems of Pte. Frank Walker*, xv.

properly strike back, or the feelings of helplessness which this engendered, were important contributing factors to the onset of war weariness.

The physical features of this sector of the front, the weather, and even the time of day also become problematic for medical personnel at Vimy. For No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, inclement weather, “the ancient enemy,” compounded the problems they faced. Mud and precipitation hindered evacuation efforts, and medical personnel found themselves battling enemy fire, as well as snow and rain.<sup>744</sup> The arrival of night brought its own problems,<sup>745</sup> and the danger of slipping into the mud or drowning in water-filled shell holes was a real one. The medical arrangements for the Battle of Hill 70 in August 1917 seemed to adopt some of the lessons learned during Vimy. The medical actions and responses at Hill 70 were largely successful, in part because of the rapid and effective evacuation and treatment of casualties. Adaptations for weather, sufficient transport facilities, and “the provision of alternate routes” in the face of congestion all contributed to successful evacuation.<sup>746</sup> The medical arrangements for this battle, however, were unable to anticipate and accommodate the presence of civilians in the area.<sup>747</sup> These civilians and refugees not only complicated the operations of the Corps, but by requiring varying degrees of medical attention and supplies they also contributed to the over-taxing of medical resources and personnel.

The casualties inflicted on the attacking forces had a direct impact on the military units taking part in these operations through the summer of 1917. Some officers, such as chaplains, were given respite and rest periods after sustained operations. In one case, G.H. Andrews was returned to Canada “in accordance with the policy...for recuperation after an arduous term of service.”<sup>748</sup> Of course chaplains and other non-combatants were often

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<sup>744</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, Historical Records, ‘Synopsis of Operations, Mt. Sorrell to Mons.’ During the Battle of Hill 70, moreover, reports indicated that poor weather usually added extra “hardship” on the troops and medical personnel. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4714, Folder 106, File 5, ‘Report on the Evacuation of Wounded in the Canadian Corps: Operations for the Capture of Hill 70.’

<sup>745</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, Historical Records, ‘Synopsis of Operations, Mt. Sorrell to Mons.’

<sup>746</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4714, Folder 106, File 5, ‘Report on the Evacuation of Wounded in the Canadian Corps: Operations for the Capture of Hill 70.’

<sup>747</sup> Ibid.

<sup>748</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4615, C-A-7, Andrews, G.H., ‘Cablegram from the Overseas Minister to the Minister of Militia and Defence, dated 23 April, 1917.’

granted special privileges or secured more leeway than regular infantryman, but the date of this cablegram indicating this policy of recuperation was 23 April 1917, just weeks after the capture of Vimy and its attendant arduous fighting. The loss of trusted officers and support personnel was difficult for military units, but infantry battalions also had to deal with the loss of their riflemen. For instance at Vimy, one Captain was wounded (presumably prior to the assault), but “pluckily insisted on going in with his company for the attack.”<sup>749</sup> On the surface, this seemed like a laudable decision, but it may also have caused some problems, too. His behaviour might also have acted as a deterrent on subordinate troops’ decision to go sick or to seek medical attention for wounds or other casualties.<sup>750</sup> And finally, the captain’s decision to go forward with his men might also have negatively affected his unit if his performance, decision-making, or stamina were compromised. Weakened soldiers had their abilities undermined by medical problems, and instead of rest and treatment, carrying on in the line could prolong or exacerbate health issues.

Regardless of the medical arrangements and evacuation procedures in place, a certain proportion of casualties had to be evacuated from the battle zone, sent back to Britain,<sup>751</sup> or even be invalided back to Canada. Those returned to Canada were the most serious cases, deemed unable to return to the front for at least six months. Returning them to Canada allowed for a longer respite back home, and helped ease the burden on medical facilities and personnel in the UK. In July of 1917, for instance, H.M.H.S. *Letitia*

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<sup>749</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4688, Folder 42, File 20, 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Infantry Brigade, April 1917, Unit Narrative.

<sup>750</sup> There is evidence, for instance, of soldiers deciding to stay in the firing line despite the fact that they were wounded, physically or otherwise, or other troops who sought to nurse a wound in secret lest they be deemed a coward, malingerer, or seen as suffering a SIW. When it came to psychiatric casualties, the biggest concern was the chance for relapse if a soldier stayed in the line beyond the breaking point. In one case, a shell shocked soldier was sent to the CCS by his MO “after having requested to be allowed to carry on” at the front. This soldier was apparently ‘shaky,’ often a clear indicator of advanced or acute shell shock. Less than a fortnight later (27 April to 5 May), however, he was back at his unit, “but his M.O. would only allow him to carry on at the kitchens,” ensuring he was only on light duty behind the lines. The MO knew that this soldier required respite, but also knew that the unit required all the soldiers it could muster. Unfortunately for both the soldier and his unit, he relapsed again by June 1917 and developed “gross symptoms of shell shock.” This case illustrates some of the tensions and dilemmas facing MOs in the war, and the precarious nature of mental health of soldiers experiencing cumulative and intense trauma. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3602. 24-3-1 (Volume 1), CAMC Journal.

<sup>751</sup> This return to England, or ‘Blighty,’ was such a popular destination and desire for soldiers that the type of wound that would bring them back there, a wound that was serious enough for evacuation but not serious enough for permanent debilitation, came to be known almost universally in the British armies as a ‘Blighty wound’ (or ‘Blighty one’). See also the legal and medical chapters above for more information on Blighty wounds.

transported soldiers back to Canada suffering from hysteria, epilepsy, “marked neurasthenia, and similar troubles” of this nature.<sup>752</sup> Unlike physical wounds, however, the treatment period for psychiatric casualties could be quite unpredictable. Some required only a few days and removal from the front lines to recover their self-control and equilibrium; other cases required weeks or months, whereas some individuals were invalidated for the balance of their lives. Others committed suicide,<sup>753</sup> or self-medicated with alcohol. In a report from Moore Barracks Canadian Hospital (Shorncliffe) the officer in command lamented that “there are some cases suffering from mental disease who are now invalidated back to Canada and subsequently recover their mental balance.” He continued, writing that “this recovery sometimes takes place within a short time,” and thus recommended keeping these types of cases in hospital for a time and if they failed to recover, they could then be returned to Canada “without the stigma of having been insane attached to them.”<sup>754</sup> As was the case with war weariness, at times these casualties only needed rest, respite from service, and an understanding and responsive medical system. During the operations at Vimy the No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital (in April 1917 alone) received 468 shell shock cases “when there was marked activity on that front.” The average monthly total, however, was 335 cases per month,<sup>755</sup> an increase of nearly 40%.

The casualties suffered at Vimy and other engagements between April and August 1917 illustrate that this loss of close comrades and well-liked leaders could be devastating to the unit, whether that be the company, battalion, or even brigade. In less than a forty-eight hour period, for example, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion of Alberta suffered one officer and fifteen ORs killed, as well as three officers and sixty-one other ranks wounded, and four ORs missing in action (MIA).<sup>756</sup> Depending on the severity of the wounded casualties, some of these soldiers might very well return to their unit after a stay in hospital and

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<sup>752</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘The O.C. Troops, H.M.H.S. “Letitia,”’ 25 July 1917.

<sup>753</sup> See, for instance, Julian Humphries, “How were Suicide Cases dealt with in the Frontline Trenches during the First World War?,” *BBC History Magazine*, Volume 15, No. 08 (August 2014): 97.

<sup>754</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, ‘Moore Barracks Canadian Hospital Shorncliffe, 25 July 1917, Officer I/C Hospital to A.D.M.S. Canadians Folkestone.’

<sup>755</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 3-1-4-2, Neurology, War Neuroses, File ‘Treatment of Shell Shock Cases at the Front.’

<sup>756</sup> Chartrand, *The Canadian Corps in World War I*, 15 and Norris, *The Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 281.

convalescent centre; the dead, and in all likelihood the missing, were lost to the Battalion for good. And though replacements could help bring the unit back up to nominal strength,<sup>757</sup> the individuals lost could simply not be replaced. In wartime and other traumatic situations, strong bonds can form between those forced to endure these hardships. The loss of these trusted comrades could in turn be devastating for the survivors in the event of heavy casualties. In addition, new soldiers sent to any unit would perhaps lack the intimate knowledge of the history and traditions of the unit. It was this regimental spirit and unit cohesion that created such a potent striking force in action. Other units also experienced similar losses to that of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion at Vimy Ridge.<sup>758</sup> By 1917, it was nearly impossible to reconcile these casualty rates with the pool of reinforcements available – something would have to give.

Medical officer experiences provide insight into the different types of casualties suffered, and their impact on both individuals and units. Exhaustion, both physical and otherwise, for instance, could render soldiers militarily ineffective, even detrimental to the goals of the group. As Captain Harold McGill, MO of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion explained, a set of orders for 8 May 1917 for the battalion to move up into the line and begin operations was cancelled. And in his view “this was fortunate, for the men were in no sort

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<sup>757</sup> The problem, of course, was that by 1917 voluntary recruitment in Canada had all but dried up. The passing of the MSA (conscription) helped fill the ranks again, but the training, experience, and dedication of these replacement soldiers were called into question from the very beginning, perhaps unfairly. Many of these MSA soldiers served admirably, but there likely remained a gulf between ‘green’ troops and the ‘old sweats.’ Will Bird, for example, did not trust a new officer sent to the 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, lamenting his lack of experience and the negative implications this had for himself and his comrades. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 110.

<sup>758</sup> The 1st Brigade suffered losses at both Vimy, and operations at Fresnoy. At Vimy, the Brigade suffered 583 total casualties, including 556 ORs killed, wounded, and MIA. And though brigades had a larger recruitment and reinforcement pool, the battalions of the brigade still suffered heavily from these operations. The problem, moreover, was that casualties were hardly ever spread evenly amongst the battalions, ensuring that some units suffered more than others. At Fresnoy, the Brigade lost 13 officers killed and three wounded, 182 ORs killed, 712 wounded, and 140 missing, totalling 1,080 casualties, or more than the entire strength of a full infantry battalion. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3846, Folder 51, File 1, 1<sup>st</sup> C.I.B., Operations Vimy, ‘General Observations.’ At Hill 70 the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion experienced heavy casualties, and one of its units suffered nearly 100% casualties, with all of its officer and NCOs hit. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4125, Folder 5, File 4, ‘Report on Operations,’ Hill 70, 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion. And the 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade at Vimy saw every officer of one of its battalions become a casualty, clearly undermining leadership and cohesion. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4689, Folder 45, File 1, 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Historical Records, including a ‘Synopsis of Operations.’ And Adamson wrote to his wife that “we lost 12 officers, killed or wounded, out of 21 who I took over the top.” This works out to a 57% casualty rate, clearly unsustainable in the long-term. Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 275, Letter to wife Mabel, dated 14 April 1917. See also LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3847, Folder 55, File 4, 1<sup>st</sup> C.I.B., ‘Reports on Operations, Fresnoy – 3<sup>rd</sup> May, 1917.’

of physical condition to undertake further active operations without a rest.”<sup>759</sup> McGill here also touched on a point that was crucial, if controversial, during the dangerous and often-monotonous experience that was life on the Western Front, namely, that a short rest could act as a powerful rejuvenating force for the soldiers. This rest and respite helped mitigate the worst effects of both war weariness and shell shock. Unfortunately, this vital aspect of recovery and recuperation was often in short supply.

The nature of combat on the Western Front, however, ensured that despite rest policies, war weariness and psychiatric casualties still occurred in alarming numbers. These were based on active service conditions as well as the rigid nature of the army system. And even the War Office acknowledged these casualties, stating in the context of the classification system that some soldiers were discharged “owing to nervous breakdown resulting from service in the present war,” and could be hired by companies at home without fear of being called up for service.<sup>760</sup> It was accepted that they would never soldier again. A report on ‘Mental Cases’ in military hospitals also acknowledged that soldiers could suffer “from a disability due to his being a soldier.”<sup>761</sup> Moreover, a patient report at Moore Barracks Canadian Hospital in July 1917 indicated that “there were no symptoms of definite mental disease other than those of a hysterical nature, such as *are induced by the strain of service conditions* acting on a youth.”<sup>762</sup> This illustrates the belief on the part of some authorities that certain types of soldiers had a predisposition<sup>763</sup> to breakdown, while still acknowledging these problems could be initiated or exacerbated by

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<sup>759</sup> McGill also wrote that the soldiers of his unit began to fear that they would never be comfortable or warm again. And when the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion did get rotated out of the line, this was “like a taste of paradise.” This gave the troops an opportunity to remove their dirty and lice-infested clothes after 15 days in the trenches. Moreover, the battalion band “gave much pleasure to all ranks in our short respite from the squalor and misery of the trenches.” Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 285.

<sup>760</sup> RG 9 III C10, Volume 4576, Folder 2, File 9, Discharges, newspaper clipping from *The Standard*, dated 30 April 1917. Another report on the Department of Militia and Defence in Canada indicated that in one particular case the insanity of the soldier “is not the result of his military service,” suggesting that in some cases the insanity of the soldier was the direct result of service. LAC, RG 9 III B2, 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, Department of Militia and Defence – Ottawa 31 December 1917.

<sup>761</sup> Ibid, Folder 4, File 3, ‘Hospitals for Mental Cases.’

<sup>762</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, Moore Barracks Canadian Hospital, 20 July 1917. My italics.

<sup>763</sup> Some of these individuals included those with “unstable nervous” dispositions, poor education, upbringing and surroundings that might explain their inability to stand combat. These ideas of predisposition and prediction of who might succumb to the trauma of combat were, of course, bogus. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 3-1-4-2, Neurology, War Neuroses, ‘Functional Nervous Disorders.’

the ‘strain of service.’ And though these sorts of candid appraisals of the impact of combat on the individual were relatively rare, by the end of the war the authorities were unable to deny the very serious, and sometimes permanent, negative impact of war service on these soldiers. This was evidenced, in part, by the post-war debate and discourse that resulted in the British War Office Committee of Enquiry into Shell-Shock, launched in 1922.<sup>764</sup>

The victories at Vimy Ridge and Hill 70 were certainly impressive, and tangible gains were made against stubborn and entrenched opposition. Casualties were inflicted on the enemy, and prisoners and war material were captured by the attacking troops. The issue, however, was whether these losses were deemed worth the gains attained.<sup>765</sup> Moreover, what constituted a successful offensive for the high command might have looked very different for the soldiers at the sharp end. The statistics tabulated for Canadian casualties in this period indicate that Vimy, especially, was a costly victory, with 3,598 killed and 6,664 wounded, for a total of 10,262 casualties<sup>766</sup> for this operation alone. And in April of 1917 the Corps suffered 14,301 casualties in operations on the Lens-Vimy front.<sup>767</sup> In addition to the overall number of casualties suffered, the severity of these casualties also set the Vimy battle apart. In battles and engagements of the First World War, the ratio of walking wounded to stretcher-bearer casualties was generally 3:1. But at Vimy, both groups were roughly equal;<sup>768</sup> this was a bloody battle, with lots of severely wounded, and military or territorial gains were attained at very high cost. The

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<sup>764</sup> At this the British government formally recognised shell shock as a condition of the war. Beckett, *The Great War*, 316. In the end, however, it seems the Committee sought a compromise understanding of it as both mental and physical. Ted Bogacz, “War Neurosis and Cultural Change in England, 1914-22: The Work of the War Office Committee of Enquiry into ‘Shell-Shock,’” *The Journal of Contemporary History*, 24 (1989): 227-256.

<sup>765</sup> One soldier noted, for instance, that though there were substantial gains made by the attacking troops, they were “heavily paid for.” Cate, ed., *A Soldier’s Memoir of World War I*, 59.

<sup>766</sup> Terry Copp, “The Military Effort, 1914-1918,” in *Canada and the Great War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, edited by David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 52.

<sup>767</sup> Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), Appendix B, 240. Rawling pointed out that between 9 April and 3 May the Corps (as of 7 April) had a strength of 172,486 including attached units, or 97,184 excluding attached units, suffered 16,649 casualties, but only received 9,459 reinforcements, a shortfall of 7,190. The operations of the Corps in this period included Vimy, as well as Gavrelle and Fresnoy. In March 1917 the CEF had a strength of 304,585 all ranks, but by the end of April 1917 it was 301,296, a decline of 3,289. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, Appendix “C,” 546.

<sup>768</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4714, Folder 106, File 4, ‘Operations Vimy Ridge: Report on the Collection and Evacuation of Wounded, 9 April 1917.’



key question was whether these gains, impressive though they were, were actually worth the very heavy cost in lives lost, maimed, or psychologically destroyed. Some soldiers certainly felt that the casualties and the loss of friends was worth it, and these sentiments were often expressed by soldiers themselves, in letters home, for instance. And though there are issues regarding self-censorship and the desire to paint a rosy picture for those back home, these sentiments often came across as genuine, if naïve. James Jackson Woods of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Entrenching Battalion, for example, wrote in a letter dated 15 February 1917, that

I tell you I miss Earl. It was hard to say good-bye. But I think that we will be able to get to-gether again soon....But I know that we would rather be here and do our bit and take what ever comes...[rather than have people tell] our parents that we were afraid to [do] our duty. For what is worth living for is worth fighting for.<sup>769</sup>

The fact that Woods was not infantry, and the timing of the letter predated the large battles of 1917, including Vimy and Passchendaele, might account for his continued commitment to the cause and his sanguine attitude. Woods might also have just been a generally cheery and optimistic person by disposition, or perhaps had yet to become disillusioned as to the true nature of Western Front service. One can also read a sense of commitment and stoicism in Woods: we will endure and do our duty, come what may. Victor Wheeler of the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion, though he never actually stated it was not worth it, lamented the loss of his comrades and the negative effects it had on the survivors. Aside from deaths reinforcing a sense of hatred and longing for revenge, the loss of a friend meant “a close and valued companionship of more than two war-years had snapped, and my throat was choked with sobs.” A comrade, having lost his brother, “wept bitterly, a lament burning deep within him...there had been an inseparable bond between them”<sup>770</sup> which could not be repaired or replaced. Any comment on the contribution this made to

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<sup>769</sup> The spelling and other errors of this letter are kept just as they are, in order to preserve the authenticity of this correspondence. Letter from Private J.J. Woods, to Mrs. Johns, from ‘Somewhere in France,’ dated 15 February 1917. Found on the Canadian Letters and Images Project, <http://www.canadianletters.ca/content/document-11028>.

<sup>770</sup> And after leaving the Vimy sector, Wheeler remarked that the men were “utterly fatigued but proud of a job well done, sad at the loss of so many of our comrades but thankful for our own delivery.” Any comment on the contribution this made to overall victory was noticeably absent, however. Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 99-103.

overall victory was noticeably absent, however. Grief might also conjure up certain emotions and cloud rational thought.

The Corps General Staff, however, felt that the gains at Vimy were worth the cost. A unit narrative of April 1917 indicated that at Vimy the casualties suffered were “not disproportionate to the success achieved,” and since 9 April the Corps had captured some 4,500 German POWs.<sup>771</sup> Other staff documents from later in April also conformed to this view. In one, the author expressed that “our own losses were light in proportion to the results achieved,” which included the capture of 1,000s of German POWs, including 87 officers, and 63 guns, 124 MGs, and 104 TMs.<sup>772</sup> At Hill 70, one report indicated that the results were worth the casualties sustained, and the losses were “light,” and “within moderate bounds.” In exchange for these casualties, the divisions at Hill 70 had inflicted heavy losses on the enemy, capturing 1,378 POWs, along with MGs and trench mortars.<sup>773</sup> And though the Germans had sustained heavy casualties, they had mandatory military service in place, and a much larger manpower pool in which to draw from. The Canadians, on the other hand, were already scraping the bottom of the barrel in terms of volunteer infantry reinforcements, and could therefore not afford such costly casualties. The British were also concerned with manpower problems by this phase of the war; the balance of 1917 and 1918 would be trying times indeed.

## Lessons Learned, Results, Conclusions, and Interpretations

The operations of the Corps between April and August 1917 illustrate the factors that contributed to success on the battlefield, as well as those that compromised chances for success, and ultimately, contributed to failure. The reality of failure and a sense of futility could certainly encourage the onset of war weariness, though this reaction to combat was not confined to unsuccessful armies and individuals. Conversely, war weariness manifested itself in the Corps in the final months of the war when there were

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<sup>771</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 7, File 4, April 1917, Canadian Corps (General Staff), ‘Unit Narrative.’

<sup>772</sup> Ibid, ‘Communique’ 18 April 1917, report ‘The Capture of Vimy Ridge,’ and Intelligence Summaries, ‘Intelligence Report,’ 27 April 1917.

<sup>773</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 8, File 2, August 1917, ‘Summary of Operations, including Hill 70, Report on, and Summary of.’

tangible markers of success. Though no two military engagements were the same, some common elements can be distilled, especially as to factors contributing to the overall success of operations. Discipline was one such factor that helped individuals overcome difficulties,<sup>774</sup> and acted as a form of control from without, ensuring that soldiers remained obedient and did their duty. Discipline could be capricious, uneven, and did not always work properly, but with a disciplinary system in place and every soldier doing his part this paid dividends during the traumatic experience that was combat. Discipline helped keep the troops in the line, despite powerful forces encouraging distance between the individual and sources of trauma. The problem with the focus of the authorities on discipline was that they often equated this with military effectiveness or battlefield prowess, which was mistaken. One set of orders issued to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division, for instance, indicated that

a good fighting division is always a good division in camps and billets, and this is shown by the clean turn-out of the individual soldier, the smart saluting, and the general good behaviour, all of which are evidence of the pride that every man takes in the good name of his division.<sup>775</sup>

However, just because a unit looked smart on parade and saluted superiors promptly, this did not guarantee a good fighting unit in battle. Effectiveness in training and drill, and good appearance on the parade ground did not necessarily translate into combat success. Conversely, just because a unit seemed to be lacking in formal discipline and deference to authority did not indicate poor fighting prowess.<sup>776</sup> It was crucial for all ranks to be made aware of these policies, orders, and procedures. NCOs, in particular, needed to act as a mediator between subordinates and officers,<sup>777</sup> and this had the added benefit of

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<sup>774</sup> Men kept advancing at Vimy despite the fact that their comrades were falling all around them, with McGill remarking that “that was the kind of discipline that made the taking of Vimy Ridge possible.” Norris, *Memoir of Captain Harold McGill*, 268.

<sup>775</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4530, Folder 3, ‘To all Commanders 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division,’ 15 November 1917.

<sup>776</sup> The Australians were notorious for their indiscipline and informality, yet were also touted as one of the most effective fighting formations on the Western Front. Their casual demeanor and egalitarianism were seen as undisciplined, especially by the British. Beckett, *The Great War*, 312. There were, however, instances of collective indiscipline amongst the Australian forces. Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 212.

<sup>777</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C9, Volume 4530, Folder 14E, ‘Daily Orders No. 175,’ 25 June 1917.

increasing the familiarity of ORs with their superiors, and encouraged trust and unit cohesion.

Discipline contributed to battlefield success, but good morale was also a key contributing factor to victory. An important aspect of morale was the troops' confidence in their leaders, equipment, their supply lines and medical system, and the attack plan they were ordered to carry out. One way that officers of the Corps expressed concern for their subordinates was to ensure sufficient food,<sup>778</sup> water, and rum. These acted as fortifying forces, and contributed both to the health and morale of the troops. A well-fed soldier was better able to concentrate, exert energy, and withstand illness and hardship. Proper caloric intake also helped prevent somnolence and lethargy, which could be fatal. Though it was difficult to ensure adequate sources and supplies of water,<sup>779</sup> in quantity and quality, extra effort prior Vimy helped ensure sufficient water for the troops. And before going 'over the top' it was imperative that the soldiers had a hot meal, and went into battle with extra rations, lest they be wounded or stranded in No Man's Land. Adrenaline, excitement, and physical exertion expended lots of calories, and the dearth of food could halt an attack in its tracks. And after the assault was launched, and during the consolidation phase, it was vital that food and water were brought forward in sufficient quantities.<sup>780</sup> Exhaustion and hunger could imperil an advance, just as a lack of ammunition or reinforcements could. Rum and alcohol, but also other drugs like caffeine and nicotine, helped the soldiers calm themselves prior to going 'over the top,' helped them endure the trauma of combat itself, and assisted in their recovery and grieving

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<sup>778</sup> Field rations included meat (fresh, frozen, or preserved), bread or biscuits, bacon, cheese, vegetables (fresh or dried), tea, jam, butter, sugar, oatmeal (thrice weekly), rice, salt, mustard, pepper, and (condensed) milk. Nic Clarke, John Cranfield and Kris Inwood, "Fighting Fit? Diet, Disease, and Disability in the CEF, 1914-18," *War & Society*, 33, 2 (may 2014): 80-97, and Duffett, *The Stomach for Fighting: Food and the Soldiers of the Great War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012).

<sup>779</sup> Engineers and MOs had important roles to play in ensuring that proper, potable, and safe water supplies were available. Difficulties ensued when shell fire caused breakages and damages to water systems. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3844, Folder 47, File 2, 'Engineers' and Volume 3851, Folder 63, File 9, 'Report on Operations,' 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 17-26 August 1917.

<sup>780</sup> Ibid, Folder 48, File 3, Canadian Corps Scheme (Correspondence), 'Notes on Conference held at Canadian Corps Headquarters.' This water also needed to be brought forward whenever possible, or "taken up during a lull" in the fighting. PPCLI Archives, 34 (8)-8, General Operations, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, Vimy. Food was crucial to the attacking soldiers, and could affect both morale and psychological health. Nic Clarke, John Cranfield and Kris Inwood, "Fighting Fit? Diet, Disease, and Disability in the CEF, 1914-18," *War & Society*, 33, 2 (may 2014): 80-97.

processes.<sup>781</sup> The importance of rum prior to Vimy was nicely captured in the words of historian David Bercuson:

Down the line came the panacea to top all panacea, the rum issue...an unbelievably generous one, about triple the ordinary...now, gone were gloom and apathy. A wave of quick and confident elation followed the magic-medicine down the line.<sup>782</sup>

Rum was crucial on the day of attacks, but also on subsequent days of operations to give the soldiers extra help in enduring combat and dealing with the various stresses and emotions related to it.<sup>783</sup>

The morale of the troops, and the confidence they had in leadership was also predicated on the idea of being well-equipped for combat, and having the right equipment and clothing to accomplish the task at hand. For the PPCLI, success at Vimy (and Arleux and Fresnoy) was partly based on providing the proper equipment, tools, and supplies to carry out orders. An adequate supply of Mills bombs, sandbags, candles and matches (helpful in dugouts) were important for the attack and consolidation phases. Moreover, issuing chocolate and chewing gum also helped, if only to raise troops' spirits.<sup>784</sup> And just as water and food needed to be brought forward during the attack to reach the advancing troops, so too did equipment and tools need to reach them during the consolidation phase. To this end, special carrying parties and follow-up troops needed to bring up ammunition, and entrenching tools and wire to help the infantry dig in and repulse counterattacks.<sup>785</sup>

These operations provided lessons for the Corps during the war itself – to allow refinement of tactics. During combat, confusion and chaos often reigned, and even

<sup>781</sup> A soldier wrote that after a rough day “never did rum taste so good!” Roy, ed., *The Journal of Private Fraser*, 309.

<sup>782</sup> Bercuson, *The Patricias*, 98.

<sup>783</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3851, Folder 64, File 3, ‘Instructions for the Offensive Hill 70,’ July 1917. For the importance of rum, see Tim Cook, “‘More a Medicine than a Beverage:’ ‘Demon Rum’ and the Canadian Trench Soldier of the First World War,” *Canadian Military History* 9, 1 (2000): 5-22; LAC, RG 41 III B1, Volume 7, Interview with Col. H.S. Cooper of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, page 15, and Pugsley, *On the Fringe of Hell*, 66.

<sup>784</sup> PPCLI Archives, 34 (8)-8, General Operations, 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, Vimy and LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3846 Folder 52, File 1, ‘1<sup>st</sup> Division Report on Vimy Operations, Willerval-Arleux and Fresnoy Operations.’ Moreover, a key role in this process was played by the Chaplain Service. At Vimy, they established canteens and coffee stalls near the front and on the lines of evacuation. Here the troops received hot drinks (coffee or cocoa), as well as some food and stationary for letter-writing. The chaplains also wrote letters for wounded, helped at the main dressing station, prepared bodies for burial, organised the evacuation of wounded, worked with burial parties, and many other thankless, but vital, tasks. LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4664, Battle of Vimy Ridge, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division.

<sup>785</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 3846, Folder 55, File 1, Arleux-Acheville Operation, 5<sup>th</sup> British Division, Extracts from 13<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade (Imperial), ‘War Diary.’

dedicated, loyal soldiers could get lost and disoriented. Shell explosions could deafen, landmarks and other physical markers destroyed, gas could temporarily blind, and fog and smoke could obscure the battlefield. On top of battle confusion and ‘fog of uncertainty,’ enormous pressures were placed on the individual during these times, and the strains of combat could override a sense of duty and discipline, rational thought and common sense, and activate the body’s natural fight or flight response. Shirkers, malingerers, and deserters needed to be apprehended and punished, of course, but regular troops who had lost their way or needed a brief respite or rest from battle should be treated with more understanding – sometimes soldiers just needed a hot beverage and a firm, but encouraging word. At Hill 70, trench police established battle stops to deal with “stragglers,” as well as a ‘Battle Stragglers Collecting Post.’ The latter was established at 9:00am on zero minus one, to apprehend stragglers, deserters, and those going AWL during the preparation and forming-up phase.<sup>786</sup> Similar arrangements were made at Vimy, where the ‘Battle Police’ reported to the Assistant Provost Marshall (APM), and the posts themselves were manned and patrolled by mounted troops.<sup>787</sup>

Another important lesson gleaned from the operations of April-August 1917 was that exhaustion, and war weariness more generally, could imperil an advance; conversely, the need for ‘fresh’ troops was paramount, especially when undertaking offensive operations against an entrenched defender. Ways to address the fatigue and exhaustion of the troops was to ensure that battlefield objectives were realistic, that preparation was as complete as possible, that sufficient reserves close by, and that rest and rotation policies were in place to limit the number of soldiers exposed to the trauma and mortal danger of combat for extended periods. One report on the operations at Hill 70, for example, emphasised that the final objective selected should be

a suitable tactical feature for resisting counterattacks. Its distance should not be so great that the troops detailed to take it are *exhausted upon arrival* – they should

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<sup>786</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3851, Folder 64, File 3, ‘Instructions for the Offensive Hill 70 – July 1917’ and Folder 64, File 4, ‘Administrative Arrangements.’ The Military Police (MP) also had duties regarding tracking down offenders, such as absentees and deserters. At times, these soldiers showed up in the UK, where they either surrendered to authorities or were apprehended. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 3471, 10-4-11, ‘ORs, Absentees, Etc.’ MPs also ensured that soldiers went ‘over the top’ when they were ordered to, and also rounded up stragglers. Bourke, *Fear*, 220.

<sup>787</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 10, File 1, Operations Vimy, 23-12-16 – 26-2-17, ‘8<sup>th</sup> Brigade.’

reach it [the final objective] *as fresh as possible* and be capable of meeting beating off counter attacks.<sup>788</sup>

This report highlighted the importance of avoiding exhaustion, and the need for the careful planning of operations, and the thorough and up-to-date knowledge of German defensive tactics and positions.

The study of other armies, their operations, experiences, and problems, both Allied and enemy, also served to provide the Corps with some lessons to be applied to their own upcoming and future operations. During the bloody and protracted French and German battle at Verdun, for instance, Arthur Currie, then in command of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, travelled to the sector to study the operations there. His report highlighted the importance of reconnaissance, training, and preparation for attacks, including platoon and company training incorporating the latest weapons and using the leap-frog (instead of attacking in waves), mutual support, and bite-and-hold tactics.<sup>789</sup> More importantly, however, was the need to ensure that the troops had high morale, were well-rested and prepared for future operations. Indeed, after Vimy the troops required much recuperation. One soldier wrote on 16 April 1917 that he had been in the line for 9 days, and “it was Hell.” He survived to be taken out of the line “for a few days rest, and, believe me, we need it.”<sup>790</sup> To prepare for future operations, when out of the line the troops should be “re-equipped, re-clothed, fed particularly well,” provided with entertainment and “consequently returned to the line absolutely fresh and highly trained.”<sup>791</sup> These were

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<sup>788</sup> The italics are mine. LAC, RH 9 III C1, Volume 3850, Folder 62, File 1, ‘Report on the Capture of Hill 70.’

<sup>789</sup> Bercuson, *The Patricias*, 96.

<sup>790</sup> McClare, ed., *The Letters of a Young Canadian Soldier during World War I*, 107. Another soldier remarked on 8 April that “believe me, [we had had] enough for one day.” By 14 April he admitted that “we were very tired.” McGrath, *The World War I Diary of William Hannaford Ball*, 89, 91.

<sup>791</sup> Currie wrote that the French troops at Verdun were specially-trained ‘storm’ troops “on a large scale and their morale and esprit-de-corps were consequently very high.” LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3871, Folder 115, File 8, ‘Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December 1916.’ Part of maintaining the health and military effectiveness of the troops was also ensuring that their morale was solid. Lessons from Vimy were also applied to subsequent operations. Prior to the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade raid on the evening of 8/9 June, for instance, the unit was taken out of the line for training. These preparations took place in the mornings, but “during the afternoon and evening sports and concerts were arranged, with the result that the men came into the line in excellent health and very keen.” RG 9 III D1, Volume 4689, Folder 43, File 9, 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade, June 1917, ‘Unit Narrative, Vimy Front.’ Currie’s visit allowed for the analysis and adoption of new tactics, and these lessons were applied to the planning of the Arras and Lens/Hill 70 attacks. Beckett, *The Great War*, 229.

lessons that his 1<sup>st</sup> Division, and ultimately the entire Corps, could benefit from. Currie seemed to recognise this fact, and argued that Canadians would be more successful “if these attacks were made by absolutely fresh troops who had been specially trained for the work in hand,” rather than thrown in piecemeal or without proper training.<sup>792</sup> Though it was not always possible to implement these policies or ensure troops were ‘fresh,’ this knowledge helped the Corps leadership understand the factors and forces that undermined chances of battlefield success.

Attacking soldiers, aside from being well-trained and ‘fresh,’ needed to be properly equipped for battle. This included sufficient clothing, equipment, weapons, and supplies. During all phases of battle, including preparation, attack, consolidation and mopping-up, special weapons and equipment were required for the troops to fulfill their duty. The attack phase at Vimy required a copious supply of Mills bombs for the infantry to successfully assault and capture positions. The infantry riflemen, as part of the new platoon organisation, moreover, were to cooperate and complement the work of Lewis gunners, bombers, rifle grenadiers, and TM crews.<sup>793</sup> And during the consolidation and mopping-up phase of the attack, respectively, sandbags and entrenching equipment, as well as “P” (phosphorus) bombs for clearing dugouts, were also helpful. Other lessons suggested the need for concealment of assembly and thorough preparations, including previous intelligence assessment and observation, which were deemed “absolutely essential.” Furthermore, close cooperation with flanking units, and communications with the military hierarchy were crucial. Another lesson was that stick grenades were easier to throw than the British Mills bombs, giving the Germans an apparent advantage. And finally, it was argued that though rifle grenades were essential, better range for the

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<sup>792</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3871, Folder 115, File 8, ‘Notes on French Attacks, North-East of Verdun in October and December 1916.’

<sup>793</sup> In order to further alleviate the exhaustion facing Lewis gunners in the attack, the use of slings to help carry these weapons would help. At Arleux, moreover, the bombers were to carry 10 Mills Bombs, the grenadiers to have 8 rifle grenades, and the riflemen to carry an extra bandolier of small arms ammunition, 2 Mills Bombs, 2 flares, and 48 hours of rations. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 3846, Folder 52, File 1, ‘1<sup>st</sup> Division Report on Vimy Operations, Willerval-Arleux and Fresnoy Operations’ and, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3847, Folder 55, File 2, ‘2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, Operations Arleux, Reports on Operations from April 21<sup>st</sup> to May 4<sup>th</sup> 1917.’



weapons and more training for grenadiers would be helpful.<sup>794</sup> For the soldiers actually undertaking these operations, clear evidence that the high command and staff officers were doing all in their power to improve the chances of success was important in keeping war weariness to a simmer, rather than boiling over into indiscipline and outright refusal.

The capture of Vimy Ridge and the subsequent operations of the spring and summer of 1917, impressive though they were, could not and did not win the war for the Entente. There was still much fighting that needed to be done to defeat the enemy, but, on balance, the evidence for widespread war weariness in the Canadian Corps at this period is largely lacking. The fact that these operations were successful, combined with the thorough preparations, respite periods afterwards, and time between these engagements ensured that war weariness remained at a simmer. These campaigns were generally short, and well-spaced out (after Vimy, the next big operation at Hill 70 was more than three months later). The same could not be said for the final months of the war, where there was little ‘down time’ and operations occurred in close succession, ensuring that war weariness began to boil over into a more serious and collective problem. It is also important to note that by the spring and summer of 1918 – when the first signs of ‘cracking’ begin to appear amongst the Canadians – the Corps had been in the field roughly as long as their counterparts on the Western Front had been when they experienced similar problems in 1917.<sup>795</sup> There were indicators of individual and localised war weariness at Vimy, but it was not until later in the war that cumulative strain on long-serving soldiers began to have a more significant impact, as experienced during the Hundred Days. And because the Canadian forces mostly avoided the worst effects of war weariness between April and August 1917, the authorities were less prepared for this phenomenon when it did begin to impact individuals and units in 1918. After Vimy, the attritional struggle with Germany would have to continue, and the Allied

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<sup>794</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3847, Folder 55, File 2, ‘2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, Operations Arleux, Reports on Operations from April 21<sup>st</sup> to May 4<sup>th</sup> 1917.’

<sup>795</sup> During the First World War armies in the field first began experiencing serious and widespread morale and commitment problems, and a decline in military effectiveness, after roughly two and a half years of warfare (anywhere from 30-40 months). This is based on the war beginning in August 1914, with the major armies all experiencing serious complications by 1917. If the Canadians did not enter combat until April 1915 this would suggest problems emerging by the spring and summer of 1918, which will be explored below.

offensives needed to drive the German Army from occupied France and Belgium, to say nothing of the need to subdue Germany itself. It was only by convincing the Germans, and the other Central Powers, of their own imminent defeat in the war that would finally force the enemy military and political authorities to sue for peace. To that end, the Canadians, in tandem with the other Allied armies and nations, would need to destroy the Germans' ability, and will, to continue the fight. The operations at Third Ypres, and the continued campaigns into 1918, were designed to attain this objective, however long and bloody that process might be.

## Chapter 4 - War Weariness in the Canadian Forces, July-November 1918

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The final period of the war, the five months (July-November) prior to the signing of the Armistice in November of 1918, is useful for our examination of war weariness. This helps us understand the origins and contributing factors toward, but also the characteristics and manifestations of, war weariness on both an individual and collective level. In this period there were many aspects, events, and dynamics that induced feelings of war weariness so near the end of the war. After years of combat, and war more generally, the soldiers had been pushed to, and at times beyond, the breaking point. Furthermore, as an attritional, industrial, and total war, the societies and civilians of each combatant nation were also reaching the limits of their endurance due to the stresses and strains associated with the war effort. The Hundred Days presented individual soldiers, but also their military units, with unique challenges. The nature of the fighting in the summer and autumn of 1918 helps explain the enormous stresses imposed on the soldiers, and the difficulty in maintaining momentum in attacks. This period was characterised by sustained combat, with little time for preparation for upcoming operations. Aside from the need for physical preparation, there was also little time for emotional and psychological preparations, arguably just as important as stockpiling ammunition and ensuring sufficient food and water. The war-winning strategy of Allied Commander-in-Chief Ferdinand Foch called for nearly constant pressure on the enemy, ensuring they had no respite and could not regain the initiative or prepare proper defensive positions. The problem with this, of course, was that it afforded less respite for the attacking troops as well. The hasty preparations and insufficient time for planning was problematic, to be sure, but the lack of time *following* operations and in anticipation for upcoming engagements was also challenging. In 1916/1917, units would be removed from the line for extensive periods of rest, training, acclimatization of replacements, and other duties after extended or particularly strenuous operations or tours of duty at the front. Thus after the Somme or the Third Battle of Ypres, Canadian units that participated were withdrawn from the line, sent back to lick their wounds and regain their confidence, strength, and morale. During the Hundred Days, however, there was little time after operations to

recover, rest, make good on losses, revise doctrine and tactics, replace equipment, and integrate reinforcements. This lack of respite, and forcing soldiers to remain in combat without sufficient mitigating factors and outlets, was an important contributing factor towards the onset of war weariness.

An important part of the period following combat operations was to receive, train, and integrate replacements. Without this influx and steady stream of reinforcements, and without surviving members of the unit to help reconstitute shattered battalions, these formations would quickly cease being effective military units, and would ultimately be destroyed. The Hundred Days constituted some of the heaviest fighting for the Corps and wider British Army, and included some of the bloodiest months, in terms of casualties, for the entire war. And as voluntarism had long since dried up in Canada, the Corps was reliant upon conscripted and inexperienced Military Service Act (MSA) soldiers, and on the very veterans that had suffered so much, for so long. The influx of conscripted troops brought its own problems with morale and unit cohesion, but also put added pressure on the veterans of the unit. Continuing to use worn soldiers, however dedicated they were, eroded their ability to endure the strains of war.

We are now able to appreciate that the Hundred Days ensured the defeat of the German forces on the Western Front. To the soldiers engaged in these operations at the time, however, it was not clear that the war would be successfully concluded in 1918, if at all. Others were sanguine that 1919 would be the year of victory, even if it would require much heavy fighting and thousands of further casualties. As German power declined and its army was unable to halt successive Allied attacks, the writing may have been on the wall for Canadian and British participants – and yet, these soldiers were still engaged in a war that was mostly won, but not yet over. The acknowledgement of this war as never-ending trauma was definitely a contributing factor toward the onset of war weariness. The reflective soldier knew that his chances of unscathed survival diminished with each passing day in the field, and it seemed only a matter of time before he was wounded or killed. It was nearly sacrosanct amongst the troops that one could not avoid a shell or

bullet “when your number’s up.”<sup>796</sup> The inability to reconcile this belief in all but inevitable death or disfigurement<sup>797</sup> with the need to carry on in combat, directly contributed to the development of war weariness.

The period from July to November 1918 presented the attacking troops with other problems as well. As the defeat of the Germany accelerated after the Entente victory at the Second Battle of the Marne, more and more POWs fell into Allied hands. Both contemporaries and historians attest to this reality,<sup>798</sup> as Germans were overrun, forced to surrender, or decided upon it for self-preservation. The capture of all these prisoners meant that there were fewer (veteran) enemy troops in the line, and likely encouraged the surrender of further Germans as well. It also sent a positive message to the Entente forces, supporting the belief that the war might very well come to an end. But these captures also had negative consequences. The great upsurge in POWs meant an increase in stress on the Entente, a strain on resources, especially food supplies, and there was always the fear of, and potential for, treachery on the part of enemy soldiers, especially during capture and escort. The period also presented the attackers with other problems such as booby traps and scorched-earth tactics; the increased presence of civilians and refugees; and issues pertaining to supply and logistical delays.

This period provides a useful case study on the contributing factors toward, and implications of, war weariness on both an individual and collective level, as well as how the legal/disciplinary and medical systems impacted the troops. Between August and October 1918 the Corps was engaged in several Vimy-sized battles, starting with the Battle of Amiens, beginning 8 August, and then through the Battles of Arras/Drocourt-Quéant Line in late August and early September, and the Battles of the Canal du Nord and Cambrai in late September and into October. In these bloody engagements, all four

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<sup>796</sup> Indeed, this was the title of Morton’s monograph on Canadian soldiers of the First World War. Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993). See also LAC, RG 41 III B1, Volume 10, Interview with Allan McNab of the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 6.

<sup>797</sup> Canadian War Museum, George Metcalf Archival Collection, ‘Lt. Charles MacQueen, CEF,’ 20070039-002.

<sup>798</sup> The British Army in France, for instance, took less than 10,000 German POWs between 2 and 29 July 1918, but captured over 40,000 POWs in the period 30 July to 26 August, and 27 August to 23 September. Between 24 September and 21 October, the British Army seized nearly 70,000 POWs, and between 10 October and 19 November, a further 20,000 plus POWs. Niall Ferguson, *The Pity of War: Explaining World War I* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 370, citing the British War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort*, 632.

divisions of the Corps were involved, at one time or another, and enormous gains were made. These gains were attained at enormous cost in lives, however, and it was this reality that wore down even the most dedicated, experienced troops, even volunteers.

In terms of mitigating factors to the development of war weariness, the belief that victory was imminent,<sup>799</sup> advances (operational or tactical), or at least the perception of success on the battlefield acted as a powerful motivating force and helped worn-out troops stave off the worst effects of war weariness, at least for a time. German surrenders, desertion, withdrawals, and the inability to stem the Entente advance were also tangible reminders that the troops might finally be marching to victory, however slowly and costly it might be. This was in contrast with earlier in the war, where gains had mostly been costly, minimal, and temporary. The military emergency that had been the German Spring Offensives had also been defeated, and the Allies were once again on the march through German-occupied Europe. The Entente had survived these enemy attacks, and the initiative had turned decisively in their favour. American forces were finally arriving in Europe in formidable numbers, France and Italy had remained in the war; and though they were largely incapable of extended offensive operations, they still held down thousands of German and Habsburg forces and manned hundreds of kilometres of front. By September and October 1918, Germany's allies fell one by one, leaving Germany increasingly vulnerable. And finally, the economic, financial, and industrial might of the Allies was now making a perceptible difference on the battlefield, with technology making a real impact on combat. The sheer volume of guns and shells, their increasing strength and sophistication, and raw numbers of tanks also began to be felt by both Entente troops, and the enemy. The actual performance of the tanks left much to be desired, but in terms of psychological impact, they were invaluable. The same could also be said for the Allied use of gas warfare; refined doctrine, advanced delivery systems, and the willingness to use this weapon all paid dividends for the Allies in the final months of the war.<sup>800</sup>

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<sup>799</sup> A soldier wrote in mid-September there was "a general feeling of victory in the air." Caughill, *Letters to Janet*, 127.

<sup>800</sup> The widespread use of gas, however, was a double-edged sword. Liberal use of poison and lachrymal gas could cause enemy casualties and force withdrawals, but also Allied casualties with the mere shifting of the wind. The

And yet there were also numerous factors that contributed to the onset of war weariness, and thus compromised the soldiers' ability and *willingness* to endure at the front. Aside from heavy casualties, the loss of good soldiers, especially officers, trusted comrades, and veterans was difficult for the individual, and the unit to deal with. The *number* of soldiers lost could be replaced in relatively short order, but personalities, trust, cohesion, and comradeship could not be. It was difficult to deal with the loss of close friends, especially after mid-October when German defeat appeared all but inevitable, if not imminent. Logistical problems and supply issues, moreover, negatively affected both the health and morale of the troops. And as the front was advancing, in some cases several miles each day, this put added pressure on the already overburdened Service Corps. The road and railway system could only handle so much traffic. Hindsight informs us that Germany did not need to be invaded to effect the defeat of its army in 1918, but for the weary infantryman in early November this was not known, and the German frontier was a long way off. As any reflective soldier might have asked at this juncture, was it worth it? Could I survive this phase of the war? Will my death materially contribute to the defeat of the enemy? Such questions were both symptomatic of, and reinforced, the deepening war weariness by the final months of the war.

### Problems Pertaining to Open and Mobile Warfare, and Other Issues in the Hundred Days

With the resumption of more open warfare in the final months of the war, the soldiers were relieved they would be out of the dangerous, confining, dirty trenches. Open warfare exacerbated some of the problems inherent in trench warfare, but also caused entirely new problems. With open warfare, an attacking unit's flanks were extremely vulnerable; the more a unit advanced, the more exposed its flanks and the further it was from its own lines and supplies. Shortages and supply problems were the inevitable result

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extensive use of gas also ensured that attacking troops would need to advance with their SBRs attached; this meant a decline in visibility, difficulties breathing and communicating, and served to exhaust the already over-burdened soldiers. Furthermore, some gas (like Mustard) could linger in water and shell holes for weeks, causing problems and casualties long after it was delivered.

of all this (comparatively) rapid movement, and the liberal use of shells and gas only increased transportation problems. With destruction of the landscape, it was difficult for planners and attacking troops to identify landmarks and other physical features of the terrain. As one soldier noted, “maps were completely useless at times, because of the countryside being so chewed up.”<sup>801</sup> Roads and other features were sometimes non-existent – how could the troops find their way in this lunar landscape? And with this new type of warfare, it was not always clear when or where an attacking force should dig in.<sup>802</sup> With relatively static trench warfare aerial observation and photos, raids and patrols, underground tunnelling and mining, and extensive analysis of enemy positions, maps, and terrain made it easier for planners to decide where an attack should stop, preferably on a natural defensive feature that could be defended, adequately supplied, and reinforced. This was especially true as immediate and aggressive counterattacks were an integral aspect of German defensive doctrine.<sup>803</sup>

Major Arthur Bick, an artillery officer of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, also recognised these problems. He noted that the extensive use of HE shells created craters and holes on the battlefield, which impeded infantry and armour, and delayed movement.<sup>804</sup> The torn-up roads and destroyed communications infrastructure directly contributed to congestion and

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<sup>801</sup> Reid, ed., *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 221.

<sup>802</sup> Arthur, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, 289. There were some bad habits picked up by the men while in trench warfare and it was sometimes difficult for the infantry to adapt to the new type of open and (more) mobile warfare. One document referred to the “tendency [of attacking troops] to take up positions on reverse slopes where there was little field of fire.” Moreover, another ‘bad habit’ was the tendency on the part of troops in the line to withdraw before relieving troops were actually in position to replace them. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 8, File 4, Notes on Operations, 28-3-18 to 18-10-18, ‘Notes on Recent German Attacks.’

<sup>803</sup> Currie wrote that in the fighting beyond the Canal du Nord the Germans “have fought us here very, very hard,” and that “these counter-attacks were the most violent in character, heavily driven home and made in large numbers.” Another soldier noted at Cambrai the Germans resisted in a “severe and stubborn way,” with numerous counterattacks. And “the key feature of the German defense became the timely counterattack to destroy the attacker at the moment when he was most off balance.” Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 121; Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 395 and Gudmundsson, *Stormtroop Tactics*, 94.

<sup>804</sup> Bick, ed., *The Diary of an Artillery Officer*, 78, 102, 105, 119, 123, 149. At this phase of the war, despite the manufacture of thousands of new guns each year, many old artillery pieces were still in operation. With the pace of operations it was difficult to remove guns from the line for repair and recalibration; this meant the rifling inside the gun barrels became increasingly smooth and worn down over time, affecting the range and accuracy of the shells fired. This could destroy roads and other vital pieces of infrastructure and communications. See also pages 79, 102, 118, 131-133. The increase in the wear and tear of the guns meant nearly constant repairs and adjustments to maintain accuracy and effectiveness. LAC, RG 9 III C12, Volume 4588, No. 81 Canadian Ordnance Mobile Workshop, Folder 3-4.



supply problems,<sup>805</sup> as well as to confusion, which further undermined the combat effectiveness of the affected units. The Germans also contributed to this destruction of infrastructure, in an attempt to frustrate and delay the Entente advances. These delaying actions also provided the enemy with time to regroup and fall back to well-established defensive positions, such as the Hindenburg Line (*Siegfriedstellung*).<sup>806</sup> The Germans also covered their retreat to the Canal du Nord with artillery, gas, MGs, and rearguard actions, taking the time to blow up most of the bridges across the Canal. In addition, they flooded key areas<sup>807</sup> in front of the advance by manipulating the dykes and drainage system. This was a defensive tactic used multiple times in the final months, with varying degrees of effectiveness. At the Canal de la Sensée, for example, German defenders broke the dyke bank of the canal, which forced delays on the attacking troops as supplies were brought up and engineers were required to repair and build bridges.<sup>808</sup>

References to German scorched-earth tactics emerge in contemporary firsthand accounts. The physical destruction of important historical or cultural buildings was noted by the Entente since August 1914,<sup>809</sup> and used extensively in propaganda efforts. But as the Allies closed in and Germany's allies fell into defeat this destruction took on an added urgency in the final months. An officer of the PPCLI noted that Cambrai had been

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<sup>805</sup> Ensuring effective communications between the front lines, HQ, and command posts further to the rear was especially difficult. As one soldier recalled, telephone and other communications cables would have to be buried, but were subject to "frequent breaks and [therefore required] continual supervision." The inability to communicate properly between leadership and attacking forces, as well as between different units, could be disastrous. Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 213, 221, 218-219. Other soldiers noted very heavy traffic and congestion at the Battle of Amiens. One remarked, moreover, that all they had to eat in this period was their iron rations "and what we could pick up." Others noted that medical supplies never ran out, but they "sometimes ran short of rations," which compromised the health, morale, and effectiveness of the soldiers.

<sup>806</sup> The Hindenburg Line, as it was known to the Allies, contained the German front system east of Monchy-le-Preux, the Fresney-Rouvroy Line, and the Drocourt-Quéant (DQ) Line, which contained the Vis-en-Artois Switch, amongst other defensive positions. The Hindenburg Line was "a very strongly prepared defensive system held in great depth by the enemy." Bick, *Diary of an Artillery Officer*, 108 and 117-119. And in Currie's *Interim Report on the Operations of the Canadian Corps during the Year 1918* his description of the German defences illustrated formidable positions indeed. He wrote of "a succession of ridges, rivers, and canals, which formed natural lines of defence of very great strength...often mutually supporting, [which] had been abundantly fortified...[and] represented years of intensive and systematic labour. Barbed wire entanglements...machine gun positions innumerable, and large tunnels had been provided for the protection of the garrison." There were also four main systems of defence, including: the "old German front system east of Monchy-le-Preux," the Fresnes-Rouvroy Line, the DQ Line, and the Canal du Nord Line. Humphries, ed., *Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 261-262.

<sup>807</sup> Bick, *Diary of an Artillery Officer*, 128, 131, and 136.

<sup>808</sup> Ibid, 172 and 178. The Germans also flooded terrain near Mont Houy and Valenciennes to slow the Allied advance.

<sup>809</sup> John Horne and Allan Kramer, *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).

partially destroyed prior to evacuation, and that many houses had been looted with the removal of metal, blankets, furniture, pictures, and the like. At Douai, the Germans shelled the town “to pieces,” destroyed bridges, looted homes, set booby traps and explosives,<sup>810</sup> and blew canal locks to flood “a large portion of the country[side].”<sup>811</sup> This destruction only exacerbated the logistical difficulties facing the attacking troops. As the Germans retreated across France and Belgium they shelled roads, compromised the water supply, mined roads, and set explosives to hinder the advance.<sup>812</sup> And the city of Valenciennes only fell after a bitter struggle in which every bridge and canal was destroyed, and every road mined by the withdrawing enemy.<sup>813</sup> The destruction of bridges, roads, railway crossings, and canals had a dramatic impact on the communications infrastructure of the region, slowing the advance and adding to the strain already placed on the attackers. As the troops moved further beyond the supply depots and railheads, “considerable strain was placed on available lorry resources” and other of transport.<sup>814</sup> Without proper supplies, the troops could not be expected to maintain the same level of combat motivation and effectiveness.

Though the German Army was declining rapidly in cohesion and combat effectiveness, there were still disciplined units able to put up stout resistance. As artillery officer Bick noted, the Allies were facing “stubborn” resistance, and many of the defenders were fighting with a marked desperation and sense of urgency. The rearguard units and machine gunners were especially deadly, causing casualties, slowing troops, creating uncertainty, inducing caution. The defenders did not give ground easily;

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<sup>810</sup> The archival/historical record noted the German tendency to make use of booby traps, ruses, and explosives in this time period. Prior to their withdrawal, defenders often set up traps, explosives, mines, and these were often attached to likely souvenirs. Some explosives were fitted with long-delay action fuses, to kill or maim soldiers long after the Germans had departed. The Germans also made widespread use of mines, and set up traps in cupboards, beds, dugouts, cellars, and old trenches. See LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4551, Folder 1, File 14, ‘Instructions Re. German Mines and Booby Traps,’ 24 August 1918.

<sup>811</sup> Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 344-347.

<sup>812</sup> Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 388.

<sup>813</sup> *Ibid*, 411. Moreover, archival records of the 9<sup>th</sup> CIB noted that the Germans blew craters in roads, set fire to a row of houses in the city, and the area in front of the Escaut Canal was flooded. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 8, File 1, Operations, Valenciennes, 21-10-18 to 9-11-18, October 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, ‘Field Messages’ and ‘Narrative of Operations,’ 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 21-24 October.

<sup>814</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3946, Folder 64, File 4, ‘Artillery Notes on Attack by Canadian Corps: August 8<sup>th</sup> 1918,’ and Folder 66, File 1, ‘Interim Report Covering the Operations of the Canadian Corps during the year 1918’ (by Lt.-Gen. Sir A.W. Currie).

transport infrastructure was blown up, crops were destroyed, and villages set ablaze prior to evacuation.<sup>815</sup> Some accounts of wanton German destruction might be apocryphal or exaggerated, nevertheless there was indeed much destruction and delay in the path of the Allied advance. This destruction complicated attack plans and compromised the supply situation, but also put added pressure and stress on the attacking troops themselves. For the ‘poor bloody infantry,’ the war had always been one of physical labour and demanding duties. Route marches over long distances was just an accepted aspect of soldiering. During the Hundred Days, however, distances and demands grew substantially. Private A.E. Smith of the 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote to his mother from France on 11 August 1918 stating that his current billet was, just days ago, six kilometres behind the German line. He explained that “it is a long route march to the front line and it is getting longer every day,”<sup>816</sup> only adding to the strain. Many soldiers were glad to finally be making progress, but these exertions wore down even the strongest troops over time.

The demands placed on the soldiers were also exacerbated by inclement weather and other problems associated with open warfare. Although the trenches were not luxury accommodations by any stretch of the imagination, there were bunk holes, covered sections, dugouts, and underground tunnels and chambers where soldiers could escape the terrible conditions, at least temporarily. The foetid smell and vermin were perhaps a small price to pay for periods of relative safety. During the Hundred Days, however, these shelters were left behind as the troops continued to advance. One soldier remarked that in the final months “the weather was our worse enemy,”<sup>817</sup> suggesting that for some at least, the weather was just as hated as the Germans. And just as the enemy could cause casualties and undermine the strength of units, so too could the weather and atmospheric conditions. As the advance continued beyond the old trench lines out into the open, many

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<sup>815</sup> Bick wrote that the Germans were pillaging and “burning towns, villages and crops as they retire.” It seems that while retreating they destroyed “trivial things – sacking a chateaux, burning furniture etc.” but also systematically blew up crossings, highways, bridges and the like. Bick, *Diary of an Artillery Officer*, 149, 163, 165, and 173.

<sup>816</sup> Climo, *Lively Letters from World War One*, 285 and 288, taken from *The Cobourg World*, Friday 20 September, 1918, Page 1:4, ‘Letters From Men at the Front (In France),’ Letter dated 11 August 1918. The editor of this collection stated that “hardly any letters from soldiers have been published in October due to the men at the front being too busy chasing after the retreating Germans” to write much.

<sup>817</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 214. Currie also wrote that adverse weather was one of the main difficulties faced by the advancing troops in this period. Humphries, *Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 301-302.

soldiers were forced to sleep out in open fields, exposed to the conditions.<sup>818</sup> Another soldier noted that the weather, the cold tea and food, and the lack of blankets undermined their health, morale, and combat motivation. Living in cold and wet trenches, under constant shell fire, “from which every human impulse recoils...every human instinct cries, ‘Go Back!’”<sup>819</sup> did not bode well for the future ability and willingness of soldiers to carry on. But carry on they did.

Another contributor to war weariness in the Hundred Days was the fact that by late October 1918, the war was simply not yet over. The decline of the opposition, the problems on the German home front, and the fall of its allies all but ensured the ultimate defeat of Germany. And yet, the war continued throughout October and into November, with heavy casualties being inflicted on both sides all the while. This reality certainly contributed to the fed-up attitude increasingly evident amongst the soldiers. Most remained committed and loyal, to be sure, yet others worried that they would be killed or maimed before the war finally ended. This was a fear exhibited by troops throughout the war, but in these final months it took on heightened importance. For many in the line, “it had become evident that Germany could not win;” they had lost the war, “but the Allies had not yet won it,” ensuring that these troops continued to face mortal danger daily.<sup>820</sup> Thousands would be killed in the final months before the Armistice took effect. Though it is often difficult to cut through the hyperbole and hindsight found in soldier memoirs written *after* the conclusion of hostilities, there was a sense among some Canadian troops that they were being pushed too hard by their own officers. This perception was made worse by evidence of imminent German collapse which only increased in the autumn of 1918. A soldier of the 49<sup>th</sup> Battalion remarked that his comrades were “mad about it [the order to take Mons], we didn’t want it...they were all grumbling to beat hell, and they knew the war was coming to an end...what the hell do we have to go any further for?”<sup>821</sup>

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<sup>818</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 217.

<sup>819</sup> Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 393.

<sup>820</sup> Francis Rolt-Wheeler and Frederick E. Drinker, eds., *History of the Great War: A Comprehensive and Authentic History of the War by Land, Sea and Air* (Washington: National Publisher Co., 1919), 116.

<sup>821</sup> Another soldier wrote that there was “no need to expend the lives of a lot of men to prove how good we were” at this phase of the war. See LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume 14, Interview with C.P. Keeler of the 49<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Interview 2 of

Indicators of decline were everywhere, and local German successes like effective rearguard actions and counterattacks could not mask wider defeat. One Canadian wrote that losses in the final weeks were difficult to bear, especially those “who were sacrificed when the victory was in sight.”<sup>822</sup> The term ‘sacrifice’ suggests, at the very least, disappointment at the (perceived) callousness on the part of Allied leadership. Will Bird of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion recounted that after his sergeant-major informed the troops that Mons was to be taken, “every man argued bitterly and it was difficult to get them ready” for the attack. Soldiers from another platoon even suggested they attack their own HQ. Bird remarked, somewhat pithily, that “the officers were worse enemies than any German.”<sup>823</sup> It was important that the signing of the Armistice occurred when it did, as these attitudes and the war weariness they represented could not remain at a simmer for long. And once these sentiments boiled over there would be enormous implications for the morale, discipline, commitment, and combat motivation of the soldiers at the front.

The Corps commander in the Hundred Days, Sir Arthur Currie, also wrote of the hard fighting, and the fact that many enemy soldiers fought on to the bitter end. In late August 1918 the German Army was “far from defeated,” he wrote, and “was staging an orderly withdrawal, desperately trying to stabilise the front along a new defensive line.”<sup>824</sup> Many enemy units remained in the field, and the liberal use of gas, stout rearguard actions, and deadly MG teams ensured that heavy casualties were inflicted on the Entente forces whenever they advanced. Both individual soldiers and the military units were approaching exhaustion, and yet the fighting continued. And even in November, just days before the end of hostilities, Currie wrote of “stiff fighting,” the “enemy fighting very stubbornly,” and casualties incurred on the attackers.<sup>825</sup> It was this

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2, page 10; *Ibid*, Volume 10, Interview with C. Howard of the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion, page 23, and Chase, “Unwilling to Continue, Ordered to Advance,” 112, 116.

<sup>822</sup> Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 411.

<sup>823</sup> Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 147-148. Bird also wrote that “no one wanted to run into any trouble” or get killed so near the end of the war.

<sup>824</sup> Humphries, ed., *Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 108 and 126.

<sup>825</sup> On 26 October, Currie wrote that “the Germans fought us exceedingly hard all the way...” and “you must not assume that we have been out of the line and resting.” On 1 November Currie wrote to Kemp: “since August 8<sup>th</sup> the Corps, as you know, has been continuously engaged.” Currie also referred to the “continuity of the operations” and “very hard and continuous fighting.” During the Canal du Nord Battle Currie explained the negative impact that these operations were having on the military effectiveness of his troops. He wrote that “the tremendous exertions and

reality that contributed to the growing war weariness amongst Canadian troops, and wore down even the most stoic and committed veterans.

After years of war and especially combat, Canadian soldiers were experiencing the negative repercussions of this long-term service. Not all soldiers were long-serving veterans, of course, but nor were they all young, ‘fresh,’ and healthy. Substantial experience at the front, and years spent in uniform, were positive in the sense of providing personal understandings of the reality at the front, and tips for survival in this environment. Service also brought comradeship, confidence, and a sense of purpose. The cumulative effect on individuals, however, could be negative as well, as they were worn down by trauma, physical exertion, health problems associated with high-stress living, and the lack of genuine respite. As Ernest Black explained, most troops taking part in the Amiens attack in August “had been in a [big] push before,”<sup>826</sup> such as the Somme, Vimy, and Third Ypres. The pace of the Hundred Days, however, was all part of the plan to conclude the war as quickly as possible. The Germans suffered because of this, but so too did the Entente soldiers forced to carry out these plans.

The CO of the PPCLI also wrote about the problems facing individuals. He lamented the loss of friends and fellow officers in costly attacks, where at Arras “one whole company was wiped out.” These were not just faces and statistics, these were human beings with fears and desires, needs and experiences. In a letter to his wife dated 27 August 1918, Adamson admitted that “I fear our next casualty list will be a severe one as, from all accounts, the fighting has been most intense,” and that it was Foch’s idea to “put a Division in the line and let it push for all it is worth for 10 days and then take it out.”<sup>827</sup> Adamson knew the negative effects of combat took their toll on all troops, regardless of their experience, duties, demeanor, or health. By September 1918, the pace

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considerable casualties consequent upon the four days of almost continuous fighting had made heavy inroads on the freshness and efficiency of all arms.” And after five days of fighting at the Canal, he remarked that “to continue to throw tired troops against such opposition, without giving them an opportunity to refit and recuperate, was obviously inviting a serious failure.” And finally, during the pursuit phase prior to reaching Valenciennes “the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division had now been in the line for two weeks without having an opportunity to rest and refit since the hard-fought battle of the Canal du Nord.” Ibid, 299, 127, 131, 280-281, 293-295.

<sup>826</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 164.

<sup>827</sup> Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 340-341, Letter to his wife Mabel, dated 27 August 1918.

and intensity of the fighting had negatively impacted both individuals and the units they served in. Regarding the latter, some units “were all kept very much on the go and I am more than ever convinced that the present open fighting is a young man’s job,”<sup>828</sup> suggesting that this type of fighting was more taxing than trench warfare. Another soldier of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote in September that despite his unit being “depleted and exhausted,” they were expected to attack again.<sup>829</sup> The heavy fighting of the period also reinforced the notion, present throughout the war, that breakdown in combat, due to the cumulative effects of the strains of warfare, was all but inevitable for long-serving veterans. In a letter of 3 September, Adamson wrote that “Charles thinks he will crack, but wants to stick it for a couple of months...Donald Gray is very anxious to take command, becoming second in command to Charles *till he cracks*.”<sup>830</sup> This suggests breakdown was expected, but also that Charles sought to remain at the front in a show of dedication and duty, but also based on notions of masculinity and social expectations.

The Hundred Days presented the Canadians with other unique challenges, namely, the presence of substantial numbers of civilians, refugees, and other non-combatants in the war zone. This increased the pressure placed on soldiers, and meant more work for them as well. Civilians in the area complicated attack plans, and induced a sense of caution on the part of planners. For example, forces needed to be careful with artillery barrages, and according to one artillery officer, “shooting promiscuously is not allowed” due to the presence of civilians.<sup>831</sup> Attempting to maintain the moral high ground in relation to the enemy meant altering attack plans to take these civilians into account. And as the Corps continued, they encountered ever more civilians and refugees on their lines of advance. One officer noted that by November roughly a third of the soldiers’ rations were being shared with locals.<sup>832</sup> The presence of civilians, however, might also have

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<sup>828</sup> Adamson, *Letters*, 341, Letter to his wife Mabel, dated 3 September 1918, Chateau de la Haie.

<sup>829</sup> Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 122.

<sup>830</sup> The italics are mine, to emphasise that breakdown was all but inevitable for long-serving veterans. See Ibid.

<sup>831</sup> Bick, *Diary of an Artillery Officer*, 174.

<sup>832</sup> Christie, *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 344-347. Another soldier noted that by November the Corps was feeding and caring for over 75,000 liberated civilians. Cate, ed., *A Soldier’s Memoir of World War I*, 76.

contributed to the morale of the troops, as they relished the role of liberator and finally saw tangible evidence of the positive impact they were making.

Another difficulty facing the advancing troops was the water situation. This was connected to transportation and logistical problems, as well as to German destruction and scorched-earth policies. One 2<sup>nd</sup> Division report of 25 August 1918 indicated that “wells in recaptured area are reported contaminated with Arsenic...all water must be tested before drinking.”<sup>833</sup> It is unclear whether the retreating enemy purposely poisoned wells or this was an unintended consequence of combat in the area, though the results were the same. Another report indicated that in the forward area “it is unlikely that many of these wells will be available for some little time,” ensuring that these shortages could not be mitigated by local sources. In some cases, despite the best efforts of support and service troops, it was “impossible to obtain water tank lorries to convey water forward under divisional arrangements,” which meant the troops would be reliant upon a limited number of supply tanks and chlorinating tablets.<sup>834</sup> These problems served to undermine both the health and morale<sup>835</sup> of the participating troops, and were a direct contributing factor toward war weariness in the final months of the war.

Ultimately it was the nature of the fighting during the Hundred Days that eroded the strength and will of the long-serving veterans still fighting and dying on the Western Front by the summer and autumn of 1918. The hardships and discomfort, hard fighting and heavy casualties, the “violent nature of the fighting in 1918, the rapid...movement from place to place, and the fact that the troops were almost constantly in action”<sup>836</sup> wore down even the strongest, most committed veteran soldiers. It was fortuitous that the fighting ceased when it did in November 1918, but in August there was still much heavy fighting, and suffering, to remain.

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<sup>833</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4553, Folder 5, File 8, ‘Ref. No. 3-4/4869,’ A.D.M.S., 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division. Purposeful poisoning of wells was also a claim made by some historians. See, for example, Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front*, 161.

<sup>834</sup> Ibid, ‘Water Supply, Reports On,’ 2-8-16 to 20-11-18, No. 6 CDN Field Ambulance, C.A.M.C.

<sup>835</sup> Because water was in short supply or even unobtainable, at times support services like the YMCA, Salvation Army Huts, or Chaplain Services were unable to provide the troops with sufficient coffee, cocoa, or tea. This likely acted as an assault on their morale. LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4664, Report ADCS France, and ‘Reports – France.’

<sup>836</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4667, Chaplains Reports 12, and Volume 4674, Lt.-Col. W.T. Workman, including a ‘Report: The Canadian Catholic Chaplains Overseas.’



## July-November 1918 and the Hundred Days Campaign in Context

The period from July to November 1918 was the busiest of the entire war for the Canadians in terms of actions and engagements. There were more days in action and in preparing for operations than in any previous phase of the war. The Corps fought large set-piece battles, and participated in urban warfare, follow-up, mopping up, and pursuit operations, and by October nearly-constant advancing. During July 1918, the Corps was mostly out of the line and preparing, training, and practicing for the upcoming offensive in August. Following this respite, the Corps was nearly always in the line until the signing of the Armistice on 11 November, and Canadian troops participated in three large-scale battles, and a number of minor operations. The first major action of the campaign took place in early August. Between 8 and 11 August the Corps played an integral role in the Battle of Amiens.<sup>837</sup> Following the successful conclusion of these operations, the Corps moved to a different sector of the front to take part in the Second Battles of Arras, between 26 August and 3 September.<sup>838</sup> And, according to *Canada's Official History*, the third major battle in which the Corps was engaged was the Battles of the Hindenburg Line, including the Canal du Nord, capture of Brouillon Wood (27 September-1 October), and the capture of Cambrai (8-9 October).<sup>839</sup> Following the capture of Cambrai, pursuit

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<sup>837</sup> Canadian troops, or at least detached units or sub-units, also participated in “actions round Damery” (15-17 August) and the Second Battles of the Somme, 1918, including Albert (21-23 August) and Second Bapaume (31 August-3 September). G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War – With an Introduction by Mark Osborne Humphries* (Montreal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2015), Appendix “F,” 554-556.

<sup>838</sup> During the Battle of Arras aspects of the Corps were also at the Scarpe, or capture of Monchy-le-Preux (26-30 August) and the Drocourt-Queant Canal (2-3 September). Ibid. Currie also noted that the attack to break the Fresnes-Roubroy Line began before dawn on 26 August. And the attack on the DQ Line (and DQ Switch) began at 5:00am on 2 September. Humphries, ed., *Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 110-114. The Corps attacked on 26 August east of Arras, with troops on the right bank of the Scarpe. And by 2 September, they had broken through the DQ Line. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 4, August 1918, ‘Operation Orders’ and Volume 4680, Folder 18, File 18, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, September 1918, ‘Operations DQ Line, Report on.’

<sup>839</sup> The Battles of the Hindenburg Line included actions at Havrincourt (12 September), Epehy (18 September), St. Quentin Canal (29 September-2 October), and Beaufort Line (3-5 October). Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 555. The attack on the Canal du Nord began on 27 September, one of the riskiest and most dangerous operations of the entire war. Humphries, *Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 118. See also Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man's Land*, 261 and 284 and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4231, Folder 23, File 1, Operations, Canal and Brouillon Wood, 20-8-18 to 28-9-18. The Cambrai battle began at 4:30am on 8 October. Allied forces in this period also captured the Hindenburg Line north from Marcoing to Lens, and then captured Cambrai, Lille, and Douai. Rolt-Wheeler and Drinker, *History of the Great War*, 125, 127. An officer of the Corps wrote that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was “fighting

operations commenced, with the Corps chasing the enemy toward their frontier and attempting to keep contact with the retreating Germans. The enemy made a stand at the city of Valenciennes, however, and between 1 and 2 November the Corps fought and captured the city (as well as Mont Houy).<sup>840</sup> This was the final set-piece battle prior to the end of the war. After this there was still fighting, but was on a lesser scale.

Especially compared with the operations of the past, this constituted a very heavy period of sustained fighting for the Canadian Corps. The pace of fighting ensured a lack of time for preparation, and insufficient time to recuperate following operations. Both soldiers and units required time to take certain actions and recover properly. But it was this lack of respite, combined with the continued use of long-serving soldiers, which directly contributed to the onset and development of war weariness in the final months of the war. The collapse of the German Army in the field and the subsequent signing of the Armistice was fortuitous, as continued combat of this nature would have led to further morale, disciplinary, and commitment problems, not to mention further medical issues.

During this final phase of the war political,<sup>841</sup> military, and other developments had a direct bearing on the operations on the Western Front, and on the perception of the troops engaged. The perception of battlefield success and tangible aspects of progress, for example, might have staved off the worst effects of war weariness on both an individual

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continuously for twelve days from the crossing of the Canal du Nord on September 27, until it entered Cambrai on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October,” suggesting very little respite from the fighting for these units. Cambrai was fully captured by 10 October. Lt.-Gen. E.L.M. Burns, *General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars* (Toronto/Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1970), 76.

<sup>840</sup> After the capture of Cambrai, Canadians were involved in the Battle of Ypres, 1918 (28 September-2 October), Pursuit to the Selle (9-12 October), Battle of Courtrai (14-19 October), Battle of the Selle (17-25 October), Valenciennes and Mont Houy, Battle of the Sambre (4 November), Passage of the Grand Honnelle (5-7 November), and capture of Mons (11 November). The operations at Valenciennes and surrounding areas only began on 1 November, after the capture of Denain, on 19 October. On 2 November, troops of the British First Army seized Valenciennes, the last major battle of the war. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 556; Horne and Austin, eds., *Source Records of the Great War: Volume VI 1918*, xxxvi and 390; and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, Operations Valenciennes, November 1918, 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, ‘Narrative of Operations’ and report of 13-11-18 by J.M. Ross, CO 10<sup>th</sup> C.I.B; Wheeler, *50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 274-277, 297 and LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 6, October 1918, ‘Address from L’Abbe O. Podvin, Cure Doyen of Denain, at the Church of St. Martin, re. the Deliverance of Denain, by the Canadian Corps, 27<sup>th</sup> Oct. 1918.’

<sup>841</sup> The commitment of the US to the war, and the growing number of troop ships arriving in Britain, provided the Allies with hope that the enemy could be defeated. The enormous industrial, economic, financial, and demographic strength of the US provided a psychological and morale boost; the fact that US forces were inexperienced, insufficiently trained, and lacked modern weapons was almost beside the point. US divisions were stronger than their counterparts, and the technological superiority of the Entente helped mask the qualitative deficiencies with the quantitative.

and collective level, at least for the Allied forces. For the Germans, however, military and political developments were a harbinger of worse things to come.<sup>842</sup> By 25 September Bulgaria sought an armistice with the Entente,<sup>843</sup> and Turkey concluded an armistice on 30 October.<sup>844</sup> Continued Entente military victories and advances, combined with increasing and sometimes intractable problems on the home front, ensured that war weariness began to have serious consequences which could no longer be denied, hidden, or properly dealt with. Political changes in Germany and military reverses<sup>845</sup> indicated this decline and heralded the ultimate defeat of its army. War weariness was not exclusive to individuals, and affected large groups of people as well. Indeed, after years of warfare, and by the final months whole societies including civilian workers and of course armed forces were suffering the negative effects of war weariness. Canadian soldier Coningsby Dawson wrote that troops looked to the US for firmness and resolve in the face of German calls for leniency, “for the reason that she [the US] is not war-weary, and because millions of her men who are in khaki have yet to prove their manhood to themselves.”<sup>846</sup>

The strength of the Canadian Corps at the end of each month between July and December 1918 also reflects the heavy casualties suffered in the final months of the war, and the disruption this involved. The charts in Appendix I clearly illustrate the steady

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<sup>842</sup> Regime change in Russia, and the murder of the Tsar and the Romanov family (16 July 1918) began the destruction of the old order. This had a deleterious effect on the other monarchies of the continent, not least of which were Germany and Austria-Hungary. The peoples of Europe were inspired that they could throw off the shackles of imperial government, however radical and violent the process. By 15 September, Vienna called for an international peace conference, in an attempt to salvage something from the disintegration caused by the war. Inspired by the words and ideas of US President Woodrow Wilson and Bolshevik leader V.I. Lenin, Czechoslovakia declared independence on 21 October. Barring a military and political miracle, the final defeat of the Habsburgs was only a matter of time. This also had a negative effect on Germany and the other remaining Central Powers.

<sup>843</sup> This came less than a fortnight after the Allies attacked the Bulgarian Army at Salonika, on 14-15 September. This illustrated the will of the people and the recognition on the part of Bulgaria’s leaders that the war could no longer be prosecuted effectively, especially with the dissipation of the pro-war consensus.

<sup>844</sup> To protect and expand its Empire, and to accelerate the defeat of the Turks, the British launched attacks across the Middle East and elsewhere. For example, a small British force occupied Baku on 4 August, the last major operation in Palestine, which began 19 September, and Damascus fell to British (and allied Arab) forces on 1 October.

<sup>845</sup> By 18 July the French forces had counterattacked at the Marne, driving the Germans back. US forces launched an offensive at St. Mihiel on 12 September, followed closely by a combined Franco-American offensive at Meuse-Argonne on 26 September. The British also recaptured Bapaume on 29 August, and On 24 October Italian forces launched the Battle of Vittorio Veneto, which ensured the final defeat of the Habsburg Army. The final Allied offensive on the Western Front began 4 November, and by 8 November Maubeuge was re-taken by British forces.

<sup>846</sup> Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 215-216.

decline in the overall number of available soldiers, especially in terms of ORs. And the Corps was also increasingly reliant upon long-serving veterans and recently-trained, inexperienced MSA men.<sup>847</sup> The substantial loss of life and disruptions this caused the Canadian forces were also experienced by other armies. And though British artillery production reached its zenith in 1918,<sup>848</sup> increased technology could not fully compensate for manpower and morale problems. Increasing the overall numbers and sophistication of weapons systems was helpful, but increasing firepower was only beneficial if there were still sufficient troops to operate this technology, which often required specialist training. The final months, especially August to October, were especially bloody periods for the British Army on the Western Front, and only July and November saw their casualties dip below 35,000.<sup>849</sup> In August 1918 they suffered 122,272 casualties; in September 114,831; and for October were 121,046. As expressed in a chart, the number of casualties evidently spiked during the heaviest fighting of the period. And the number of casualties and losses to the French and German armies in this period were equally sobering.<sup>850</sup> For Germany

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<sup>847</sup> The MSA did not provide the CEF with as many troops as it could have. In some ways, its impact was a case of ‘too little, too late.’ According to the figures provided by the Departments of Justice and Militia and Defence, there had been 401,882 Class 1 registrations, but of this figure 221,949 were granted exemptions. Of these 179,933 remaining, 24,139 were unapprehended defaulters, and 26,225 were available for military service, but not called up. This left 129,569 available for military service, who reported for duty. Of this number, 8,445 were allowed to enlist in the British forces, such as the RFC/RAF. This left a balance of 121,124 taken on strength in the CEF. Of these, 16,108 were struck off strength as medically unfit or otherwise exempted. This left 105,016 available for service in CEF units. A further 8,637 were discharged for miscellaneous reasons, leaving a total of 96,379 on strength with the Canadian forces on 11 November 1918. Of this number, however, only 47,509 proceeded overseas, and of this group only 24,132 were actually taken on strength with units in France/Belgium. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 551, Appendix “E,” citing *Report of the Director of the Military Service Branch to the Honourable The Minister of Justice on the Operation of the Military Service Act, 1917*, dated 1 March 1919, *Canada Sessional Papers* No. 246, and *Memorandum Respecting Work of the Department of Militia and Defence* No. 5 and No. 6.

<sup>848</sup> British industry turned out 10,680 new guns in 1918, the most to date. Moreover, 4,873 guns were repaired and returned to service, again the highest number during the war years. British industrial output had accelerated throughout the war, which was also reflected in the decline in the number of guns manufactured in the US for the UK in 1918 (213), which was lower than 1916 and 1917. Dale Clarke, *World War I Battlefield Artillery Tactics* (Oxford: Osprey Publishing Ltd., 2014), 25, 60.

<sup>849</sup> Casualties to the British Army on the Western Front for July 1918 amounted to 32,562. For November, the number was 20,925. Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 845, citing British War Office, *The Military Effort*, 253.

<sup>850</sup> In the French Army, Between July and November of 1918 (the ‘Campagne Offensive de 1918’) 110,000 soldiers were killed on the field of battle, or became prisoners. A further 35,000 died in military hospitals in the war zone, presumably from wounds and illness sustained in combat; roughly 18,000 died in hospitals in the interior; and 368,000 were evacuated from the front to the interior. These numbers also appear to exclude officers. Ibid, 846-847, citing *Journal Officiel, Documents parlementaires, Session Extraordinaire 1920, Annexe 633, Séance du 29 Mars, 1920, proposition de resolution Marin* and *Statistics of the Reicharchiv*. German casualties opposite the combined Franco-Belgian-British fronts (in the West) between July and November were substantial. In this five month period 78,196 soldiers died on the battlefield alone, 347,867 were missing and taken prisoner, and a further 359,670 were wounded

especially, these losses, combined with the dwindling prospect for ultimate victory, contributed to their collective war weariness in the final year of the conflict.

## Training and Preparations

In the weeks leading up to the offensive at Amiens, the Canadians were engaged in training, practicing, and preparing for the upcoming attack. Training included that for open and more mobile warfare generally,<sup>851</sup> and for more specific operations. Prior to the attack on Valenciennes, for example, the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion needed to reconnoitre the area, coordinate with neighbouring units, and plan for the attack itself.<sup>852</sup> Training was also designed to help units recuperate from previous operations, and to assimilate replacements. As the editor of one soldier journal made clear,

Even though the [19<sup>th</sup>] Battalion had just come through an intense period of fighting, it had to keep up a regimen of training to help integrate reinforcements and to allow newly promoted NCOs to exercise their authority. By keeping the men busy [moreover], it helped to distract them from the trauma they had just endured.<sup>853</sup>

Training thus continued throughout the Hundred Days, and when units were taken out of the line they were to maintain strict discipline and continue drilling. The 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion was given instructions to carry on “training as there was a temporary lull in the advance” at one point in this period.<sup>854</sup> These ‘lulls’ were few and far between, and thus authorities wanted to ensure that these times were not wasted. Training ensured that lessons from recent operations would be studied, and perhaps integrated into doctrine, but also that there was little respite for the soldiers actually taking part in operations. This contributed to the emerging war weariness.

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<sup>851</sup> The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and J.E. Child Archives, TMM FOO 81, John Cummer Fonds, Series 4-6, 90304, Folder 3, Notebook: Open Warfare.

<sup>852</sup> Cooperation with other units was often based on the use of liaison officers, who were to make contact with and coordinate with units on the flank, and to keep their CO apprised of the situation elsewhere. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 12, File 3, Operations Canal du Nord (Bourlon Wood), ‘Narrative of Events.’

LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 8, File 1, Operations Valenciennes, 21-10-18 to 9-11-18, ‘58<sup>th</sup> Battalion.’  
<sup>853</sup> Cane, ed., *The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes*, 250.

<sup>854</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 8, File 1, Operations Valenciennes, 21-10-18 to 9-11-18, 116<sup>th</sup> (Ontario County) Canadian Infantry Bn., ‘Narrative of Operations from October 21<sup>st</sup> to October 24<sup>th</sup>, 1918.’

Training occurred throughout the period, though was concentrated just prior to the launching of the offensive; Canadians during the campaign itself were too busy with operations to carry on much training behind the lines. When out of the line, training involved much exertion, physical exercise, and always army discipline. But this was still time out of the line, where soldiers could partially recuperate after fighting. This respite was only short-lived, however, but could do wonders for health, morale, and endurance. Any relief from the strains of war helped keep war weariness at bay, which is why the pace and intensity of the campaign led to such deterioration – there was precious little time for such relief. Training and preparation was thus designed, in part, to help the troops recover before being thrown back into the maelstrom. For those taken out of the line, it was important to take advantage of “rest conditions”<sup>855</sup> before returning to the front. Support personnel were busy bringing up supplies and stockpiling ammunition, whereas infantry and other arms prepared for their roles in the attack. Training for combat, however, was much different than the real thing. Once the campaign was underway and during periods of heavy fighting, there needed to be time and opportunity for recuperation.<sup>856</sup> And as the campaign continued, one soldier noted confusion as they were given only a “few hours’ notice” for the attack at Arras, and thus little time to rest after Amiens.<sup>857</sup> Lack of rest and genuine respite was detrimental to individuals, but could also compromise the wider military situation itself.

The heavy casualties of the period meant time was also required to integrate replacements into units. These were soldiers transferred to the infantry, or called up under the MSA. Moreover, prior to Amiens Currie ordered a thorough re-organisation of the Corps, and these troops would have to be trained in their new roles and acclimate to their new surroundings, roles, and units. And as manpower shortages became dire in 1918, fit (Category “A1”) soldiers in the support services and non-combatant branches, such as the

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<sup>855</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4653, Historical 1, ‘Precis, July 1918.’ Artilleryman Ernest Black wrote that during the Hundred Days ‘Rest’ meant “a change of activity and we spent the time practicing open warfare.” See Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 80 and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 8, File 1, ‘Operations Valenciennes, 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion.’

<sup>856</sup> H.M. Urquhart, *The History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion (The Canadian Scottish) Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1919* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company of Canada Limited, 1932), 301.

<sup>857</sup> Cane, ed., *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 236, 240.

CASC, were ‘combed out’ and sent to infantry units.<sup>858</sup> These troops, along with recently-added MSA men, needed to be inculcated into the life of infantry. This took time, and also entailed inspections and drilling.<sup>859</sup>

Before moving into the line, units were required to prepare positions. This included repairing trenches and wire, creating defensive positions, establishing jumping-off points, and ensuring proper communications infrastructure. Units moving into the line required time and effort to choose appropriate assembly areas for concentrating troops, to examine the ground to identify problem areas and potential routes of advance, and establish positions.<sup>860</sup> As the advances continued, units were frequently entering new sections of line where much work was required. During the battles at the Canal du Nord and Bourslon Wood, for example, the 4<sup>th</sup> CMRs needed to establish an observation post when entering a new sector.<sup>861</sup> This in turn put added responsibilities on the infantry, who often supplemented engineering and Labour Corps personnel with additional working parties. And prior to any major attack time, effort, and personnel were required to reconnoitre the area and launch reconnaissance patrols.<sup>862</sup> Prior to Arras the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion sent out parties to reconnoitre approach routes, assembly areas, as well as a possible HQ and dressing station location.<sup>863</sup> In October 1918, moreover, orders for the next day’s action only reached the 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion “late at night,” leaving little time for proper preparation. Nevertheless, the CO, intelligence officer, and others sent out patrols,<sup>864</sup> crucial to the chances of success. Another Canadian soldier wrote that “an attack made without enough time for reconnaissance and preparation will usually fail.”<sup>865</sup> It was,

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<sup>858</sup> LAC, RG 150, Volume 247, Canadian Motor Machine Gun M.T. Company.

<sup>859</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, No. 10 Field Ambulance, ‘Historical Records, Operations, Synopsis of, from Mount Sorrel, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1916 to Mons, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918, File 20, 1 November 1918.’

<sup>860</sup> Urquhart, *History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 288, 301.

<sup>861</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 12, File 3, ‘Narrative of Events.’

<sup>862</sup> This was crucial in the planning phase, and it was the duty of commanders and staff officers to determine the best avenues for attack and medical evacuation, for establishing important positions, and to generally be cognizant of the important features of the area.

<sup>863</sup> Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 278. This was also the case for the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion, who required time to reconnoitre approaches to the front to determine assembly areas. Urquhart, *History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 288.

<sup>864</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 8, File 1, ‘52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 21-24 October 1918.’ Prior to their attack toward Valenciennes, the 58<sup>th</sup> Battalion also sent out parties to reconnoitre the area. Ibid, ‘58<sup>th</sup> Battalion.’ The launching of patrols, and the analysis of the information gathered, were important aspects of any preparation for upcoming attacks. See, for instance, Urquhart, *History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 301.

<sup>865</sup> Burns, *General Mud*, 79.

however, not always possible to heed this advice, putting extra strain on those forced to carry out attacks.

Patrols and reconnaissance parties were designed to research the immediate area and gather intelligence, which assisted planners and helped staff officers devise appropriate plans. Preparations for the Canal du Nord in September 1918, for example, were as extensive as the time allowed. The intelligence gathering included information on the dimensions of the canal itself,<sup>866</sup> as well as the local terrain and potential obstacles. And after this information was ascertained, it needed to be analysed, and disseminated to planners and decision-makers. To this end, conferences and meetings were held for company COs and others who would lead their troops into battle.<sup>867</sup> At these gatherings orders were issued, maps distributed, discussions held, and other pre-attack plans decided upon. Adequate preparations could pay dividends in the attack itself, though sufficient time was often in short supply by the final months of the war.

Perhaps the most important aspect of preparations prior to, and during, the operations of the Hundred Days was that there simply was not enough time for all of it. The complexity of the operations and the sheer number of troops and variables involved warranted more time for preparation. Yet because of Foch's strategy of applying constant pressure all across the Western Front, there was insufficient time for full preparations for operations of this magnitude. The desire of the Entente leadership to defeat the Germans before the onset of winter, or before the latter could regroup and recover, pushed the participating soldiers to the very limits of their endurance.<sup>868</sup> These rushed, incomplete, or insufficient preparations caused myriad problems in this period. An officer with the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Divisional Artillery (CDA), for example, noted in his diary that barrage maps were sometimes late in arriving. These were crucial for the artillery to properly prepare its barrages and lifts, but the pace of operations and the fluid nature of the situation "necessitates very hasty work by the 1<sup>st</sup> CDA staff," especially when orders and maps

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<sup>866</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4206, Folder 7, File 8, 'Operations Canal du Nord (Bourlon Wood), 19-9-18.'

<sup>867</sup> Ibid, Volume 4189, Folder 8, File 1, '52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 21-24 October 1918.'

<sup>868</sup> Humphries, ed., *Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 108.



were issued at the last minute.<sup>869</sup> For the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, preparations in this period were often made “in haste,”<sup>870</sup> causing further problems in the attack itself. This also negatively affected the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion, where the “lack of time for proper preparation” led to delays and confusion.<sup>871</sup> These problems could prove fatal to those undertaking operations, and could compromise entire attack plans.

This lack of proper preparation time, especially for “battle wearied troops” was problematic, to say the least.<sup>872</sup> And because of heavy casualties, the lack of properly-trained replacements, and the pace of operations, under-strength and exhausted units tended to suffer heavier losses in battle, which could compromise the local military situation. And as was true with military units, so too was the case for individuals. As Currie put it, “to continue to throw tired troops against such opposition, without giving them an opportunity to refit and recuperate, was obviously inviting a serious failure,”<sup>873</sup> and thus should be avoided at all costs. That attacks were so successful in this period is quite remarkable, and suggests the increasing technological sophistication of the Allies, but also the deterioration and especially war weariness plaguing the enemy in the final months. And to put the pace of operations into perspective, the Corps staff officers and planners had months to prepare for the attack at Vimy, and several weeks to plan for the attacks at Hill 70, and Third Ypres in 1917. But for the attack on the DQ Line, on the other hand, and “unlike previous battles,” Currie and his staff were given mere days to plan for this complex operation.<sup>874</sup> As one officer wrote in his diary on 2 September 1918, the Vimy operation “took months of preparation,” but “four days ago I knew nothing of this affair and the job is at the least of equal magnitude.”<sup>875</sup> All the set-piece battles of the

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<sup>869</sup> Bick, *Diary of an Artillery Officer*, 148.

<sup>870</sup> Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 286.

<sup>871</sup> Corrigall, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 223, 227, 257 and 260. Corrigall later wrote that the pace of operations caused problems, for instance, when the artillery was unable to keep pace with the infantry advance. He admitted that these were indeed complex and “complicated” operations.

<sup>872</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4666, Chaplain Service, Last 100 Days, ‘The Final Advance (7<sup>th</sup> October-11<sup>th</sup> November).’

<sup>873</sup> Archival documents quote Currie as saying “to continue to throw tired troops against fresh troops in superior numbers was to court disaster.” See Ibid, and Humphries, ed., *Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 281.

<sup>874</sup> Humphries, ed., *Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 108.

<sup>875</sup> Joseph Pope, ed., *Letters from the Front: 1914-1918 by Lieutenant-General Maurice A. Pope, C.B., M.C.* (Toronto: Pope & Company, 1993), 132.

Hundred Days were complex, involving thousands of troops, different arms and services, numerous units from multiple divisions and brigades, and for some operations, a careful emphasis upon secrecy and deception. At Amiens some participating troops found that there was insufficient time for proper preparations because of this need for secrecy.<sup>876</sup> Many troops, including NCOs and some officers, were ignorant as to the location and objectives of the upcoming attack, leaving little time for reconnaissance and other important tasks. The Corps commander again weighed in on this matter, lamenting that they were unable to carry out meticulous and careful preparations as they were accustomed to. In a letter to Brigadier-General F.W. Hill on 15 August 1918, Currie wrote that:

What worried me more than the actual operation itself was getting the troops and guns into position without arousing any suspicion on the part of the Boche. All movement for many miles behind our lines had to be carried out at night...the move also was so hurried, and the necessity of secret so urgent, that many things which are normally done in preparation for an attack had to be left undone.<sup>877</sup>

It was hoped that these things ‘left undone’ did not imperil the attack. Hasty preparations and the nature of the fighting of the Hundred Days only added to the stresses and strains imposed on the soldiers, fighting and dying, on the Western Front. Orders issued from the high command asked the troops to push the enemy, and themselves, to the very limits of their endurance. And it was this reality, coupled with the refusal of German forces to quietly submit to the Entente, that exacerbated the growing war weariness found everywhere by 1918.

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<sup>876</sup> Norm Christie, ed., *Silhouettes of the Great War: The Memoir of John Harold Becker 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2001), 195.

<sup>877</sup> Humphries, ed., *Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 105 and 263. Currie also noted that after Amiens the Corps had to attack without surprise, and with little time for preparation, making Arras more difficult than Amiens.

## The Operations of the Hundred Days, Contemporary Views, and Firsthand Accounts

The operations of the Canadian Corps in August 1918, in conjunction with other Allied forces, included the two big set-piece battles at Amiens, and then at Arras.<sup>878</sup> The Battle of Amiens (beginning 8 August) was the first major action of the Hundred Days campaign, and punched a large hole in the German defences on the Western Front. After this breakthrough the attacking forces pushed the enemy back over eight miles the first day, and then another five miles on 9 August.<sup>879</sup> And by 10 August British and French forces were completing a pincer movement, closing in on Montdidier and the capture of roughly 25,000 POWs.<sup>880</sup> The Amiens battle officially ended on 11 August, and was trailed closely by follow-up and consolidation actions, designed to exploit the gains, beat off counterattacks, and prepare the way for further operations. At the Battle of Arras, which included operations at the Scarpe River (26-30 August)<sup>881</sup> and the DQ Line (2-3 September), there were further gains. This area was dominated by German defensive systems, not least of which was the Hindenburg (or Siegfried) Line. The Canadians, playing an outsized role in these final months, “made the first break” in these positions.<sup>882</sup> They were now tasked with breaking the Hindenburg Line, as well as its “tributaries,” including the Fresnes-Rouvroy Line, Vis-en-Artois Line, Buissy Switch, and DQ Line

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<sup>878</sup> These full-scale and more traditional set-piece attacks were also joined by pursuit operations, urban warfare, and actions against German defensive positions, designed to isolate Germany, destroy the cohesion and fighting effectiveness of the Central Powers, and ultimately win the war by defeating them in the field. All weapons were made use of, including the Motor Machine Gun Brigades, under the command of the Canadian Independent Force, or ‘Brutinel’s Brigade.’ And along with combined arms tactics, Allied forces also made use of bite and hold tactics, fire and movement, as well as a focus on the initiative, training, and the firepower of the soldiers themselves. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4687, Folder 38, File 5, ‘1st Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigade,’ August 1918.

<sup>879</sup> Pope, *Letters from the Front*, 127. This rapid advance also allowed for the field ambulances and medical services to move their operations forward, bringing their facilities and activities closer to the front line, and thus reducing the time casualties had to wait for treatment, medicine, diagnosis, etc. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Field Ambulance, Historical Records, Operations, ‘Synopsis of, from Mount Sorrel, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1916 to Mons, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918.’

<sup>880</sup> Rolt-Wheeler, *History of the Great War*, 124.

<sup>881</sup> The PPCLI were at Jigsaw Wood during the Battle of Amiens/Scarpe, and then pushed on toward Tilloy and Cambrai. The pace of operations, however, proved problematic, as units were forced to attack without proper rest, faced stiff opposition, and were forced to pull back in some areas. Attacks on subsequent days were compromised by the fact that the “men were tired” as well as by manpower shortages. PPCLI Archives, WWI Battles, 16 (20) – 1, Tilloy.

<sup>882</sup> Some even deemed these impregnable. Home, *Source Records of the Great War Volume VI*, xxxiii and Corrigan, *History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 235.

itself;<sup>883</sup> these were all astride the Arras-Cambrai road, and protected Cambrai, Valenciennes, and Mons.<sup>884</sup> In the words of the PPCLI CO, the Corps was “exhausted” after these engagements,<sup>885</sup> and it was still only early September.

The main engagements in September included those around the Hindenburg Line and affiliated defensive positions, and the daring attack across the Canal du Nord, which began 27 September.<sup>886</sup> In October the Corps completed its attack across and beyond the formidable Canal, broke through the Marquion Line,<sup>887</sup> and captured Bourlon Wood. In conjunction with British forces they then advanced on Cambrai. At Bourlon/Bourlon Wood, the attacking forces encountered many difficulties, including traffic congestion on roads and bridges, which by delaying the arrival of ammunition and supplies<sup>888</sup> compromised the ability to attain battlefield objectives. And as the advance continued all along the line, the enemy was forced to evacuate Lens (3 October), and by 9 October the city of Cambrai fell to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division and British forces; meanwhile, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division crossed the Scheldt Canal.<sup>889</sup> Allied momentum continued after the fall of Cambrai, as the Germans were being pushed back all across the Western Front. Le Cateau

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<sup>883</sup> The attacks on the DQ Line, Buissy Switch, and these other positions began 2 September. These (British) forces attacked with tanks, but repeated assaults taxed the strength of the Entente forces. Other sources indicate that in the Canadian attacks on 2 September the tanks were late in arriving, forcing the infantry to deal with wire and other defensive features on their own. Moreover, clearing pockets of heavy German resistance cost the 85<sup>th</sup> Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) roughly 50% casualties, a rate clearly unsustainable. It must also be remembered that understrength and exhausted units tended to take heavier casualties in subsequent operations. See Horne, *Source Records of the Great War Volume VI*, 294; General Ludendorff, *My War Memories 1914-1918 – Volume II* (London: Hutchison & Co., 1919), 696, 699; Chartrand, *The Canadian Corps in World War I*, and LAC, RH 9 III D1, Volume 4680, Folder 18, File 18, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, September 1918, ‘Operations DQ Line, Report On.’

<sup>884</sup> Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 247.

<sup>885</sup> Christie, *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 342.

<sup>886</sup> On 18 September British troops breached the Hindenburg Line north from Marcoing to Lens, and captured the village of Épehy, and thousands of prisoners in the process. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 556; Rolt-Wheeler, *History of the Great War*, 125; Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 261 and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4231, Folder 23, File 1, Operations, Canal du Nord and Bourlon Wood, 20-8-18 to 28-9-18, ‘12<sup>th</sup> Brigade.’

<sup>887</sup> Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 263.

<sup>888</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3913, Folder 43, File 3, ‘Notes and Comments on Bourlon Wood Operation.’ French cities, towns, and villages were swollen with refugees, which further compounded the supply problem. And as the Germans retreated they shelled roads, destroyed water supplies, and mined paths, which also contributed to the logistical difficulties. Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 363, 388.

<sup>889</sup> For the evacuation of Lens, see Rolt-Wheeler, *History of the Great War*, 127. For information on the Cambrai attacks, see Pope, *Letters from the Front*, 135.

and Iwuy were captured on 11 October, Lille and Douai taken on 17 October, and the liberation of Denain was completed by the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division on 19 October.<sup>890</sup>

As the campaign continued into November, the Corps continued its advance through France and Belgium, driving the enemy back towards the German frontier. This was done in coordination with British units, as well as the French, American, and Belgian armies. The main Canadian operations between 1 and 11 November were at Valenciennes/Mont Houy, and Mons. But as winter was fast approaching, the Entente leadership was dedicated to ending the war as quickly as possible. Allowing the enemy to withdraw in good order and establish further defensive positions would ensure at least another campaign in 1919. This would destroy the Entente's momentum and initiative, increase the reliance on inexperienced troops, and give the Germans time to regroup. The high command sought to avoid this fate at all costs, even to the point of driving their own soldiers to the breaking point. Cases of war weariness and shell shock continued right up to the signing of the Armistice on 11 November.

At Valenciennes and the Mont Houy operations there were still difficulties to overcome, even as the German Army – and nation – crumbled in these final weeks of the war. Hindsight allows us to appreciate this, but for the regular soldier at the front, there was no end in sight.<sup>891</sup> The attacking infantry were supported by the artillery and other services, but the former were expected to conduct mopping up operations as soon as possible,<sup>892</sup> which could put undue stress on these individuals. Moreover, conducting operations before consolidating gains and moving artillery and supplies forward could end in disaster. Fortunately, the Canadians involved were able to overcome resistance in the area, even as the 12<sup>th</sup> Brigade faced “considerable opposition...and the troops were unable to progress beyond” a certain point.<sup>893</sup> Valenciennes was eventually captured by

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<sup>890</sup> Pope, *Letters from the Front*, 135; Rolt-Wheeler, *History of the Great War*, 127 and LAC, RG III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 6, October 1918, ‘Address from L’Abbe Podvin, of Denain, Regarding ‘The Deliverance of Denain, by the Canadian Corps, 27 October 1918.’

<sup>891</sup> The German city of Aachen, for example, was still over 100 miles from Valenciennes. For all the troops knew, they still had to cross the German frontier and march on Berlin. See the map in Michael S. Neiberg, *The Military Atlas of World War I* (London: Amber Books, 2014), 95.

<sup>892</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3914, Folder 46, File 9, ‘Orders and Instructions by the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division,’ 28-10-18 to 5-11-18.

<sup>893</sup> *Ibid*, ‘Report on Mont Houy Operations.’

troops of the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> Brigades, but not before suffering casualties so near the end of the war. According to operational reports, casualties were “comparatively light,” amounting to 500 all ranks from the 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, of the roughly 1,200 involved (around 42%).<sup>894</sup> Casualties might have been ‘light’ in comparison to the bloody, drawn-out attritional struggles of the past, but was little comfort for the grieving families back home and their unit comrades. These gains were important, of course, but in the words of one contemporary, “never did men more sorely miss their fellows than the Canadians [and] their comrades who were sacrificed when the victory was in sight.”<sup>895</sup>

The Canadians captured hundreds of POWs, and contributed to the destruction of the Germans’ “resistance and morale” at this late phase of the war. And yet, Valenciennes was still a hard-fought battle, in the face of “severest opposition,”<sup>896</sup> in which soldiers had to deal with obstacles that placed enormous strain on them and their units. To give an indication of the devastation, Valenciennes only fell after every bridge was destroyed, and every road mined and set with explosives.<sup>897</sup> In preparation for the attack, the enemy cut retaining walls and constructed dams to raise the water levels of the Canal de L’Escaut over six feet. These proved an obstacle at the best of times, but the enemy had also blown bridges, wired the approaches to the canal, and destroyed culverts, roads, railway crossings, and buildings.<sup>898</sup> In the end, Canadian and British units in the vicinity captured the city and forced the withdrawal of the remaining Germans back toward the Belgian city of Mons. Progress was finally being made, which could cheer the men, but the cost was still heavy, which assaulted morale. The advance continued, and by the evening of 10 November, Canadian units had entered Mons; by the next morning, some had pushed

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<sup>894</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, Operations Valenciennes, November 1918, 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, including ‘Narrative of Operations’ and a report of 13-11-18 by J.M. Ross, CO 10<sup>th</sup> CIB.

<sup>895</sup> Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 411.

<sup>896</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, Operations Valenciennes, November 1918, 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, including ‘Narrative of Operations’ and a report of 13-11-18 by J.M. Ross, CO 10<sup>th</sup> CIB.

<sup>897</sup> Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 411.

<sup>898</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 12, File 4, ‘Operations Mons, October – November 1918.’

beyond the city itself.<sup>899</sup> In these operations, there were casualties<sup>900</sup> right up until the signing of the Armistice. Indeed, Private George Price of the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion was perhaps the last Canadian to be killed in action on the Western Front, just minutes before 11:00am and the suspension of hostilities.<sup>901</sup> He was supposedly killed by a sniper, but those still fighting had other problems to deal with as well. The PPCLI, for instance, had been “desperately crippled” by previous actions around Cambrai, and thus spent “the next month...devoted to training and bringing it back to something near the strength of a fighting battalion” that could undertake operations. And yet, these units were still expected to undertake operations, to maintain pressure on the enemy, to defeat German rearguards, and to clear villages. As the PPCLI advanced and overcame enemy resistance, the 4<sup>th</sup> Company even helped seize Mons.<sup>902</sup> It is thus no surprise there were indicators of war weariness, even on the precipice of victory.

Though the Hundred Days had been a bloody and protracted affair, the Canadians and their allies accomplished what they set out to do. Ultimately, the Central Powers were defeated on the field of battle, and were forced to sue for peace in the face of these coordinated and unrelenting attacks. The fighting in the final months had cost the Corps thousands of casualties, and also contributed in large measure to the development of war weariness in this period. And the war weariness would have been even worse if the Corps had not been so successful on the battlefield. Nevertheless, the accomplishments all along the Western Front cannot be denied or denigrated. By the end of September the Canadians had a very strenuous, but also very successful two months of combat. In this short period there were four major operations in a span of seven weeks, in which each

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<sup>899</sup> Canadian officer Maurice Pope noted that by the time the Armistice was signed some units were already approximately five miles northeast of Mons. See Pope, *Letters from the Front*, 135 and PPCLI Archives, First World War, Regimental History and Summary, Part IV, File No. 16 (1.6) – 1.

<sup>900</sup> Canada’s Official Historian stated that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Division “gave its total losses for both 10 and 11 November as 9 officers and 107 ORs killed, wounded and missing,” whereas the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division reported 22 officer and 343 OR casualties between 7 and 11 November. Official post-war calculations, however, indicated 18 officers and 262 OR casualties (including killed, wounded, MIA, and gassed) on 10 and 11 November. Research done at the behest of Currie showed that on the final day of the war there were 16 casualties, one fatal and 15 non-fatal. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 482.

<sup>901</sup> CWM, Canada and the First World War, Battles and Fighting – Land Battles, Mons, <http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/land-battles/mons/>.

<sup>902</sup> PPCLI Archives, World War I Battles, File No. 16 (20) – 1, Mons (The Final Advance).

Division took part in three, including at the Canal du Nord. Simply surviving these intense and bloody battles, despite the lack of proper rest and respite for the troops involved, was impressive enough. The captures in this period were also impressive. By the end of September the Corps had captured 27,000 POWs, 170 miles (along the front) had been recaptured, 69 villages liberated, 500 guns captured, and had supposedly encountered 49 German divisions in the field.<sup>903</sup> Currie calculated that between 8 August and 11 November, the Corps were responsible for the capture of 31,537 POWs,<sup>904</sup> 623 heavy and field guns, 2,842 MGs, 335 heavy and light TMs, and over 500 square miles of territory. 228 cities, towns, and villages had also been liberated, including Cambrai, Denain, Valenciennes, and Mons.<sup>905</sup> Currie was proud of these accomplishments, and the Corps' tenacity during this period, especially at Amiens, Arras, and Cambrai. He wrote that just because the newspapers were not discussing the exploits after the capture of Cambrai, "you must not assume that we have been out of the line and resting," as they still had to 'roll up' the flanks and march on Valenciennes, and beyond.<sup>906</sup> Between August and November, this was "three months of the hardest fighting experienced by the Canadian Corps," where they suffered heavy casualties in a "period of relentless fighting."<sup>907</sup> Official reports were also supplemented by later historical writing and analysis that reinforced the view of the presence of war weariness by 1918.<sup>908</sup>

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<sup>903</sup> Pope, *Letters from the Front*, 133-134. And though some of these numbers have been called into question in the years since the end of the war, including the composition and strength of those German divisions, the totals are remarkable nonetheless.

<sup>904</sup> There is some confusion regarding the number of POWs captured in the Hundred Days, largely stemming from the fact that my personal copy of *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie: Diaries, Letters, and Report to the Ministry* has the total captures at 1,537 prisoners. This is clearly a typo, especially as other sources have the total captures as tens of thousands (31,537, in fact), and Nicholson stated that the Canadian Corps "was credited with capturing 5033 prisoners" during the first day of the Amiens offensive alone. See Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 303; Shane B. Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (Westport: CT, 1997), 132, and Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 407.

<sup>905</sup> Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 303 and Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire*, 132. During the period the Corps broke through at Amiens, Arras, and the Hindenburg Line, and captured Cambrai, Denain, Valenciennes, and Mons. Macphail, *Medical Services*, 381.

<sup>906</sup> Grecoe, *The Book of War Letters*, 196.

<sup>907</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3946, Folder 64, File 2, 'Report of 1918.'

<sup>908</sup> Granatstein wrote that German morale was "shaken as weariness took hold." Granatstein, *Canada's Army*. A pair of Canadian historians titled their chapter on 1918 'The Weariest Year.' Moreover, by late 1917 and without conscription (yet), Canadian soldiers adopted fatalism as a coping mechanism, but "even if they were wounded, they would still be sent back to the front again and again until army doctors agreed that they were too badly mutilated to be cannon fodder any longer." In 1918 "Borden and his key ministers were as wear-weary as any Canadians." And Canada went to war against Bolshevism even though it was "a country weary enough with fighting Germans." They also referred to



Unit accounts including regimental histories and war diaries (WDs), are a valuable tool for understanding how the participants experienced the fighting in the final months, as well as the problems encountered. Colonel W.W. Murray, for instance, referred to congested roads and the need to advance without the expected tank support at Amiens, lamented the brevity of rest periods, German rearguard actions and defensive measures. Despite these issues, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was successful due to preparation and the integration of reinforcements, training, and the use of tactics such as leap-frogging and advancing in ‘diamond’ formation.<sup>909</sup> Ultimately, the 2<sup>nd</sup> at Amiens captured seven officers and 428 ORs, four guns, 20 MGs, and stores of engineering material, though of course suffered casualties as well.<sup>910</sup> Moreover, of the factors undermining chances of success, perhaps the most important were the “fairly heavy casualties” suffered. Speed and especially surprise, however, allowed the attacking forces to overcome enemy resistance, artificial smoke and fog, and tanks, helped in this regard as well.<sup>911</sup> These ‘heavy casualties’ only increased in importance over time, particularly as units found themselves engaged in action day after day. Neither individual soldiers nor units could maintain this pace and casualty rate for long. E.L.M. Burns noted that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was “fighting continuously for twelve days from the crossing of the Canal du Nord on September 27, until it entered Cambrai on the 9<sup>th</sup> of October.”<sup>912</sup> The nature of these operations was hard on both men and machines, and war weariness and breakdown were the inevitable result after a certain amount of time.

The fighting, exhaustion, and lack of respite in the final months served to compromise the endurance and fighting effectiveness of both the individual and unit, and began to negatively affect operations. One medical WD referred to “ten days and nights

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spreading militancy on the home front and how 1918 saw “more strikes in Canada than in the rest of the war years combined,” based in part on inflation and stagnant wages. And finally, “war-weariness was relative:” it was worse in Europe “where death and hunger had gone on too long,” than in Canada. And all major armies, save the Germans, had “cracked” by 1918. First the Habsburgs, then the Russians, French, Italian, and “even British in 1917.” Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War 1914-1919* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1989), Chapter 8, and pages 152, 194, 205, 206, 207.

<sup>909</sup> Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 258, 263, 290, 319, 253, 270, 287.

<sup>910</sup> Ibid, 266, 273. Two days cost the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 170 total casualties, with 84 on 8 August and 86 on 9 August.

<sup>911</sup> Urquhart also noted German treachery at Amiens, whereby some prisoners of war sought to escape their escorts and dashed for weapons to turn on their captors. Urquhart, *History of the 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion*, 269, 274, 278-279.

<sup>912</sup> Burns, *General Mud*, 76.

without a rest, [and] rarely getting sleep” either. This was problematic, and troops got fed up with such a life. One wrote that “you got awfully tired of 18 days under shell fire and mud and machine gun fire and no hot meals...we lived on bully beef and hard biscuits...[and] there was no glamour in it at all.”<sup>913</sup> Exhaustion had a direct and negative impact on soldierly abilities at this phase of the war. As October turned to November, the pace of operations and difficulty in maintaining momentum were compounded by poor weather. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> CMRs, “rain and cold wet nights” had the effect of “greatly impeding the movements of our troops,” and contributed to trench foot cases.<sup>914</sup> And for units of the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, attacks at Amiens were pushed forward “until an impasse was reached owing to the nature of the ground” and the defenders.<sup>915</sup> The terrain and weather acted as obstacles to the advance, just as the enemy did.

Unit histories and WDs provide a relatively narrow outlook, but other accounts took a broader view of the situation and contextual reality. From a larger perspective, it was clear that the Corps and its constituent units were engaged nearly the entire period of the Hundred Days. Lt.-Col. W.T. Workman, writing on behalf of the Catholic Chaplains overseas, referred to the “violent nature of fighting in 1918, the rapid movement from place to place, and the fact that the troops were almost continually in action,”<sup>916</sup> which acted as a contributing factor to the onset of war weariness and health problems. And though the units of the Corps were advancing and capturing vast quantities of equipment, weapons, and POWs, they were suffering heavy casualties with every attack.<sup>917</sup> During

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<sup>913</sup> Another soldier of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion wrote that because of heavy casualties his unit required more men immediately, but orders to attack brought consternation. He wrote that “if such a disorganized mob is sent ‘over’ now I shall call it a crime.” LAC, RG 41B III 1, Volume 9, Interview with Lt.-Col. T.S. Morrissey of the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, page 17, and LAC, MG 30 E 32, ‘Diary of Corporal Albert West,’ entry for 9 October 1918, page 46.

<sup>914</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 12, File 9, Operational Summaries, 2<sup>nd</sup> CMRs, 26-10-18 to 13-11-18, ‘Summary of Operations,’ 26 October – 13 November. See also Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, Letter of 3 October 1918, found at <http://www.shiawasseehistory.com/coxoctober31918.html>.

<sup>915</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 6, File 5, Operations, Amiens, August 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, ‘Operational Orders’ and ‘Amiens Report,’ OC 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. The 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion at Arras, moreover, found that they attained their objectives “though suffering heavily” in terms of casualties. The 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion encountered poor weather and thus roads in poor condition. Ibid, Folder 7, File 1, Operations Arras, August 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, ‘43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Narrative of Operations’ and Ibid, Folder 8, File 1, Operations Valenciennes, ‘116<sup>th</sup> Battalion.’

<sup>916</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4674, Lt.-Col. W.T. Workman, including ‘Report: The Canadian Catholic Chaplains Overseas.’

<sup>917</sup> It was difficult to calculate the number of POWs captured, as many were used as stretcher bearers. The 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade at the Canal du Nord and Bournon Wood, however, estimated that there were approximately 200 captured on 28 September, 300 on 29 September, and 450 on 1 October (for a total of roughly 950). The casualties for the four

the Valenciennes operations, other problems included the substantial number of civilians and refugees in the area. Being greeted as liberators boosted spirits, but also meant limits placed on military operational flexibility and freedom, as well as the sharing of rations and water. Moreover, the Germans continued to practice scorched-earth tactics; under such circumstances it was difficult to advance, and especially to maintain contact with other units in these conditions.<sup>918</sup> Accounts of those in staff positions, part of the High Command, or at HQ,<sup>919</sup> including Currie, also provide insight into the difficulties encountered by attacking troops, and some of the various factors that helped overcome these difficulties, and ultimately contributed to victory. Currie wrote that after the loss of surprise the fighting on 9 August, the second day of the Amiens operation, “fresh [German] troops” offered stiff resistance to the attackers. This highlighted the importance of having rested soldiers for each phase of the attack, and the maintenance of surprise. Despite the difficulties encountered, however, the German Army was “impressed” with Allied superiority and the “great determination of our troops.”<sup>920</sup> This was an impressive victory indeed, as evidenced by the congratulatory messages and visits<sup>921</sup> after the conclusion of the battle.

Agar Adamson of the PPCLI lamented the heavy casualties inflicted on his troops and fellow officers. In many cases these were not only colleagues, they were friends and companions too. He referred to the fighting as “most intense” in a letter to his wife, in part because of Foch’s plan to maintain pressure on the faltering Germans all along the front. Adamson also referred to breaking down (or “cracking”) after long service at the

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battalions engaged (43<sup>rd</sup>, 52<sup>nd</sup>, 58<sup>th</sup>, and 116<sup>th</sup>), however, were also substantial. Between 27 September and 2 October there were 221 killed, 905 wounded, 397 MIA, a total of 1,523 casualties. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 7, File 3, Canal du Nord (Bourlon Wood), 13-9-18 to 9-10-18, ‘9<sup>th</sup> Brigade.’

<sup>918</sup> Ibid, Folder 8, File 1, Operations, Valenciennes, 21-10-18 to 9-11-18, October 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, ‘Field Messages,’ and ‘Narrative of Operations,’ 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 21-24 October.

<sup>919</sup> Though the tone and motivation of these accounts might be affected by their biases and propagandistic nature and value, they are still a good source for understanding events during this period.

<sup>920</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3946, Folder 66, File 2, ‘Interim Report Covering the Operations of the Canadian Corps during the Year 1918 (By Lieutenant-General Sir A.W. Currie.)’

<sup>921</sup> After the Allied victory at Amiens, and in recognition of Canada’s role in the battle, the King made a personal visit, as did Georges Clemenceau, and members from the Belgian and Italian mission at GHQ. There were also telegrams from the Duke of Connaught, PM Borden, Sir Edward Kemp, Major-General Mewburn, General Plumer, General Horne, and letters of congratulations from Commander-in-Chief Haig, and Generals Byng, Rawlinson, and others. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 5, August 1918, ‘Unit Narratives.’

front as all but inevitable.<sup>922</sup> These combat veterans were aware of the reality at the front, and acknowledged that *all* soldiers had their breaking point. The intensity of fighting was also noted by the commander of the British First Army, Henry Horne. In a report of 4 October, he praised the “determined fighting of the Canadian Corps during the last five days,” which saw them cross the Canal du Nord and capture Bourlon Wood. The Corps also had to destroy numerous determined counterattacks, with troops from 12 German divisions engaged.<sup>923</sup>

One artilleryman who participated in the Battle for Mont Houy and the capture of Valenciennes was Andrew McNaughton, Canada’s Counter-Battery Staff Officer. Of the problems encountered in the final months, he referenced the German propensity to counterattack any Allied gains as soon as possible. This was part of their defensive doctrine, and gave no respite to attacking troops. This also suggested the importance of having ‘fresh’ reserves close at hand for consolidation and follow-up operations. He noted, moreover, that proper planning and preparations were still required, as suddenly improvised attacks were liable to failure, especially important given the pace of operations during the period.<sup>924</sup> McNaughton also expressed concern for the presence of civilians, how it was important to be careful in the deployment of gas and artillery.<sup>925</sup>

McNaughton also provided an indication as to the importance of the successful attack at Valenciennes. This was the Corps’ final set-piece assault, its last “major pre-arranged attack” of the war. Valenciennes can therefore be seen as incorporating many of the lessons learned over the previously bloody years of combat on the Western Front. The Corps managed to break the German lines, a “key position stoutly and desperately defended,” suggesting the improvement of the Canadians, but also the decline of the

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<sup>922</sup> Christie, *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 341.

<sup>923</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4547, Folder 1, File 4, ‘Canadian Corps Routine Orders, 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance,’ 23-7-18 to 21-1-19.

<sup>924</sup> McNaughton noted that careful and thorough preparations were one of the keys to victory. Prior to any major attack it was imperative to locate strong points and enemy defences, use aeroplane photos and intelligence reports to make maps, to coordinate with different units, and to study previous operations, especially regarding enemy positions and probable counterattack plans. It was crucial not to overlook any dangerous possibility, and prepare for any contingency. Major-General A.G.L. McNaughton, “The Capture of Valenciennes: ‘A Study in Co-ordination,’” *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 10, 3 (April 1933): 279-294. See pages 281, 283, and 289.

<sup>925</sup> *Ibid*, 284 and 290.

Germans.<sup>926</sup> Canadian casualties were deemed ‘light’ compared with those of the enemy and considering the important gains made, totalling 60 killed and 300 wounded. And finally, this was an important battle because of the enormous amount of artillery pieces and weight of shells involved. At Mont Houy 88,090 artillery rounds were fired, amounting to 2,149 *tons*. In contrast, at the Battle of Waterloo (1815) there were roughly 9,000 rounds fired, of 37 tons; during the entire Second Boer War, 279,000 rounds of 2,800 tons were fired, and the German fleet at Jutland (1916) fired a total of 1,942 tons. This firepower was impressive, constituting “the most intense barrage in history [supporting] a single infantry brigade.”<sup>927</sup> It is thus not surprising there were so many demoralized prisoners in the wake of such fire. This reliance on artillery and technology might also have helped mitigate the worst effects of war weariness amongst the troops in this operation, as Canadian soldiers spent less time in combat. But the thunderous artillery shook the ground and rattled the nerves of even the most experienced veterans.

Another feature of the period was the enormous distances covered, and the sheer pace of operations. One veteran referred to it as “the almost continuous offensive operations which took the Canadian Corps from in front of Amiens on August 8 to Mons on the 11<sup>th</sup> of November”<sup>928</sup> and the end of the war. Currie wrote that after Amiens and Arras, “something had to break,” but was thankful that it was not the Canadians as a whole (though there were certainly individuals who broke down). In this final campaign, the Corps was advancing and pushing hard, suffering casualties but also pushing the Germans inexorably back. In a letter of mid-October, Currie wrote that “we are still in the line, three [divisions] in and one out, so you see there is no rest for the wicked.”<sup>929</sup> James Adams of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote that though he was new to the front, “many of the lads here through the Amiens business have had about enough and are under a great deal of strain.” Yet despite these problems “we continue to win battle after battle but are given no

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<sup>926</sup> According to McNaughton, German dead littered the battlefield – there were corpses in rifle and MG pits, in trenches and sunken roads, out in the open, and in demolished houses. Over 800 enemy dead were collected, and over 1,000 unwounded POWs captured.

<sup>927</sup> *Ibid*, 279, 292-293.

<sup>928</sup> Burns, *General Mud*, 70.

<sup>929</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4648, England 1915-1919, ‘Currie Letter,’ dated 16 October 1918.

rest,” and are “victims of our own success I guess.”<sup>930</sup> The reality of this open and more mobile warfare proved a challenge for all involved. Aside from the “demands of the varying conditions” and types of terrain, the heavy casualties, the difficulties in bringing up adequate supplies, the lack of opportunity for rest, respite, relief, and recuperation undermined the health and morale of the soldiers involved.<sup>931</sup> These military successes were thus bought at a rather heavy cost.

Members of the medical services and Chaplain Service provide unique insight into the health, morale, and overall well-being of the troops at this time. One British MO wrote that when the Germans were undertaking defensive destruction and scorched-earth tactics, they often made shelters unusable in less than sanitary ways.<sup>932</sup> And for the members of the No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, the preparations, operations, and follow-up aspects of Amiens between 2 and 20 August were characterised by congestion and crowded roads, where progress was “slow and wearisome;” rapid advances served to complicate medical arrangements<sup>933</sup> and delay the arrival of equipment and supplies. And after the loss of surprise, enemy resistance increased over time and “held to his strong points with stubborn determination.” And yet, despite this “more difficult phase of the fighting,” the men went forward with the “same spirit and eagerness that characterized the first day of action” at Amiens.<sup>934</sup> The Entente forces were able to overcome these difficulties, but this last point on their ‘spirit and eagerness’ speaks to a larger problem in the realm of military history, namely, the difficulty in analysing these intangible descriptors, such ‘dash,’ ‘bravery,’ and ‘devotion.’<sup>935</sup> What exactly do these terms mean? Did this suggest they had good morale, effective discipline, the use of rum and other fortifying forces? Does it mean they triumphed in combat despite difficulties? There are

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<sup>930</sup> Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 114.

<sup>931</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4666, Amiens, ‘Report’ by the A.D.C.S., dated 20 September 1918.

<sup>932</sup> The retreating Germans did their best “to make all shelter unusable,” by fouling floors, defecating in basins and on cooking tools, etcetera. Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 108.

<sup>933</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Field Ambulance, Historical Records, ‘Operations, Synopsis of, from Mount Sorrel, 2<sup>nd</sup> June 1916 to Mons, 11<sup>th</sup> November 1918.’

<sup>934</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>935</sup> See, for instance, the ‘Special Orders’ of the day for the Canal du Nord, which referred to the “dash and magnificent bravery of our incomparable infantry,” the “skill” of the machine gunners, and the “initiative and resourcefulness” of the engineers. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4747, Folder 178, File 2, ‘Special Orders’ of the Day, ‘Canal du Nord.’

difficulties in quantifying and understanding behaviour and motivations in the chaos of combat and the ‘fog of uncertainty,’ in the words of Clausewitz. But this problem is also based on the penchant to attribute success and victory on the battlefield to the ‘character’ of the individuals involved. This only seems to complicate the task of the historian and muddle the waters of analysis.

Many stresses confronted the attacking soldiers in this period. As part of their scorched-earth tactics, for example, the Germans purposely flooded large sectors of ground prior to retiring.<sup>936</sup> The advancing troops also had to deal with large numbers of civilians and refugees, many of whom were in an “emaciated condition” after years of hardship. The liberation of formerly-occupied areas “was recompensed by the suffering and misery of the days spent in the trenches,” where death, disease, and disfigurement lurked around every corner. The fighting in the Hundred Days was difficult and undermined health and morale, but chaplains and the YMCA played a key role in providing the men with coffee, cigarettes, biscuits, and other material comforts. The Chaplain Service and those attached to infantry and other units played an important role in the health, morale, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of the soldiers at the front and on the lines of communication. One chaplain wrote on 8 August that he visited medical facilities and wounded troops to offer coffee and smokes, and organised a coffee stall at the ADS.<sup>937</sup> The importance and benefits of these actions cannot be measured or quantified, but they were invaluable. In letters from the front, Coningsby Dawson made reference to booby traps, often attached to explosives and mines, and the scorched earth tactics of the Germans. This included the destruction of buildings and property, the levelling of cities, and even “civilian populations...being carried away captive”<sup>938</sup> by the enemy. F.A. McKenzie, who fought at Amiens, Arras, and the D-Q Line, made reference to encountering booby traps, obstacles and tank traps. He noted, moreover, that despite declining German morale, enemy machine gunners put up stout resistance, battalion losses were “cruelly heavy,” and the defenders were at times able to withdraw in good

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<sup>936</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Field Ambulance, ‘1 September – 31 October.’

<sup>937</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4651, Diaries 1, ‘Entry for 8 and 9 August.’

<sup>938</sup> Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 206, 213.

order.<sup>939</sup> Nevertheless, at Amiens alone the Entente forces penetrated to a depth of 12 miles on the first day, and within a fortnight 30 villages had been liberated, over 10,000 German POWs captured, along with hundreds of guns.<sup>940</sup>

Yet despite these gains and successes on the battlefield, they came at a rather heavy cost. There were casualties suffered by attacking troops and support personnel – as well as to the defenders – but also unprecedented demands were placed on the surviving soldiers. It was up to these long-serving veterans, in addition to recently-arrived conscripted troops, to ensure attacks continued and that the enemy was given no respite to regroup. Will Bird of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion wrote at Amiens “I felt I would collapse if I did not get anything to eat,” which suggested how busy the soldiers were and the supply problems inherent in this warfare. Bird admitted he was simply exhausted from lack of sleep and physical exertion, and that he was extremely thirsty during this period as well.<sup>941</sup> These problems, combined with the pace of the fighting, ensured that the health and morale<sup>942</sup> of soldiers could become compromised, and these factors all contributed to the growing war weariness amongst both individuals and units. These problems wore down even the strongest and most dedicated troops, and one wrote in a letter about the continuous fighting and moving, and the extended periods without proper rest and recuperation. His unit went ‘over the top’ three times in one week, and then again three times in eight days.<sup>943</sup> This pace could certainly not be maintained for long, and contributed to war weariness and psychiatric casualties. Victor Wheeler of the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion also wrote about the pace and intensity of operations, and the negative effects this had on himself and comrades. Long marches and combat led to “great physical and mental strain” in this period. And before the Battle of Amiens, his unit arrived in jumping-off positions “already exhausted, [and] we lay down on our haunches like weary

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<sup>939</sup> Horne, *Source Records of the Great War Volume VI*, 292, 295, 293.

<sup>940</sup> *Ibid*, 287.

<sup>941</sup> Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 99-102, 108 and Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 118.

<sup>942</sup> These problems could compromise the health and morale of the soldiers, but morale could also be bolstered by battlefield success and victories. Black wrote that after the breakthrough at Amiens he and his men had high morale, explaining that “we had done very well and were aware of it.” It is important to note, however, that they were artillerymen, so were not exposed to as much death and trauma, in an immediate sense, as their infantry counterparts. Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 53.

<sup>943</sup> Grescoe, eds., *The Book of War Letters*, 186.



oxen on the soaking-wet ground to get a few hours rest before zero hour” the next morning.<sup>944</sup> Wheeler also acknowledged heavy casualties, especially to officers; that his battalion faced “long, hard” days at Amiens, where units advanced for three straight days; and that his unit, “worn down by the heat and the lack of drinking water...lost a lot of men.”<sup>945</sup> This lack of water could have serious detrimental effects on both individuals, units, and their ability to seize battlefield objectives. At times, desperation for water led troops to drink from contaminated (with poison gas) water sources.<sup>946</sup> Desperation contributed to health problems, and discontent on the part of participating soldiers.

One contemporary noted that the Battle of Cambrai, after the hard-fought victories at Amiens, Arras, and the Canal du Nord, was the “most intense and fierce battle” of 1918, in part because the enemy was “desperate,” and fought in a “severe and stubborn” way. They relied heavily on rearguard units, MGs, and gas as manpower problems rose dramatically. The Germans also continued to launch counterattacks in an attempt to dislodge the Allied forces. The Canadian and British troops finally captured Cambrai on 9 October, and observers noted that “even victorious war is an awful thing.”<sup>947</sup> The Army high command, the press and politicians, the propaganda and public could all discuss glory, personal heroism, sacrifice, and defence of the Empire, but for the soldiers actually taking part in these operations, it was likely a different sort of feeling after these bloody battles. This rhetoric, moreover, was largely unwelcome amongst the troops, and made certain commanders appear callous or out-of-touch with reality.<sup>948</sup>

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<sup>944</sup> Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man's Land*, 230-231.

<sup>945</sup> *Ibid*, 239, 236-237, 239, 244. Wheeler stated that at the Amiens battle alone, the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost 14 officers, and 231 ORs killed, wounded, MIA, or gassed.

<sup>946</sup> It was very difficult to maintain communications owing to the speed of the advance. *Ibid*, 233 and 245.

<sup>947</sup> Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 394-396.

<sup>948</sup> Currie, for instance, “had an unfortunate gift for the ill-chosen phrase.” He apparently spoke to a group of exhausted survivors of a unit, saying ‘that’s the way I like to see you, all mud and blood.’ Morton and Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon*, 197.

## Casualties, Medical Aspects, and Medical Arrangements for July-November 1918

The medical arrangements illustrate the developments made in military medicine during the war, but also the perennial problems affecting soldiers and those responsible for their care. The thousands of wounded, gassed, and ill admitted to medical facilities<sup>949</sup> demonstrate that despite the decline of German fighting power, heavy casualties were still inflicted on the attacking forces, including 1,000s of killed or MIA. These casualties also reflect that in many ways the power of the defensive<sup>950</sup> still had the advantage over offensive forces, even during this period of open and more mobile warfare; every time there were engagements beyond normal trench warfare, there was also a corresponding increase in casualties.<sup>951</sup> This is perhaps counterintuitive given the general perception of terrible trench conditions and artillery bombardments. But the reality was that trenches provided a modicum of protection, and trench warfare had a twisted logic and predictability about it. Tunnels and communication trenches provided some measure of protection for those bringing supplies up the line, and removing casualties. Open warfare, on the other hand, exposed troops to danger from above, below, and all sides.

The medical classification system ensured that manpower requirements were addressed above all else. By the final months of the war, the emphasis on preserving and maximising manpower for the coming campaign, and to compensate for heavy casualties, took on a new level of importance and urgency. On 12 August 1918 the classification of soldiers in CASC units was updated,<sup>952</sup> presumably to ensure that any troops fit for frontline service were transferred to infantry units. The idea was that these individuals were of more use in combat units, and their experience and expertise along the lines of communication could be more easily replaced. This attempt to free up all able-bodied troops for combat duties also occurred right after the closing of the Amiens battle, where heavy casualties were suffered. Infantry units needed to be brought up to strength, and the

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<sup>949</sup> See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 4, August 1918, 'Operation Orders.'

<sup>950</sup> One historian argued that even by the final months of the war the Allies never achieved "the technical means to completely break through an opposing defensive system." Beckett, *The Making of the First World War*, 234.

<sup>951</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4564, Folder 2, File 1, 'Casualties: Monthly Returns, Sick and Wounded, 1-1-17 to 1-2-19.'

<sup>952</sup> LAC, RG 150, Volume 246, 9<sup>th</sup> Depot Unit of Supply, File '12-8-18.'

combing out of rear echelons for any remaining “A” men could help supplement those arriving from reserve units, hospitals, and the newly-arrived MSA troops.<sup>953</sup> But even when infantry and other combat units were up to strength, they still suffered heavy casualties. Due to the nature of operations thousands of casualties were regularly admitted to medical facilities from the front and lines of communication. Front-line evacuations constituted a higher percentage of these casualties,<sup>954</sup> and numbers spiked during periods of combat; even successful operations were costly, and wore down the strength of both individuals and units. At the Arras operations, medical personnel and the combat services encountered many difficulties. During inclement weather, for example, roads could become nearly impossible to traverse with the rain and mud, it was difficult to avoid congestion, and the reliance on evacuation by hand slowed and complicated matters. Yet despite these obstacles, “these [medical] men did exceptionally good work today under very heavy shell fire”<sup>955</sup> and exposure to other mortal danger. This evacuation system generally worked quite well,<sup>956</sup> especially given the enormous challenges facing medical personnel and the number of casualties suffered. The system did well under the circumstances, but not all troops were treated equally and on the whole the needs of the collective, especially manpower and morale, trumped those of the individual. This was the case when soldiers were sent back to the front prematurely, or before their treatment had been completed.<sup>957</sup> With war-weary and psychiatric cases, this increased the chances

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<sup>953</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3597, 24-1-4C, Returns, ‘Strengths and Casualties’ and Volume 3686, 30-0-0 (Volume 4), June 1918 – December 1918, General Correspondence, 21 August 1918, ‘Instructions for Medical Officers.’ See also Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front*, 165.

<sup>954</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4564, Folder 2, File 2, Weekly Statistical Reports, ‘Concise Report for Week Ending Midnight, Saturday August 17<sup>th</sup>, 1918.’

<sup>955</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4546, Folder 6, File 3, Appendix “B” to Diary for August, ‘Report of Fighting East of Arras, 26-28 August 1918.’

<sup>956</sup> To provide one example, Coningsby Dawson was wounded by shell fire near the DQ Line, and was sent to an advanced aid post, likely a RAP or advanced dressing station. From there, he was sent to Arras and a CCS. After this he proceeded by train to the British Army bases on the coast, to No. 20 General Hospital, before taking a train to the port and then a hospital vessel across the Channel to England. Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 201-202.

<sup>957</sup> See Cate, ed., *A Soldier’s Memoir of World War I*, 73 and Rogers, ed., *The Diary of Gunner Frank Byron Ferguson*, 149-149. Ferguson wrote on 11 January 1918 that he was “discharged as cured today...notwithstanding the fact that I was in a very weakened position.” This seemed to be especially the case with VD patients, and those suffering from non-combat wounds and illnesses. Some soldiers were sent back to their units at the front before they had fully completed their treatment regimen. One report of August 1918 stated that “the retention of syphilis cases in hospital until open lesions are healed, is really quite unnecessary,” as their treatment could continue at the front, just as long as it was done “in such a manner that it will not interfere in the least with the man doing full duty even in a fighting unit.” Another report from a combat unit, however, noted that soldiers “are continually being returned to this battalion before

of relapse and permanent breakdown/debilitation. Medical personnel did what they could under difficult conditions, attempting to balance conflicting motives and priorities.

During the final months of the war medical personnel suffered from the same problems afflicting combat soldiers, but also had other burdens unique to their duties. For the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian CCS, congestion complicated medical arrangements at Arras, and the pace of operations and heavy casualties taxed the MOs and their staffs to the very limit.<sup>958</sup> Moreover, soldiers were given precious little time out of the line for rest. The lack of respite from service and sources of stress put enormous strain on those participating, and wore down soldiers both mentally and physically. The open warfare of the period, and the sheer pace of operations, also put more responsibility on medical personnel regarding their sanitary duties; daily advances complicated matters, and meant new obstacles to overcome, new sources of water to test, new dangers to confront.<sup>959</sup>

The experiences of medical personnel allow for a look at the inner workings of the military medical system, and the problems and casualties suffered. At Amiens and related operations, for instance, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion MO noted the heavy casualties suffered. He acknowledged that “we had been in the line exactly a month and were all unspeakably dirty and lousy,” a problem that for some amounted to “not only an annoyance and discomfort but a positive torture.”<sup>960</sup> Another CAMC member argued that the secrecy and the “swiftness of the attack” at Amiens, as well as the “depth of penetration,” taxed the medical services and personnel. There were also enormous casualties suffered in the few days of battle there, including 7,643 wounded on 8 August alone, in addition to 5,076 and 4,783 wounded on 9 and 10 August respectively.<sup>961</sup> During Arras and the fighting around

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properly cured and have to be returned to hospital.” The author lamented that troops were being sent back to the front “in an unfit condition for duty.” This clearly did little to help with the morale and manpower problems in the forces. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-11-3, Files ‘Syphilis,’ ‘Delay in Treatment,’ 16 October 1917, report on treatment dated 10 May 1918, and report dated 5 August 1918.

<sup>958</sup> DUASC, *Clearing: The Tale of the First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, BEF, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, MS-2-432 – SF 44-1, page 175-176, 181.

<sup>959</sup> MOs were to advise on and oversee work pertaining to the health of the soldiers, and were to work in conjunction with the unit CO. ‘Instructions’ issued to them in September 1918 stated that “the efficiency of the unit depends largely upon your constant care in the performance of all sanitary duties by yourself and those under you.” LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686, 30-0-0 (Volume 4), June 1918 – December 1918, ‘Instructions to Medical Officers,’ 1 September 1918 and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 2, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Sanitary Section, ‘Miscellaneous Subjects.’

<sup>960</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 325.

<sup>961</sup> Macphail, *Medical Services*, 385-386.

the Hindenburg Line, the Corps suffered substantial casualties as well, totalling 664 officer and 13,686 ORs wounded alone between 26 August and 7 September.<sup>962</sup>

The pace of fighting caused considerable casualties to the attackers during this period, but casualties were also incurred from regular duty and simply living at the front. By the Hundred Days, troops were still being removed from the line for VD,<sup>963</sup> despite the best efforts at prevention, education, and discipline. The lack of clean water and fresh produce<sup>964</sup> also caused health problems, and German scorched-earth tactics and destruction of water sources combined with supply difficulties only exacerbated this issue. Soldiers were still incapacitated and thus removed from the line for ailments like trench foot, trench fever, accidental and SIWs and illness.<sup>965</sup> Perhaps most importantly, by the summer of 1918 the global pandemic known as Spanish Influenza was wreaking havoc amongst the troops.<sup>966</sup> And as was the case during trench warfare, casualties were sustained by infantry (and other) units at the front, even in supposedly ‘quiet’ sectors, and during ‘quiet’ periods between operations – daily wastage.<sup>967</sup> Service and support troops on the lines of communication also suffered casualties, from stray shells and explosives, gas, snipers, and other distance weapons. There were also accidents, such as lorry collisions or falling off horses or wagons. This wastage was a daily and interminable

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<sup>962</sup> Ibid, 394.

<sup>963</sup> VD continued to be a problem to the end of the war and into the post-Armistice period. A report of 25 October 1918 mentioned the presence of VD in villages and communities recently-captured by the Allies. Another report even stated that as Germany evacuated Belgium and withdrew towards their own frontier, they (apparently) “liberated a large number of diseased prostitutes,” perhaps as a form of biological warfare. LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 7, report of 25 October regarding Venereal Disease, and File 8, ‘Sanitation.’

<sup>964</sup> As one artillery officer noted, the lack of fresh vegetables had negative health effects over time. By the final months of the war, there was “an epidemic of boils among the old-timers.” Between August and November, this soldier had 41 boils. Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 99.

<sup>965</sup> One soldier longed for a ‘Blighty’ wound so he could see his wife, but suffered from trench fever instead, and was not sent across the Channel to Britain. And in terms of accidental and self-inflicted injuries, these were still occurring by October of 1918. The ‘Report on Accidental or Self-Inflicted Injuries’ seemed to be Army Form W. 3428. Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 195 and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4557, Folder 5, “D” 1501-2000, ‘12-10-18 to 13-1-19 (2).’

<sup>966</sup> On Spanish Influenza, see LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 7, ‘Report on Influenza;’ LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4653, Historical 2, ‘October 1918’ and LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, No. 10 Canadian Field Ambulance, Historical Records, Synopsis of Operations, Mt. Sorrell to Mons, ‘Passchendaele to Gouyen-Artois.’ For Influenza on the Canadian home front, see Mark Osborne Humphries, *The Last Plague: Spanish Influenza and the Politics of Public Health in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013).

<sup>967</sup> For example the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion suffered casualties in operations of 15/16 August. The 43<sup>rd</sup> suffered 9 officer casualties, as well as 14 ORs killed, 109 wounded, 5 missing and wounded, and 31 MIA. Macphail, *Medical Services*, 382 and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 5, File 6, Operations, Amiens, August 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, including ‘Operation Orders’ and ‘Amiens Report,’ written by OC 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion.

drain on the forces, constantly undermining strength and removing soldiers from duty, at least temporarily. They also had the potential to negatively affect morale, reinforcing the reality that death and danger surrounded these troops, even when they were not going ‘over the top.’ Eventually, many soldiers adopted a fatalistic attitude, indicative of war weariness, in response to the reality that death or wounding was all but inevitable.

During this period every infantry unit engaged in operations suffered casualties, whether it was battle wounds from enemy fire, or due to illness/disease. Casualties were especially troublesome as the pace of operations afforded each unit little time to make good their losses; the integration and training of replacements took time, and the lack of respite following operations increased the burden on those who were not rotated out of the line or sent to medical facilities as a casualty. Deward Barnes of the 19<sup>th</sup> (Central Ontario) Battalion noted that they suffered 158 casualties, including eleven officers, on 8 August alone.<sup>968</sup> Heavy losses, especially to officers, had the potential to adversely affect the military effectiveness of the battalion going forward. There was promotion within the ranks, especially of NCOs, but there was no replacing the steady hand of trusted and experienced officers. The nominal strength of an infantry battalion was around 1,000 all ranks, so casualties of 158 constituted a good proportion of total strength. Some suffered even heavier losses than the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion, at times approaching or surpassing 50% of forces employed. And the 19<sup>th</sup> still had to continue fighting after these losses at Amiens, they were not exempt from further combat.<sup>969</sup> The 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion also suffered heavily on the first day at Amiens, including thirty-two killed and seventy-seven wounded.<sup>970</sup> On the first day at Amiens the Corps largely achieved surprise, but on the following days the enemy was able to bring up substantial reinforcements and launch counterattacks, slowing the attack considerably. The German defenders were able to regain balance and put up much stouter resistance starting on 9 August. The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Amiens alone suffered fourteen officers killed or wounded, as well as 231 ORs killed, wounded, gassed, or MIA;

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<sup>968</sup> Cane, ed., *The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes*, 233 and Chartrand, *The Canadian Corps in World War I*, 15.

<sup>969</sup> Aside from combat at Amiens beginning on 8 August, the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion also fought at the Arras trench systems, at Cambrai, in the final advance on Mons, and in other operations of the period. See online WDs, Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 430, 419, 458-459, 480, and Cook, *Shock Troops*, 420-421 and 464.

<sup>970</sup> Corrigan, *History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 223.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> CMRs lost four officers killed and five wounded, and seventy-eight ORs killed and 135 wounded between 8-10 August.<sup>971</sup> Between 8 and 20 August, at Amiens and subsequent consolidation operations, the Corps suffered 11,822 casualties, part of the reason why August 1918 was the single bloodiest month of the war for the Canadians.<sup>972</sup>

The casualties continued throughout the Hundred Days, ensuring that the pressure and strain was maintained on those who *did* survive these engagements. During the next major operation at Arras, the DQ Line and Hindenburg Line, casualties continued to accrue. The 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered heavy losses on 17 August, especially to officers, with a nearly 50% casualty rate. For the unit as a whole this was obviously unsustainable, especially as the campaign stretched out beyond weeks and into months. At the end of the day, “only three officers came out who were not wounded,” compromising the ability to seize battlefield objectives on subsequent days.<sup>973</sup> In attacks on the DQ Line in early September, the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered nearly 300 casualties before 8:30 am, undermining the next phase of operations throughout the day.<sup>974</sup> In other cases, casualties were suffered even before the attack itself was launched, as artillery barrages and gas attacks caught soldiers in assembly areas and collecting points preparing to go ‘over the top.’<sup>975</sup> At the fighting around the Scarpe and the Fresnes-Rouvroy Line (Battle of Arras), the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>971</sup> Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 244 and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 11, File 4, ‘Operations Amiens,’ 5-8-18 to 16-8-18, and ‘Notes and Some Lessons Learned from the Experience Gained during the Operations August 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, on the Somme.’

<sup>972</sup> For casualties at Amiens, see Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 102. For Canadian casualties by month, see Will R. Bird, *The Communication Trench: Anecdotes & Statistics from The Great War 1914-1918* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000), 141-142. In August of 1918 the Canadians suffered 25,471 total casualties. It seems, however, that the numbers used by Bird represent all Canadian casualties, not just those of the Corps. For example, between August and November, during “the three months of the hardest fighting experienced by the Canadian Corps” the MG Corps suffered 180 Officer and 3,200 OR casualties in this period. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3946, Folder 64, File 2, ‘Report of 1918.’ Other sources indicate that there were 455 officers and 9,102 ORs wounded processed in August, which also excluded wounded from the 51<sup>st</sup> British Division (which fought with the Corps at Amiens), as well as other formations outside the four Canadian Divisions, as well as POWs, killed, and missing. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 4, August 1918, ‘Operation Orders.’

<sup>973</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> was forced to go into battle again on 28 August, though heavy casualties prevented some units from taking their objectives. Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 244-245 and Chartrand, *The Canadian Corps in World War I*, 15.

<sup>974</sup> Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 248-250.

<sup>975</sup> At the Canal du Nord and Bourlon Wood operations the 1<sup>st</sup> CMRs suffered roughly 90 casualties from high explosive and Blue Cross gas shells just moving up the line. And the 4<sup>th</sup> CMRs suffered over 10 casualties on roads and assembly areas, including three killed. Casualties were also sustained during moves and reliefs. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 12, File 3, ‘Operations Canal du Nord (Bourlon Wood)’ and ‘Narrative of Events.’

Battalion lost 295 soldiers, and the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion 437 in just three days.<sup>976</sup> Of course territorial gains were being made, but the cost was great.

The next major battles at the Canal du Nord, Brouillon Wood, and Cambrai again saw substantial casualties in driving the Germans back. In these operations, the defenders seemed to become more desperate over time, realising that every attack brought the enemy one step inexorably closer to German territory. At the Canal du Nord, Victor Wheeler of the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion saw every single officer of “D” Company become a casualty, and it was tough to bear the loss of “gallant, irreplaceable men.”<sup>977</sup> And near Cambrai, the 2<sup>nd</sup> CMRs also suffered heavy losses, which compromised their ability to seize objectives in subsequent operations. The unit suffered some forty casualties prior to even reaching assembly positions, meaning fewer soldiers for the attack itself. Heavy uncut wire caused further problems, and “owing to heavy casualties, [the troops] were unable to advance” to their objectives. Battalion strength at the outset of operations amounted to 29 officers and 575 ORs, and they suffered fifteen officer and 266 OR casualties.<sup>978</sup> This meant that 52% of all officers became casualties, and roughly 46% of ORs, totalling 47% of the entire unit. The 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered eleven officer and 319 OR casualties at Cambrai on 10 and 11 October alone.<sup>979</sup> Heavy casualties were inflicted on the attackers because as the Germans continued to deteriorate and the supply situation proved critical, the enemy relied heavily upon rearguard actions, MGs, and the copious use of gas<sup>980</sup> to slow the Allied attackers.

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<sup>976</sup> Cane, ed., *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 249.

<sup>977</sup> Wheeler also wrote that companies were down to around 65% strength in this period, and that by the Canal du Nord all company COs who were at Amiens were gone, with two officers killed and nine wounded. Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man's Land*, 262-264.

<sup>978</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 12, File 2, Operations Cambrai 3-10-18 to 7-10-18, ‘2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Mounted Rifles Battalion, Report on Operations Before Cambrai, 29<sup>th</sup> September – 3<sup>rd</sup> October, 1918.’

<sup>979</sup> Corrigan, *History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 265.

<sup>980</sup> Poison gas was a difficult weapon to counteract because it was indiscriminate, potentially long-lasting, and could be terrifying. In many ways, gas was a psychological weapon, inducing fear and demanding numerous precautions; no soldier, except perhaps those at the base, could ever truly be safe from its reach. And because there were different types of gas, including poison and lachrymatory gas, some soldiers took the latter gas lightly, thinking it was relatively benign. One report stated that troops were taking German Yellow Cross gas lightly, but “the current impression that this gas only produces slight casualties... is erroneous and should be checked.” Furthermore, it was difficult to prevent gas casualties as “the gas was scarcely perceptible to the sense, and, in many cases, the effect seemed to take some hours to develop,” providing a false sense of security. Moreover, the Germans were able to launch and release enormous quantities of gas prior to withdrawal, ensuring that the battlefield was ‘drenched’ with gas. Between 27 October and 2 November, the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered five ORs killed, three officers and 34 ORs wounded, eight officers and 76 ORs



Even after the final set-piece attack at Valenciennes, casualties continued right up until the Armistice came into effect at 11:00am on 11 November.<sup>981</sup> By this phase of the war, casualties had taken their toll on participating units. The PPCLI on 10 November, for example, could muster “only 450 strong including both bands and transport,”<sup>982</sup> illustrating the costly and desperate nature of the fighting. This was a particularly bitter pill to swallow, especially as the war appeared to be won, but not yet over. Indeed, Currie’s order to take Mons on 10 November caused resentment at the time, and considerable controversy in the years following.<sup>983</sup> Casualties continued until the final hour, but orders were orders, and Currie had received instructions to advance on Mons from the highest levels. Advance the Canadians did, and by 11 November units of the Corps had captured Mons, and pushed beyond the city itself. By the time the Armistice came into effect, the Corps had already suffered 437 killed and 1,275 wounded in the less than two weeks’ fighting of November.<sup>984</sup> And since the beginning of August, the Corps lost 11,259 killed and 36,906 wounded, which amounted to more than 25% of all Canadian battle casualties in the entire war.<sup>985</sup> This illustrates just how intense and costly

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wounded (gas), and one OR missing, for a total of 11 Officer and 116 OR casualties in this short time period. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, ‘50<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 27 October – 2 November;’ LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3897, Folder 7, ‘Canadian Corps G.256/23-11’ and Ibid, ‘Canadian Corps G. 429/25-5.’ For more on gas and the Canadian experience, see Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999) and CWM, Battles and Fighting – Weapons on Land, “Poison Gas.” Government of Canada, Accessed 28 February 2018, <http://www.warmuseum.ca/firstworldwar/history/battles-and-fighting/weapons-on-land/poison-gas/>.

<sup>981</sup> On 1 November the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered one officer and 33 ORs killed, three officers and 87 ORs wounded, and two ORs MIA (total of 126 casualties). And in November the 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered five officer and 130 OR casualties. One veteran remembered that six Canadians were killed by MG fire in Mons. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, ‘46<sup>th</sup> Battalion, Report on Operations,’ November 1<sup>st</sup> and ‘47<sup>th</sup> Battalion Report on Operations;’ Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 284 and Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 225.

<sup>982</sup> Christie, *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 347.

<sup>983</sup> Much of this controversy can be explained by the re-interpretation of the meaning and cost of the war; and in part on the views and writings of unrepresentative war poets, broken promises to veterans following the war, and by Sam Hughes’ personal vendetta against the Corps Commander. On the famous Currie libel trial, as well as the contested nature of historical memory, see Cook, *Shock Troops*, 631-633; Tim Cook, *Clio’s Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver and Toronto: UBC Press, 2006), 56-61; Daniel D. Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987), Appendix One, 241-245; Humphries, ed., *Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 365-366; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 482, and Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 180-188, 197, 212. On the matter of being called a bloodthirsty butcher, or murderer of his own men, Currie wrote “to have gone through what anyone who has been here for three years has had to go through, and to have given the very best that is in one to the service of your country, would almost justify one in hoping that your own countrymen would not refer to you as a murderer.” John Robert Colombo, ed., *Colombo’s Canadian Quotations* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, n.d.), 135.

<sup>984</sup> Humphries, ed., *Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 139.

<sup>985</sup> Ibid.

these final operations were, even if it is difficult for the modern reader to comprehend the scale of the bloodshed.<sup>986</sup>

These casualties were problematic for at least three reasons. First of all, the fact that the Corps continued to suffer heavy casualties at this phase of the war, even when the enemy was disintegrating and the German nation was on the verge of revolution, was perhaps disheartening for those undertaking these operations. And though there was relief that the tide of war had finally swung decisively against the enemy, even successful and victorious combat was costly. The German Army was able to inflict casualties on the Canadian forces *despite* the Allied preponderance in military forces, technology such as tanks and aircraft, and industrial and economic strength. Secondly, casualties undermined the health and strength of individual soldiers, but also eroded the fighting effectiveness of their units. Missing important leaders and key personnel was difficult to deal with during the best of circumstances, including in combat operations and afterwards. Additionally, understrength units tended to take heavier casualties in attacks, forming a cyclical pattern that could only be broken with a large influx of new troops, or with the halting of operations, rest and recuperation. The MSA ultimately put less than 25,000 new troops into the field (with units in France and Belgium), ensuring that combat units relied increasingly upon veteran soldiers, those previously in support roles, and those returning from hospitals and convalescent centres. And because of the nature of fighting, and especially the plans of the Allied high command to keep up pressure on the faltering Germans all across the line, there would be no substantial break in operations. And finally, casualties and the daily draining of military strength reinforced the notion that death and disfigurement were inevitable, they were only a matter of time for every single soldier at the front. This state of affairs placed an enormous burden on the individual, regardless of their experience or level of commitment. These coping mechanisms were also no panacea to the problem. War weariness, and shell shock were the inevitable result

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<sup>986</sup> 158 members of the Canadian Armed Forces lost their lives related to operations in Afghanistan.  
<http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/canadian-armed-forces/afghanistan-remembered/fallen>.

of all this. The loss of comrades and close friends only exacerbated this reality, especially so near the end of the war.

Though it was difficult to determine which casualties were ‘genuine’ cases of shell shock (a term the authorities used) and those related to exhaustion and gradual erosion of fighting strength, including war weariness, there is no doubt these cases continued right up until the cessation of hostilities. Indeed, the mere acknowledgment on the part of army authorities that the stresses of war and the violence of combat could create psychiatric casualties was progress of sorts. PPCLI daily orders for 27 September – the opening day of the Canal du Nord – for example, referred to soldiers invalided out of the line as “mental” cases, and were not listed as sick or wounded.<sup>987</sup> This appeared to be a frank recognition of a different type of casualty in modern, industrial war, that made soldiers militarily ineffective but *without* a visible wound. Confusion over what constituted shell shock, its manifestations and diagnoses, however, continued into 1918 and beyond. CAMC Captain F. Dillon wrote in September 1918 that there was still a “diversity of opinion” regarding shell shock, but that it was a “class of cases amongst the most difficult within the scope of medicine” to diagnose and treat. Some MOs, however, refused to accept that the reality of war could produce such casualties in otherwise healthy and committed soldiers; there was reluctance based on both “egoistic and patriotic” motives to accept that psychiatric casualties were a normal part of modern warfare. Dillon lamented that

no attempt seems to have been made to form any conception of a constantly recurring clinical condition which might be said to represent the disorder resulting from the stresses and strains of warfare.<sup>988</sup>

For more punitive or traditionally-minded doctors, their emphasis was elsewhere, predisposition of soldiers to ‘mental’ problems. Many MOs and army doctors continued to interpret shell shock in a narrowly physical sense, as the result of shell explosions or

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<sup>987</sup> PPCLI Archives, 34 (3) – 6, Battalion Orders, Daily Orders Part II, 1 January – 31 December 1918, ‘Daily Orders,’ 27-9-18.

<sup>988</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 5, ‘Bulletin of the CAMC,’ Vol. I, No. 6 (September 1918), by Captain F. Dillon, ‘On the Nature of Shell Shock.’

brain concussion that disrupted the nervous system, rather than as a natural result of long-term and/or acute exposure to the trauma and terror associated with combat and frontline service. This had a tangible impact on the soldiers, ranging from accusations of cowardice to the rejection of post-war pensions for disability.

Though the sources of trauma and the contributors toward war weariness and psychiatric casualties could not be removed entirely,<sup>989</sup> there were things that the authorities could do to minimise suffering, and reduce chances of debilitation. Relief from duty was essential, as was emotional and mental respite. Fatigue and exhaustion not only contributed to casualties, but also undermined combat effectiveness and the ability to carry on with duty.<sup>990</sup> Commanding, medical officers, and the support services also played an important role in identifying those driven to the breaking point, providing an opportunity for intervention on their behalf. Chaplains could help ease the suffering of the dying and wounded, and provide “cheering words to men on the edge of nervous collaps[e],”<sup>991</sup> comforting and reassuring those suffering from the results of the war. And indeed, many did suffer during the war, whether at the front, on the lines of communication, or on the home front. Anything the army could do to extend the ‘shelf life’ of the troops was welcomed.

Most soldiers suffered during the war, though this suffering and the inevitable casualties that accompanied combat were understood by authorities as a means to an end. The troops endured hardships and trauma, the loss of friends and relatives, disease and disfigurement, but it was all in the name of attaining victory.<sup>992</sup> In order to ensure

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<sup>989</sup> Long marches and combat itself led to “great physical and emotional strain” on the troops. And because of the pace and intensity of fighting, these pressures were all but interminable. One soldier noted that when they were pinned down or under an artillery bombardment, their “nerves [were] stretched taut.” It was only a matter of time before these nerves ‘broke’ entirely. Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 230 and 256.

<sup>990</sup> By August 1918 previous actions and lack of proper sleep and rest could compromise future operations, especially during the combined arms attacks of the Hundred Days. Moreover, “the exhaustion of the crews of the tanks is very great after a heavy day’s fighting and if they are called upon again the next day, disappointment to infantry may result,” which could imperil the entire assault. Another document referred to “the desirability of getting troops to the concentration area with as little fatigue as possible,” so they would not expend precious energy prior to the attack itself. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 11, File 4, ‘Operations Amiens, 5-8-18 to 16-8-18’ and Volume 4189, Folder 6, File 5, ‘Lessons Learnt from Recent Operations, 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, R.H.C.,’ 25-30 September 1918.

<sup>991</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4653, Precis, ‘September 1918.’

<sup>992</sup> Indeed, the historical record suggests that in many cases soldiers were sent back to the front *despite* their chances of relapse, or before they were fully recovered, all in the name of military duty and the need to beat the enemy. In this sense the soldiers really were a means to an end, and the collective needs of the army and nation trumped the needs of

compliance and to impose the best terms possible on the defeated enemy, the Allies needed to illustrate their offensive prowess and military superiority, and push as far into German-occupied territory as possible. Hence the orders issued to take Mons, so near the end of the war. And in the end, Currie was unable, or perhaps unwilling, to disobey orders even with the cessation of hostilities on the near horizon.<sup>993</sup> Currie sought to balance the needs of his superiors, with those of his subordinates, thus his established emphasis on shells over human lives. There was a widespread belief, however, especially in the post-war period that these casualties were unnecessary, and that those troops fell in vain.

The loss of trusted and experienced leaders hit the troops hard, as was the case with the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the tough and bloody fighting at this phase of the war. At Arras, the unit was pinned down on the far side of the Sensée River, and “nearly all the officers and section commanders were killed or wounded,”<sup>994</sup> leaving the survivors largely leaderless. And at the Canal du Nord, Currie wrote the enemy have fought us “very, very hard,” and that “these [German] counter-attacks were the most violent in character, heavily driven home and made in large numbers.” Heavy casualties were suffered by the attacking forces, especially officers, and “some of our battalions have none.”<sup>995</sup> Promotion through the ranks often took place in response to officer casualties, but it would take time for newly-promoted troops to grasp the intricacies of unit command and new responsibilities. The 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion at Amiens also experienced a similar problem. The (surviving) unit CO wrote of heavy losses, and that “my battalion was left with very

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the individual soldier/patient, even in terms of health and recovery. LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3618, 25-13-6, Gas Poisoning, December 1915 – May 28 1918, File ‘The Use of Oxygen in Gassed Cases.’

<sup>993</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division reported that between 7 and 11 November it suffered 365 casualties, and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division suffered 116 casualties on 10-11 November. Another source indicated there were eight Canadians killed in the capture of Mons, whereas a report on casualties for 11-12 November indicated there were no reported casualties for the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, two wounded in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, 66 casualties in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, and eight for the 4<sup>th</sup> Division. According to Nicholson, “considering the resistance put up by the German machine-gunners, the capture of the city had been achieved with very few casualties,” but this unlikely acted as much of a palliative to the friends, comrades, and family of the fallen in the final days of the war. See Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 482; Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 423, and LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3874, Folder 122, File 1, ‘Reports and Returns, Daily Casualty Summary from Canadian Corps,’ 31-8-18 to 31-1-19. Moreover, “official post-war calculation of Canadians killed, wounded and missing, including from gas, show a total of 18 officers and 262 ORs for the final two days of operations.” And, “careful research made at General Currie’s request revealed that on 11 November itself there were one fatal and 15 non-fatal casualties.”

<sup>994</sup> Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 219 and 241.

<sup>995</sup> Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 121.

few officers of experience, having had 16 officer casualties during the past few days as well as 20 sergeants.”<sup>996</sup> They suffered officer casualties but also lost important NCOs like sergeants, who were vital links between officers and enlisted men. The CO of the 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion also lamented the loss of ‘experienced’ officers; their knowledge and steady hand could not simply be replaced by bringing in another from the base depot. Losses to runners and other communications personnel and equipment could likewise handicap a unit in operations. The fighting in the Hundred Days, however, required even more reliance on runners than during static trench warfare. But it was exceedingly difficult to maintain proper communications and links between the front and HQ when roughly 90% of runners became casualties.<sup>997</sup>

Substantial problems arising from the pace of operations directly impacted the medical care and evacuation of the period. Traffic jams, congestion, and the lack of serviceable roads contributed to these problems.<sup>998</sup> Delays in the treatment and clearing of wounded meant the chances of saving these troops was “undoubtedly diminished” during and after operations. Moreover, it was important that COs gave their subordinates fair warning regarding the goals and duration of advances, “in order that the men may take the necessary steps to conserve sufficient energy, physical and mental, to cope with the situation” at the front.<sup>999</sup> After all, exhausted units and individuals tended to perform less well in their duties than their well-rested and ‘fresh’ counterparts. In this period, though, ‘fresh’ units and individuals were in rather short supply.

Despite the best efforts of the CAMC, casualties continued to accrue during the heavy fighting of the final months of the war. Even during successful offensive

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<sup>996</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 6, File 5, Operations, Amiens, August 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, including ‘Operational Orders’ and ‘Amiens Report,’ OC 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion.

<sup>997</sup> Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 242.

<sup>998</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance also made reference to these difficulties, stating that slow evacuation and the unfamiliarity of ambulance drivers with the roads compounded problems. Moreover, because of rapid advances the CCSs were often too far away; congestion at the main dressing station slowed matters; insufficient troops to load and unload casualties delayed things; congestion on the roads, and questionable traffic control (“no assistance to the passage of ambulance cars and lorries”) all exacerbated the already difficult job of the medical services. LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4551, Folder 1, File 13, 6<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance, ‘Medical Arrangements during 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle of Amiens.’

<sup>999</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3859, Folder 85, File 7, ‘1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division, 6 November 1918.’

operations, the number of dead, wounded, sick, and gassed increased over time.<sup>1000</sup> Casualties were inevitable, but became even more problematic if they constituted a large percentage of the attacking force or unit as a whole. To provide but one example, the 2<sup>nd</sup> CMRs in October and November had a battalion strength of 22 officers, and 561 ORs (583 all ranks). Their casualties in this period of just over two weeks amounted to five officers, and 82 ORs, including 29 killed.<sup>1001</sup> This meant roughly 23% of all officers and 15% of ORs became casualties during this short period.<sup>1002</sup> And though during normal trench warfare these losses would not have been insurmountable, because of the pace of operations in the Hundred Days these units would be expected to launch multiple large set-piece attacks in a relatively short time frame. And because of those killed in operations, there was no chance of getting these veteran soldiers back in the unit after hospitalization and convalescence – they would have to be replaced with troops less experienced, and perhaps unfamiliar with the traditions and history of the unit. This no doubt had an impact on the morale and cohesion of the unit itself. It was not uncommon, furthermore, for attacking units to lose over 50% of their strength in a single operation. The 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion at Arras suffered this fate. The objectives for the unit were eventually taken, “but the losses had been over 50%” and each company only had one officer remaining. These casualties took their toll, and “A” and “C” Companies only mustered 38 ORs between them, whereas “D” Company only had 13 ORs, and 1 Lewis Gunner surviving.<sup>1003</sup> These losses were unsustainable over time, even with the rump of the unit left behind in the LOB group to reconstitute the unit.

The heavy fighting also negatively affected the health and well-being of the participating individuals. In the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, exhausted soldiers drank water from shell

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<sup>1000</sup> See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4564, Folder 2, File 1, ‘Casualties: Monthly Returns, Sick and Wounded, 1-1-17 to 1-2-19.’

<sup>1001</sup> When these casualties were suffered the unit also captured nine officers and 172 ORs as POWs. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 12, File 9, ‘Operational Summaries, 2<sup>nd</sup> CMRs, 26-10-18 to 13-11-18, Summary of Operations 26 October – 13 November.’

<sup>1002</sup> It should also be kept in mind that of the battalion’s total strength, a certain percentage would be kept out of combat as part of the LOB group. This makes the casualties of troops engaged that much higher.

<sup>1003</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 7, File 1, ‘Operations Arras, August 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Narrative of Operations.’

holes at Amiens, and got violently ill as a result.<sup>1004</sup> It seems these troops grew so desperate that they sated their thirst with polluted water, despite warnings and their best judgment to the contrary. Exhaustion thus drove soldiers to take risks that ended up harming their health. It was also acknowledged by the medical services that exhaustion could compromise the health, ability, and endurance of those affected. One MO, for example, after a passage on *H.M.T. Victoria* “arrived thoroughly broken down” due to mental strain, lack of sleep, and the fact that he had “worked incessantly” throughout the voyage.<sup>1005</sup> And of course there were different aspects to exhaustion and war weariness, namely, both physical and psychological exhaustion. Shell shocked soldiers could be fine physically, but psychologically unable to carry on with duty. Conversely, one soldier argued there was a disconnect between the mind and body, as “the body is a traitor to the spirit – it can become very tired.”<sup>1006</sup> Thus even if one had the desire or *will* to carry on in combat or duty, they might be physically unable or incapable to do so. This speaks to a larger point about the distinctions between war weariness and shell shock debilitation, that the former largely represented an *unwillingness* and *reluctance* to carry on in combat, whereas the latter suggested an *inability* to continue at the front or with normal duty. The “stomach-sinking tension of nerves,”<sup>1007</sup> as described by Will Bird, might not prevent a soldier from doing his duty in battle, but without proper rest, outlets or ‘safety valves,’ and mitigating factors, this unwillingness could transform into inability.

These attacks pushed the troops to the very limits of their endurance, which had detrimental consequences in the coming campaign.<sup>1008</sup> On 31 August Currie wrote that the 4<sup>th</sup> British Division was unable to gain its objectives, or even carry out its ordered attack, “owing to the physical condition of the men and to their lack of numbers.”<sup>1009</sup> Heavy casualties, exhaustion, and the health problems of the soldiers thus had real

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<sup>1004</sup> Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 258.

<sup>1005</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 3-1-1-5, ‘Influenza Epidemic: H.M.T. Victoria,’ Abstract of a Report by Lt.-Col. Bell, October 19<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

<sup>1006</sup> Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 194.

<sup>1007</sup> Every soldier needed (physical) health, or the ability to do their duty despite the stresses and strains of war, as well as the will or willingness to continue on despite the trauma and terror. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 114.

<sup>1008</sup> See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4666, Last 100 Days, ‘The Final Advance (7<sup>th</sup> October – 11<sup>th</sup> November), Chaplain Services,’ and Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 108.

<sup>1009</sup> *Ibid*, 113.



military implications. One MO went “ten days and nights without a rest, rarely getting sleep.” And in one particular attack, a captain of the Fort Garry Horse admitted that “there might have been more prisoners [captured] but we were too tired to run after them,”<sup>1010</sup> thus allowing their escape to fight another day. Ultimately, however, the soldiers were able to overcome these difficulties and triumph in the war, despite their exhaustion, war weariness, casualties, and health problems during the final months. The survivors of the fighting in October 1918 were also praised by authorities and officials for their “bravery and endurance,” their confidence and “powers of resistance,”<sup>1011</sup> though this poses a problem for modern researchers attempting to understand these intangibles.

## Results, Lessons Learned, Conclusions, and Interpretations

For the size and strength of the Canadian Corps, the captures and results attained in the final months of the war were impressive indeed. These captures acted as a tangible reminder that the Entente were successful in this period, and illustrated German decline; this acted as a powerful antidote to the war weariness present in all armies at the time. The Canadians, along with their Dominion allies and alongside the British, French, and to a lesser extent Belgian and American armies, made a direct and material contribution to the destruction of German fighting capacity, will to continue, and therefore the cessation of hostilities with the Armistice. Regarding results attained, the Corps captured thousands of POWs, copious amounts of military equipment<sup>1012</sup> and weapons, and liberated numerous cities, towns, villages, occupied territory and countryside. On 8 August alone, the Corps pushed the German defenders back anywhere from eight to ten miles,<sup>1013</sup> and there were similar advances on the Australian front to the north. Though the gains on the

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<sup>1010</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3601, 24-3-0 (Volume 4), ‘Medical War Diary, July 1917 to August 1918.’ See also Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, Letter of 29 August 1918, found at <http://www.shiawasseehistory.com/coxaugust291918.html>.

<sup>1011</sup> See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 6, ‘October 1918.’

<sup>1012</sup> In late September 1918 the 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion alone captured two large German supply dumps, containing engineering supplies, TMs, bombs, signalling lights, MGs, and other equipment. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 7, File 2, ‘Lessons Learnt from Recent Operations,’ 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, R.H.C. 25-30 September 1918.

<sup>1013</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 407 and LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4651, Diaries 1, ‘Entry for 8 and 9 August 1918.’ The Canadians were “credited with capturing 5033 prisoners and 161 guns” on this first day alone.

9 August were more modest, Canadians “made advances of up to four miles,” despite the fact that “resistance had been stronger than expected, and was becoming still stronger” over time.<sup>1014</sup> The Canadians were also responsible for the destruction and capture of hundreds of German MGs, artillery pieces, TMs, and other equipment during the attack. To provide but one example the 2<sup>nd</sup> CMRs, in just two days, captured 342 POWs, fifteen MGs, one TM, and one anti-tank (AT) rifle; the prisoners captured also exceeded the unit’s own casualties, which was not always the case.<sup>1015</sup>

After the consolidation operations following Amiens, the Corps launched attacks near Arras. These were quite successful, though did come at a heavy cost. The capture of POWs, however, had a direct effect on the ability of the enemy to withstand further Entente attacks, as prisoners were removed from combat and thus unable to return to the fight. In late August the Corps was credited with capturing nearly 2,000 enemy soldiers, and the decision of the German high command to counterattack resulted in the capture of a further “approximately 6000 unwounded prisoners between 1 and 4 September” alone.<sup>1016</sup> The Canal du Nord, Bournon Wood, and Cambrai operations further contributed to the destruction of German fighting strength, and netted several thousand more POWs. The 4<sup>th</sup> CMRs at the Canal du Nord, for instance, liberated civilians in the area, seized four guns, a TM and AT rifle, twelve MGs and sixty-one POWs. And the 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade captured nearly 1,000 POWs, though it was difficult to determine exactly as most were used as stretcher-bearers and did not always remain in any given unit’s area of operations.<sup>1017</sup> And according to the CO of the British First Army, the actions of the Corps were crucial, as they crossed the Canal, captured Bournon Wood, and engaged 12

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<sup>1014</sup> Ibid, 414.

<sup>1015</sup> The casualties for the 2<sup>nd</sup> CMRs at Amiens amounted to 82 killed and 140 wounded. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 11, File 4, ‘Operations Amiens,’ 5-8-18 to 16-8-18, including ‘Notes and some Lessons Learned from the Experience Gained during the Operations August 8<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup>, on the Somme.’

<sup>1016</sup> See Horne, *Source Records of the Great War Vol. VI*, 293 and Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 440. Another document indicated that in the attacks on the DQ Line the Corps captured 4,250 all ranks, at a cost of 166 officer and 3,425 OR casualties. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4680, Folder 18, File 18, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, September 1918, ‘Operations DQ Line, Report On.’ For more on POWs during the war see Ferguson, *The Pity of War*, 369-370.

<sup>1017</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 12, File 3, ‘Narrative of Events,’ and Volume 4189, Folder 7, File 3, ‘Operations Canal du Nord (Bournon Wood),’ 13-9-18 to 9-10-18, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

German divisions,<sup>1018</sup> providing opportunity for forces elsewhere to advance against a depleted and distracted enemy. The captures in the final set-piece attack of the war, at Mont Houy and Valenciennes and on through to the capture of Mons, were equally impressive.<sup>1019</sup> The Canadians and their allies had refined their attack doctrine and improved substantially in offensive operations, but these captures also reflected German decline over time.<sup>1020</sup>

Though the Hundred Days campaign resulted in the cessation of hostilities and the destruction of the German Army and its willingness to continue the war, there were still lessons to be learnt for other armies and forces. Lessons were not always taken to heart, and sometimes the wrong lessons were learned. Following the conclusion of the war the Canadian forces quickly demobilized and returned to their pre-war state as a small, under-equipped, and relatively unprepared fighting force in the interwar period; many of the lessons regarding fire and movement, secrecy and surprise, and all-arms tactics were also forgotten. But while the war was still being fought, lessons could be applied to subsequent operations. The medical services at Arras incorporated lessons from the previous operation at Amiens, to help with the treatment and evacuation of soldiers. The CAMC prepared for heavy casualties, understanding that momentum slowed after the first day of attack, as congestion, the need to bring up artillery, and increasing enemy resistance over time all factored in.<sup>1021</sup>

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<sup>1018</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4547, Folder 1, File 4 (3<sup>rd</sup>), 'Canadian Corps Routine Orders' 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance, 23-7-18 to 21-1-19.

<sup>1019</sup> The 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion at Valenciennes and Mont Houy captured between 800 and approximately 1,500 German POWs, of different units, and roughly 800 Germans were killed in the attack as well. They also captured "several" field guns, MGs, and TMs. The 44<sup>th</sup> Battalion in four days' fighting captured three field guns, 20 medium and heavy minenwerfers, 83 MGs, and over 600 POWs. And on a single day of fighting the 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion captured seven field guns, six TMs, 45 MGs, four AT guns, a large quantity of rifles, ammunition, and equipment, as well as 800 POWs. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, 'Operations Valenciennes,' November 1918, 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, including 'Narrative of Operations,' and report of 13-11-18 by J.M. Ross, CO 10<sup>th</sup> CIB; Ibid, 44<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 'Report on Operations,' 29 October – 1 November, and Ibid, 46<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 'Report on Operations,' November 1<sup>st</sup>.

<sup>1020</sup> At this phase of the war the capture of enemy prisoners, especially unwounded ones, was likely indicative of German war weariness, the fall of morale, loss of faith in ultimate victory, and acknowledgment of the hopelessness of the situation. Some Germans refused to surrender and fought to the bitter end, to be sure, but the enormous number of POWs falling into Allied hands suggested a widespread recognition of defeat and disintegration. In all, the Canadians seized in excess of 30,000 POWs, over 600 guns, nearly 3,000 MGs, and over 300 mortars, in addition to capturing over 500 square miles of territory, including the liberation of 228 cities, towns, and villages.

<sup>1021</sup> DUASC, MS – 2 – 432, SF 44-1, *Clearing: The Tale of The First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, British Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, page 173-177.

This time period also made it evident that exhaustion could be detrimental, even fatal, to any attack. Thus rest, rotation, and respite were crucial for both soldiers and their units. Without proper rest and time away from the stresses and strains of war, war weariness, shell shock, and other psychiatric casualties were all too likely. Units could achieve their battlefield objectives without sufficient rest beforehand,<sup>1022</sup> but this was likely rare and the pace of operations in the Hundred Days made this unwise. The Allied high command and unit COs needed to take the reality of exhaustion and the erosion of endurance seriously, as war weariness and shell shock could harm the individual soldier, his unit,<sup>1023</sup> and, ultimately, the wider military situation itself. These types of problems could induce recklessness, undue caution, apathy, terror, and any number of emotions and issues related to the impact of combat on the individual and collective.

And indeed, the intensity of fighting took its toll on those involved. Bloody and protracted engagements occurred earlier in the war, such as at the Somme and Third Ypres, but never before had these operations taken place in such a short time period. Successive attacks in the same area or employing the same units was a feature of the final months, and simply put, there was a price to pay for this fighting. Not only in the casualties inflicted, but also in the disciplinary problems it engendered and the moral issues it created. The final Canadian to be officially executed for wartime crimes, Private Norman Ling of Toronto, suffered this fate early in the campaign; he faced the firing squad on 12 August, 1918.<sup>1024</sup> The military authorities were keen on ensuring that the proper ‘message’ was sent to those still in the line, and there was a clear deterrent aspect. There were fears that disciplinary problems would overwhelm the situation, and thus a

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<sup>1022</sup> After the Battle of Amiens, and between 12 and 15 August, “during the four days there was little or no opportunity for rest or sleep” but apparently the troops involved still displayed “magnificent fighting abilities” and “high spirit.” Would this remain the case if this exhausted unit was asked to attack again in short order? PPCLI Archives, WWI Battles, File 16 (20) – 1, Parvillers.

<sup>1023</sup> At Amiens, “having suffered rather severely in the shelling, a platoon occupying our position about that point followed their officer who had apparently been shell shocked and was *unaccountable for his action*, ran towards Damery.” My italics. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 6, File 5, Operations, Amiens, August 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, including ‘Operation Orders’ and ‘Amiens Report,’ OC 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion.

<sup>1024</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4561, Folder 7, 1, ‘Orders Part I and II,’ 31-7-18 to 15-3-19, 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Stationary Hospital. For more on Private Ling and other executed Canadians, see Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour* and Chris Madsen, *Another Kind of Justice: Canadian Military Law from Confederation to Somalia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999). For the role of chaplains in defending accused soldiers at courts martial trials, and also helping them prior to their execution, see LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4664, ‘Report for 15 June to 14 July 1918’ inclusive.

firm hand was required – desertion or cowardice would not be tolerated, despite the particulars of any given case. Soldiers were punished for failing to do their duty, often in disregard to the *reasons* for this failure.

This period was also problematic for authorities because the fighting brought the troops within hand-to-hand combat range of the enemy. In many cases, this was the first time they had been within such close contact with the enemy, save for trench raids and patrols. And with this close contact, there were abundant opportunities for bloodlust, revenge, and rage killings, especially as some enemy units, such as machine gunners, refused to give in and fought to the bitter end. There is both anecdotal and official evidence of the killing of German POWs and those attempting to surrender in the heat of battle. At times, this killing was presented matter-of-factly in letters and memoirs, such as those of Agar Adamson.<sup>1025</sup> Other soldiers, however, felt guilty about contravening international laws, agreements, and the norms of war. Some justified it by arguing that it was of military necessity, part of orders received from superiors, or was done for the safety of them and comrades.<sup>1026</sup> This abrogation of the moral high ground was the result of intense combat, but also reflected that at times no amount of discipline, training, orders, expectations, or regimental culture could prevent human emotions from overwhelming the individual. This was just one reason why connections to home and family life, partly in the form of letters,<sup>1027</sup> were so important for the soldiers at the front. Constant reinforcements of their humanity perhaps helped prevent further dehumanization of the enemy across No Man's Land.

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<sup>1025</sup> At Vimy Adamson wrote that “A German Major refused to be sent with prisoners to the rear, except in charge of a Major. He will trouble us no more,” suggesting that his captors shot this uncooperative German prisoner as a matter of course. Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 274.

<sup>1026</sup> Wheeler recounted at Amiens that the 54<sup>th</sup> Battalion had received orders to take no prisoners, and to “show no mercy” to the enemy. In another section, he wrote that beyond Denain German MG crews were “given no quarter,” and that those who refused to surrender were “despatched without mercy.” In a telling statement, he wrote that “it was impossible to avoid taking so many alive,” suggesting that they *did not want* to take many alive. Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man's Land*, 244 and 279. Barnes noted in his journal that he witnessed and even participated in the shooting of prisoners. He wrote, for example, that when they reached the German lines not all were captured, as “we shot them down like dogs.” In another case, POWs were killed on their way to prisoner cages in the rear. And in a final example, Barnes wrote that his comrade “Bell wanted to say for sure that he killed a German and so he shot a prisoner point-blank.” Cane, ed., *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 226-231.

<sup>1027</sup> Postal arrangements were thus crucial to the soldiers. During the open warfare of the period it was important that letters and packages from home be delivered to the soldiers, even being brought up with military supplies if need be. LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 8, ‘Postal Arrangements during Operations,’ 2 September 1918.

For the historian, there were also lessons to be gleaned from this time period. The Canadian forces during the war were composed mostly of volunteer citizen-soldiers, rather than professionals. And though months and years at the front tended to create hardened veterans familiar with the strains of warfare, these were still humans with natural (biological) reactions to trauma and terror. It is thus not surprising that despite comradeship and pride in unit, discipline and effective leadership, and both ‘carrots and sticks’ to keep soldiers at duty, some were unable to stand the strain and sought an escape from the horror of combat, death, and dying. Many soldiers over time became war weary and cautious, or fatalistic and apathetic, reducing their participation in combat to a bare minimum; others suffered shell shock debilitation or panic, and did all they could to avoid the sources of their fear and uncertainty. This is just one reason why instances of AWL and desertion continued throughout the Hundred Days,<sup>1028</sup> despite the tangible signs of military success and corresponding indications of German disintegration. And desperate soldiers would do nearly anything to escape their plight at the front, or evade duty, including surrendering, adopting reckless behaviour that invited death or wounding, and the administering of a SIW or illness. For these soldiers, almost any fate was preferable to the inevitable result of the trenches and combat. Ultimately, just like human society and life in general, combat and warfare more generally were (and remain) complex and confusing, and resist clean, easy analysis.

Other unpredictable elements such as inclement weather or enemy responses<sup>1029</sup> could make things difficult, or even compromise attacks altogether. Heavy rain turned the battlefield into a bloody morass, and a well-timed and executed counterattack could dislodge troops from recently-captured positions. Problems with the “inevitable confusion and obscurity of close fighting” were also common in this period.<sup>1030</sup> This emphasised the need for substantial reserves close at hand, contingency plans and flexibility, as well as robust communications. Perhaps most importantly, however, was the need to ensure that soldiers were kept well-rested, and physically and mentally prepared for any

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<sup>1028</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3597, 24-1-4C, ‘Returns, Strengths, Casualties.’

<sup>1029</sup> Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 245.

<sup>1030</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3913, Folder 43, File 3, ‘Notes and Comments on Bourlon Wood Operation.’

contingencies. Disorganisation was inevitable in combat, but it was important to minimise the chances for confusion and exhaustion, lest they undermine efforts to seize objectives and the ability to do one's duty.<sup>1031</sup> And yet despite all these difficulties, the Corps and its allies were able to triumph and eventually bring about the cessation of hostilities.

The Canadian experience in Hundred Days was presented by veterans and unit historians in a largely positive light. Regimental histories acknowledged the costly nature of the fighting, especially with their honour rolls and lists of the fallen, but also interpreted the Canadian role as effective, making a direct contribution to victory. Moreover, many histories have a decidedly nationalist tone, emphasising Canada's contributions, sometimes at the expense of other formations and the very real and important role played by other forces. It would be anti-historical and misguided, for instance, to acknowledge the role played by the Corps while at the same time failing to stress the role of Canadians *within* the wider British Army. The Corps was part of the British Army, and the British Army was but one of the major armies on the Western Front in 1918, fighting alongside its French, Belgian, and American allies. Nevertheless, these histories and numerous secondary accounts emphasised that the war, especially Vimy Ridge, Third Ypres, and the Hundred Days were an important event for Canada. A history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian CCS highlighted that Canadians "took a prominent part" in the attacks on Amiens, Arras, the DQ Switch, Canal du Nord, Cambrai, and other battles.<sup>1032</sup> A biographer of Currie also made reference to the "outstanding" achievements of the Corps in the Hundred Days, noting good fighting qualities and efficient military organisation.<sup>1033</sup> And even into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, laudatory accounts stressing Canada's important contributions continue to emerge. In a history of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, for example, the Hundred Days was presented as a "rapid succession of set-piece attacks" and "a

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<sup>1031</sup> Ordering follow-up operations shortly after the conclusion of other engagements was inviting disaster and failure. For example, one report stated that "the battalions, which have captured Rocourt and Magnicourt, are too exhausted and disorganised to undertake any further advance." LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3915, Folder 51, File 9, 'Special Idea: Enemy Force.'

<sup>1032</sup> DUASC, MS – 2 – 432, SF 44-1, *Clearing: The Tale of The First Canadian Casualty Clearing Station, British Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*, by Thomas Brenton Smith, page 266-269.

<sup>1033</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*, 118-119.

continuous coordinated advance.”<sup>1034</sup> This was a view echoed by other historians, one of whom wrote that this was “the most sustained series of offensives in the entire war,” and that the Canadians were “practically never out of the line,”<sup>1035</sup> yet never wavered.

Though this might be a reductive reading of the historical record there is truth to this, and cotemporary army reports and official documents also conform to this view, while recognising the problems and the casualties incurred. One report for November 1918 referred to the “heavy and continuous fighting for three months.” This report also pointed to the numerous cities and towns captured by the Canadians, and the liberated civilians freed from German bondage. In this way, the Canadians were depicted as conquering heroes, despite the fact that there continued to be charges of looting, theft, and other untoward behaviour in the formerly occupied areas. Ultimately, the actions of the Canadian forces during the war were interpreted by many back home as earning a place for Canada at the negotiating table. It would be simplistic and anachronistic to say that Canadian independence and sovereignty were born on the slopes of Vimy Ridge or in the battles of the Hundred Days, especially as the repatriation of the constitution did not occur until 1982, and the Statute of Westminster was years away (1931). It was popularly understood that Canada’s role in the war justified its presence at the Versailles Peace Conference as a junior, but independent, ally of Great Britain.

Luckily for the soldiers of the Corps, the Allies were able to force the surrender of the enemy before 1919. There were many factors that help explain why the war turned out the way it did, and why it happened when it did, but suffice it to say here that the Canadians played an important role in the fight to victory. The Hundred Days campaign was, in fact, the culmination of a steep learning curve, where lessons from previous operations were incorporated into attack plans, and where an all-arms doctrine emerged to overcome the enemy defences. It first took a rather heavy toll in both blood and treasure to determine that careful planning, and limited set-piece attacks increased the chances of battlefield success. Effective attacks also served to reinforce the reputation of the Corps

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<sup>1034</sup> Kenneth Radley, *We Lead, Others Follow: First Canadian Division 1914-1918* (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2006), 354.

<sup>1035</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie*, 118-119.



as elite, marching shoulder to shoulder with its allies.<sup>1036</sup> And by 1918 the Entente boasted overwhelming technological advantages over the Central Powers; their economic, industrial, and financial strength also gave them enormous powers that their enemies simply could not match. It cannot be denied, however, that Germany and its allies had agency, and also played a role in their own defeat. The German offensives of March to June 1918, for instance, served to inflict heavy casualties on the attackers, exhausted first-rate stormtroop units, put heavy strain on existing resources, expanded supply lines, and of course hurt morale after promises of victory.

The final months of the war can also be understood in terms of morale, discipline, combat motivation, and endurance. War weariness, related to these concepts and yet separate from them, is also an effective way of understanding the experience of the soldiers in the Hundred Days, and to a lesser extent the rest of the war too. It is my contention that Canadian soldiers triumphed in this period *despite* the presence and impact of war weariness on both an individual and collective level. The historical record, firsthand accounts, and other evidence emphasises that other armies experienced even more serious and deep-rooted war weariness compared with the Canadians.<sup>1037</sup> Strong morale was one way to stave off and minimise war weariness and mitigate against its worst aspects. When Foch became Commander-in-Chief of the Allied Armies in the spring of 1918, there was hope that a combined strategy would be able to finally and effectively drive the enemy back. There was a sense that despite the heavy casualties and resistance, progress was being made, and hope was evident. As one contemporary put it “these are anxious days for Germany and encouraging ones for us...Foch is hurling his opponent against the ropes...[and] the knock-out blow will follow later.”<sup>1038</sup> After the successful attack at Amiens, some even began to think that the war might come to an end in the next few months. One British soldier stated “by Jove, the war’s coming to an

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<sup>1036</sup> Some historians would also argue that this period reinforced the sense of Canadian superiority or exceptionalism in the war, which some continue to assert even today.

<sup>1037</sup> One historian argued that “the reality was that all armies were on their last legs come 1918, with the exception of the slowly growing and green American army and the small Belgian army.” Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 311.

<sup>1038</sup> The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM F0038, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, *Canada’s Triumph: Amiens, Arras, Cambrai* by Fred James, Official Correspondent to the Ministry, OMFC.

end,”<sup>1039</sup> which served to uplift them. Many were also heartened to leave the old Somme battlefields behind and enter open country again, with one remembering that leaving the old war-scarred land “was marvellous.”<sup>1040</sup> D.J. Corrigan of the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion noted that a “spirit of optimism was in the air” after the success at Amiens.<sup>1041</sup> As the Hundred Days continued, tangible signs of success continued to emerge. Morale was also bolstered after the men learned that Turkey, one of Germany’s allies, had sued for peace.<sup>1042</sup>

Morale was also be strengthened and preserved by both physical and non-physical aspects. Of the former, hearty and timely food, clean water, alcohol, cigarettes, letters and parcels from home, good clothing and equipment, physical comforts provided by chaplains,<sup>1043</sup> the YMCA, and other support services all contributed to the health, well-being, and ability of soldiers to withstand the strains of war. After months and then years of war, it was often the little material comforts that mattered, and helped sustain the troops just a bit longer. Of the non-physical factors that helped bolster morale, luck, chance, superstition, religious belief, and fatalism all played a role. Some troops held firm to their religious beliefs despite the horrors of war, which helped them endure the trauma and terror of the front. Others used superstition, talismans or lucky charms in an attempt to ward off danger – at times, it seemed that one survived based on mere chance.<sup>1044</sup> These things made no real difference in reality, but were important if soldiers *believed* they helped, and thus took psychological and emotional comfort in them. Importantly, however, soldiers putting too much stock into the idea of chance could become disheartened too. Losing a friend to a stray shell far behind the lines after surviving a tour

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<sup>1039</sup> Arthur, ed., *Forgotten Voices of the Great War*, 294.

<sup>1040</sup> Ibid, 203.

<sup>1041</sup> Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 234.

<sup>1042</sup> Ibid, 273 and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4574, Folder 2, File 6, ‘Orders, December 1917 to February 1919.’ Orders of 9 November contained a ‘Text of Conditions of Armistice with Turkey.’ See also Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, Letter of 5 October 1918, found at <http://www.shiawasseehistory.com/coxoctober51918.html>.

<sup>1043</sup> Coffee stalls, canteens, and sometimes soup kitchens run by the Chaplain Services provided the soldiers with a quiet and warm place to rest, free coffee, writing material, and other material comforts. Chaplains also often worked in conjunction with the Red Cross Society to provide comfort and entertainment to the troops LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4653, Historical 1, ‘Precis, September 1918,’ and ‘August 1918’ and Volume 4664, Red Cross Society, ‘15 April – 19 May,’ and ‘Summary of Work on the Lines of Communication During the Month of November 1917.’

<sup>1044</sup> One soldier of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion stated that the “lucky arrival” of the CO helped stave off disaster for the unit. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 7, File 1, Operations Arras, August 1918, ‘9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Narrative of Operations.’ For more on the role of religion and superstition, see Chapter 14 of Cook, *Shock Troops*, entitled ‘Supernatural Battlefields: The Dead and Undead on the Western Front.’

of duty in the trenches, for instance, might be very difficult to accept. The apparent randomness could unnerve even the strongest and most dedicated. And the idea that you could be killed *despite* all your experiences and best efforts to stay safe could certainly be demoralising. Success and commitment on the battlefield could also be explained, in part, through other non-physical aspects such as “fighting spirit,” faith in leadership, the plans of attack, abilities and equipment, confidence, “determination...dash and gallantry,” the “high spirits” of the troops, “enthusiasm” and any number of other intangibles that are difficult to explain, let alone quantify.<sup>1045</sup>

Just as there were myriad factors and forces that could bolster morale and positively shape the soldier’s mind toward duty and belief in ultimate victory, there were even more that undermined and eroded morale. As historians it is important to assess both sides, and decide whether strengthening or weakening aspects were in the ascendency. A single incident could assault morale, or it could be eroded over time through poor leadership, bad equipment or clothing,<sup>1046</sup> inadequate food, and lack of rest and respite. As Currie wrote regarding the Canal du Nord, the “tremendous exertions and considerable casualties consequent upon the four days of almost continuous fighting had made heavy inroads on the freshness and efficiency of all arms” involved, and it was doubtful whether further success could be attained as a result.<sup>1047</sup> And a poem entitled

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<sup>1045</sup> A report of late 1917 stated that “the greatest factor of success...was the fighting spirit of the men, tempered by discipline, developed by training and enhanced by the confidence in themselves and their officers created by a year of unbroken success.” Raids and training also helped build morale. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3859, Folder 85, File 8, ‘Reasons for Success in Recent Operations by Canadians on Second Army Front,’ and Ibid, HQ General Staff, ‘Preliminary Notes on Recent Operations on the Front of the Second Army,’ LAC RG 9 III C15, Volume 4664, Report, ‘23 June – 17 February’ and ‘Chaplains with Canadian Corps during September 1918,’ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4163, Folder 11, File 4, Operations Amiens, 5-8-18 to 16-8-18, document of 16 August 1918 and Ibid, Folder 8, File 1, Operations Valenciennes, 21-10-18 to 9-11-18, October 1918, ‘9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion,’ and Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, Operations Valenciennes, November 1918, 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, including ‘Narrative of Operations,’ and report of 13-11-18 by J.M. Ross, CO 10<sup>th</sup> CIB.

<sup>1046</sup> The lack of proper clothing, especially during the cold winter months, could attack the morale of the troops. In 1918 the lack of great coats and cardigans created “a serious problem,” and this lack of warm clothing “entails great discomforture” [sic] amongst the men. Moreover, General Routine Order No. 33 of August 1918 stated that men should try to maintain their clothing and equipment themselves, and that “clothing should be continued in wear until actually worn out” before requesting replacements. They were also instructed to allow regimental or divisional tailors attempt to repair them before requesting new clothing or equipment. See LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4564, Folder 2, File 11, ‘Clothing Correspondence, Generally’ and Ibid, ‘General Routine Order No. 33,’ 16 August 1918.

<sup>1047</sup> Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 280.

*Armistice Day* by T. McKenzie of Saskatchewan, contained the following lines, expressed relief that the war had finally ended, but that it had been a hard road:

If you ever recall the sights we have seen  
 You'll always remember in hell we have been.  
 For in Flanders fields at break of day  
 The dead and dying around did lay...<sup>1048</sup>

The death of comrades and effective leaders certainly had the ability to hurt the morale and emotional well-being of those in the unit, but casualties also had the added effect of putting an extra burden on the survivors. There was 'survivor's guilt,' but there were other burdens to shoulder as well. Exhaustion was a reality for all soldiers, regardless of their branch of service. And during the Hundred Days there was even less time and opportunity for rest than during trench warfare. The military authorities came to acknowledge the detrimental effects of exhaustion on the abilities of the soldiers,<sup>1049</sup> and that soldiers needed to go into battle 'fresh' and well-rested. Exhaustion also contained both physical and non-physical aspects, and thus rest from combat and respite from the sources of stress were both essential.

Perhaps the largest assault on morale was that for much of the war, despite what the propagandists and politicians said, there was no end in sight – except perhaps death. One soldier wrote that by 1918 he and his mates were “almost reconciled to the belief that the war would go on forever.” James Adams of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote after the Arras battles that any “exhilaration” he once felt gave way to “the awful realisation that this is not a one time test and will go on and on with no definite end.”<sup>1050</sup> In addition to this, for many soldiers there was not much to look forward to. Leave was welcome by all, but happened all too rarely, especially for the rank and file. Time out of the line and rotation into reserve areas was also welcomed, yet time behind the front lines often did not mean

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<sup>1048</sup> The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM F0038, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, Ephemera, 'France – Afterwards.'

<sup>1049</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 7, File 1, Operations Arras, August 1918, '9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion Narrative of Operations.'

<sup>1050</sup> Hesler, ed., *Interlude: 1916-1919*, 47; Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 114, and Laffin, *Soldiers' Stories from France and Flanders*, 211.

actual rest and the ability to properly and fully recover. Infantry units out of the line were still expected to undertake training and contribute to work parties. One soldier wrote in mid-August that not knowing when the war would end, or how far they still had to go was rather tough on the troops;<sup>1051</sup> this sense of uncertainty preyed on the men, and eroded their staying power over time. And as the final campaign continued and it became clearer that the war *might* be ended in the next weeks, no one wanted to be killed so near the end. As one artillery officer noted, every soldier still exposed to enemy fire “must have wondered whether he was going to survive, or whether some shell ‘with his name on it’ would wipe him off the rolls in the last hours of the long war.”<sup>1052</sup> This served to undermine the enthusiasm and confidence of those still in the line, and for some troops, induced a sense of caution that ran counter to Allied strategy at this phase of the war.

One way in which the authorities sought to keep the troops in the line was the use of army discipline. Military discipline had three general characteristics: punishment, the threat of punishment (deterrence), and as a system of personnel management. Upon enlistment in the forces soldiers were aware of the numerous rules, regulations, and army laws they were subject to. These were often published in daily and routine orders, to remind the soldiers and to draw their attention to specific issues. In October of 1918, for example, orders were issued to units in the forward areas about looting and removing furniture to furnish dugouts, huts, and other billets. The high command instructed COs that “formations and units will adopt strict measures to prevent such occurrences, which not only constitute a grave disobedience of orders, but also tend to bring into disrepute the fair name of the British Army.”<sup>1053</sup> An increase in incidents, or the high command’s awareness of such incidents, likely prompted these orders to be issued with such urgency.

Part of discipline was to instil unquestioning obedience. The idea was that if soldiers naturally obeyed orders while out of the line, they were more likely to automatically do so while at the front and under dangerous conditions in the line. The

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<sup>1051</sup> Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 186.

<sup>1052</sup> Burns, *General Mud*, 80. See also LAC, RG 41 III B1, Volume 12, Interview with R. Ferrie of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 14 for caution bordering on insubordination in the hope of preventing casualties near the end.

<sup>1053</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4547, Folder 1, File 3, ‘Routine Orders, Haig,’ 25 October 1918.

entire functioning of the armed forces depended on this obedience to legal and legitimate orders. This was one reason why the army seemed to care so much about appearance and behaviour, even far from the front. One report of October 1918, for instance, lamented the “slackness in saluting” shown by troops, their posture, and body language.<sup>1054</sup> These behaviours apparently suggested a lack of respect for officers, the uniform, and the army, and might undermine the very hierarchy that was so crucial for executing tasks, carrying out orders, and maintaining continuity of leadership. This also explain the emphasis upon cleanliness, discipline, and ‘smartness’ in appearance. One soldier in August of 1918 was punished for having a “dirty rifle on parade.”<sup>1055</sup> It was difficult for combat soldiers to keep their weapons and equipment clean, but even for those on the lines of communication it could seem frivolous to expect such cleanliness during active service conditions, especially considering the pace of the Hundred Days. It seems, moreover, that for the authorities any breach of discipline or disobedience, whether big or small, at the front or behind the lines, could be interpreted as contrary discipline and perhaps the first step toward the breakdown of the army hierarchy, order, and control. It was even more difficult to get the soldiers to obey orders in the heat of battle, so it was important to inculcate automatic and unquestioning obedience out of the line. In order to uphold discipline and punish offending soldiers, military police (MPs) and provost agents were used. By late August 1918, the Corps had 216 MPs in France alone.<sup>1056</sup>

Yet despite all the rules and regulations, and the personnel to enforce them, there were still breaches of discipline and crimes committed in the Hundred Days. This is important, if only because some historians have asserted that breaches of discipline spiked during periods of inactivity, or when things looked rather bleak. The final months of the war were anything but a period of inactivity, and though no one knew when (or even if) the war would end, there was some cautious hope based on military successes in

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<sup>1054</sup> This report noted that “men [were] slouching around with their hands in their pockets.” Moreover, it was not just ORs that failed to uphold proper discipline, as even some officers were depicted as being slack in returning salutes. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 1778, D-17-4, document dated 8 October 1918.

<sup>1055</sup> LAC, RG 150, Volume 244, 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Divisional Train (2), ‘Daily Orders, Part II, 14 August 1918.’

<sup>1056</sup> Other military police personnel were attached to headquarters, divisional artillery, cavalry, in Paris, and at base depots. LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 3, Volume 941, E-95-3, ‘Establishment – Corps of Canadian Military Police.’

this period. Desertion and AWL, voluntary surrenders, SIWs, and acts of collective indiscipline ('strikes' or mutinies) were examples of soldier discontent and attempts to escape the front. There were, moreover, attempts to minimise individual participation or evade further duty rather than escape the situation entirely. Hard fighting and heavy casualties were a reality during the Hundred Days, but an extended period of inactivity it certainly was not. This suggests that breaches of discipline were just part of the soldier life, and that these crimes/acts of indiscipline were a way for soldiers to augment their meagre rations (in the form of theft and looting), for example, or a way to let off some steam, acting as an important safety valve. Grumbling, grousing, and complaining were a natural part of being a soldier; verbal complaints did not necessarily lead to illegal actions or military crimes, and there were different types of dissent and discontent.

If the final months of the war put more pressure on the soldiers taking part in these operations, it also provided them with increased opportunities for indiscipline, especially to loot, thief, and acquire 'souvenirs.' Charles Harrison wrote that as the troops arrived in Arras, "discipline has disappeared," and looting for food commenced. Challenges to military authority were evident, especially as there were fights between soldiers and MP in the city.<sup>1057</sup> One soldier candidly admitted that he and his pals "blew the padlock off" a brewery in Arras, and before they knew it the "fellows were bathing in white wine."<sup>1058</sup> But then some MPs showed up, and "of course there was a fracas" between the two groups. Looting was also frowned upon as the victims were often civilians, rather than enemy soldiers; Allied forces were there to end the occupation, not aggravate its effects. Captain G.A. Ramsay of the CAMC also noted the effects of looting, which had a "baleful" effect on discipline in the area.<sup>1059</sup> From the army point of view, the toleration of discipline in one area might very well have encouraged it elsewhere. Others made reference to corpses being looted, though it is rarer to see personal admissions of

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<sup>1057</sup> Charles Yale Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed: A Story from the Trenches* (Toronto: Annick Press, 2002), 225-231.

<sup>1058</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 211.

<sup>1059</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3752, Folder 4-4, Engagements 1918, 'Diary of Captain G.A. Ramsay, C.A.M.C.'

participating in this.<sup>1060</sup> Many other troops, however, readily admitted to ‘relieving’ German POWs of watches, badges, and other highly-coveted souvenir items.<sup>1061</sup>

Indiscipline in this period also included insubordination and the refusal of orders. Will Bird (42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion) wrote of disobeying direct orders, standing up to a new officer, and even threatening him with bodily harm if an unpopular order was not rescinded.<sup>1062</sup> Under the Army Act alone, Bird and his comrades could have been charged with several crimes or breaches of discipline. Section 8 (1), for example, covered ‘offering violence to his superior officer,’ or ‘striking his superior officer,’ whereas 8 (2b) was ‘using insubordinate or threatening language to his superior officer.’ Section 9 pertained to ‘disobedience of an order or lawful command,’ and section 11 was ‘refusing to obey a general order.’ Disobedience and refusing orders are found in other firsthand accounts as well. Sometimes this took the form of halting an attack and going to ground rather than continuing, or even withdrawing without orders to do so. At times, this behaviour was based more on biological determinants and self-preservation, rather than on wilful disobedience or cowardice. Army discipline was designed to overcome these instincts and natural responses, though. John Becker of the 75<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote of going to ground during an artillery barrage and attack. He admitted that “I was genuinely ashamed of myself for flattening...as I was familiar enough with shelling to know by the sound if [sic] would not be close.” He further wrote that “I realized then that my nerves were going and that I wouldn’t be much good in action if I kept at it many weeks longer,”<sup>1063</sup>

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<sup>1060</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 226. One artillery officer wrote that upon coming across a pile of German corpses “we walked among them looking for souvenirs but the infantry had had the first pick.” All watches and money were gone, but the artillery men took shoulder straps and uniform buttons. In another section, Black wrote that he wanted to remove boots from a dead soldier, but when he returned to the body he was too late. Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 52 and 148.

<sup>1061</sup> Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 227.

<sup>1062</sup> When their unit CO was replaced by a new officer, they did not have confidence in him. They were “handicapped with a new officer,” who had no combat experience and risked lives in an attack on an enemy MG nest. Bird wrote that this was “suicide to try it,” and condoned a soldier pointing his rifle at the officer and making him back off. In another example, the men were ordered to “stand to” during a barrage, but he and a friend stayed put. Another time, the 42<sup>nd</sup> was ordered to join a work party, but Bird stood up to the officer because his men had not yet been fed. Even after being threatened with a court martial, he stood his ground and told his subordinates to ignore the order and get food instead. Later, an officer told Bird to do patrols, but “we did not patrolling.” And finally, an order to hold a parade “was ignored.” Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 110, 117, 129, 135-136.

<sup>1063</sup> Christie, *The Memoir of John Harold Becker*, 203.



illustrating the wear and tear on even committed volunteer veterans. Many soldiers wanted to stick it out at duty, but were becoming increasingly unable to do so.

There were also some troops who candidly admitted they would welcome a Blighty wound that would allow them to leave the trenches honourably, legally and legitimately, but without having to do something drastic. In numerous memoirs, letters, journals, and other accounts, many expressed the hope for a Blighty without having to resort to more extreme measures like desertion or SIWs,<sup>1064</sup> which were dangerous and could bring disrepute on the individual and unit. When soldiers did finally get their Blighty and were removed from combat, a sense of relief, and envy from their comrades, was palpable.<sup>1065</sup> One officer noted that “we often killed time by debating the question of how badly we would be willing to be hit to get a Blighty,” and thus removed from combat, at least temporarily.<sup>1066</sup> This talk did not necessarily suggest demoralisation or defeatism, but a decrease in commitment to the war effort could spread amongst young, inexperienced, or impressionable troops. Perhaps more importantly, however, for some desperate soldiers, this talk could turn to action after months and years of trauma and tension. Some might have decided that they would throw caution to the wind and act in an overly aggressive manner, reclaiming their agency and asserting their independence.

Reckless behaviour could bring further danger to the unit, and also ran counter to military control and discipline. In the words of one veteran, from that point forward it was either the ‘Victoria Cross or a wooden cross,’ suggesting an award for bravery, or death.

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<sup>1064</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>1065</sup> One soldier wrote that he felt lucky for escaping slightly wounded, and thanked God for helping him through. Another wrote that the happiest soldiers were those who received Blighty wounds; they had clearly already had enough of the war and their participation in it. Historian Tim Cook referred to Blighty as “a term used by soldiers, denoting a ‘soft’ wound that would take a soldier out of the line for a few months and back to England.” And he explained that “receiving a soft wound still meant taking a bullet through the hand or shrapnel through the shoulder, temporary, if agonizing, pain was easier to face than the likely fate of worse maiming, insanity, or death if the men stayed in the trenches.” Artilleryman Black referred to a “lovely Blighty” as “nothing to do any permanent damage but enough to get him to a hospital in England and a furlough before he came back to France.” He also referred to a “beauty, a nice clean flesh wound that would get him to hospital.” See Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 7 and 23; Climo, *Lively Letters from World War One*, 265; Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 371; Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer*, 39; Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 124; Richard A. Gabriel, *No More Heroes: Madness and Psychiatry in War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1987), 52 and Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1918 – Volume I* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2007), 516.

<sup>1066</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 7. And Graves wrote that prior to an offensive the men were “pessimistic but cheerful...[and] all talk about getting a ‘cushy’ one” to send them back to England. Robert Graves, *Goodbye to All That: New Edition, Revised, with a Prologue and Epilogue* (London: Cassell & Company Ltd., 1957), 97-98.

Other troops, however, might have decided that instead of waiting to get a Blighty in combat naturally, they would help the process along and put themselves in harm's way.<sup>1067</sup> Others took the next step, administering a SIW or illness to ensure they no longer remained effective as a soldier, whereas some went AWL or sought to escape duty permanently through desertion or surrender.<sup>1068</sup> And finally, the killing of prisoners also represented a breakdown of army authority and discipline, could be counterproductive, and put comrades in harm's way in the form of retaliation for such behaviour.<sup>1069</sup> And yet, despite orders to the contrary and the negative aspects related to this illegal conduct, killing prisoners continued throughout the war. As one infantry subaltern wrote, the "circumstances of infantry fighting in the war were not such as to engender a chivalrous attitude towards the enemy." And furthermore, in this war there was "violence done by angry men, whose experience had filled their hearts with cold fury and disgust,"<sup>1070</sup> clearly not conducive to sympathy and mercy when emotions ran high and the cold steel of the bayonet found vulnerable targets.

Disciplinary issues were evident on both sides of the line<sup>1071</sup> in the final months of the war. Discipline was an important way to understand soldier behaviour and the attitude of authorities because it was often used as a proxy to measure the morale and military effectiveness of a given unit. A battalion with high desertion and trench foot rates, for

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<sup>1067</sup> One soldier who sought a 'cushy' put his hand above the parapet to attract German fire. Another soldier, "fed up and far from home," put his hand over the top, hoping to get hit. Ibid and Gabriel, *Madness and Psychiatry*, 53.

<sup>1068</sup> For SIWs and illnesses as a means to escape the horrors of the trenches and active service conditions, see Gabriel, *Madness and Psychiatry*, 57. One historian also wrote that "given enough exposure to combat," soldiers eventually realised and accepted that death and mutilation was inevitable, and based more on luck than skill. These soldiers came to accept that "it is going to happen to me, and only my not being there is going to prevent it." Christopher H. Hamner, *Enduring Battle: American Soldiers in Three Wars, 1776 – 1945* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2011), 219. Many contemporary authorities, as well as historians today, have used SIWs statistics, surrender, and desertion rates as a measure of a unit's morale and discipline. See, for example, Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 119.

<sup>1069</sup> The killing of POWs represented the breakdown of army authority as prisoners were to be kept alive for intelligence purposes, as well as to ensure good treatment for British and other Entente prisoners held by the enemy. Killing POWs could also be counterproductive as good intelligence could be lost, and rumours and knowledge that Canadians did not take prisoners might encourage future Germans never to surrender, or even revenge killings and other atrocities. For the killing of POWs, see Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 98, 106, 111, 120, 140.

<sup>1070</sup> Douie, *Recollections of a Subaltern of Infantry*, 184-185.

<sup>1071</sup> German generals made note of these disciplinary problems, partly to help explain the inability to stop the Allied advance in the summer and autumn of 1918. Ludendorff noted, for example, poor morale, "skulkers" in units, and demoralised soldiers. The German authorities also had to deal with 10,000s of deserters and those wilfully surrendering. And Ludendorff also wrote of the establishment of German worker and soldier councils, indicating an influx of political agitation and war weariness. Ludendorff, *My War Memories Volume II*, 542, 585, 587.

example, was often understood as lacking in morale and the appropriate application of top-down and self-discipline. Stronger leadership and a better appreciation of duty could bring these rates down, so the argument went. Moreover, discipline was also seen as a prerequisite for effective action in combat. At the Canal du Nord Currie explained that success was based to a large measure on “iron discipline” and tactical expertise.<sup>1072</sup> But what, exactly, did this mean? Did it suggest the unquestioning obedience to orders, regardless of consequences, even if it resulted in heavy casualties? Or did it suggest strength in the face of opposition, and self-mastery over one’s panic and self-preservation instinct? These disciplinary problems also had a direct effect on the fighting itself. When authority broke down, and indiscipline rose, it could result in killing prisoners. At Valenciennes, rumours and stories of brutal German occupation overwhelmed some soldier’s sense of morality and discipline. One officer admitted that the German occupation of Denain (and other cities) “so stimulated their desire to revenge the wrongs done [to] these wretched people, that the miserable enemy could expect and certainly received no quarter” in combat.<sup>1073</sup> The capture of enemy forces was preferable, in many ways, to the continued fighting between the two sides that served to elevate casualty rates.

Combat motivation is often understood as being composed of ‘carrots and sticks,’ or positive ways to encourage certain behaviour, through promises and rewards, and threats of punishments or punishment itself should the soldier not fulfill his duty. This is a useful analogy which helps explain soldier behaviour. There were both positive and negative motivators, with the former encouraging good outcomes through duty and combat, and the latter examining the fear of specific outcomes (for oneself, their unit, or others entirely) should certain behaviour not be adhered to, and negative aspects that shaped behaviour as well. In terms of positive inducements to behaviour, the apparent righteousness and justice of the cause was motivation enough for some. After the signing of the Armistice, Currie’s ‘Special Order of the Day’ thanked the troops for their dedication and service. He referred to the soldiers, “conscious of the righteousness of

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<sup>1072</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4747, Folder 178, File 2, ‘Special Order of the Day,’ Canal du Nord.

<sup>1073</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, Operations Valenciennes, November 1918, 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, ‘Narrative of Operations,’ and report dated 13-11-18 by J.M. Ross, CO 10<sup>th</sup> CIB.

your cause,” who “have fought many battles and endured cruel hardships” throughout.<sup>1074</sup> According to Currie, in the end their suffering had been worth it. There were also religious and moral overtones to inducements to fighting, stressing the need to rid the world of its current danger, including militarism and the belief in ‘might over right.’ In this regard, chaplains at the front and pastors in Canada had an important role to play in motivating the soldiers to fight, and if need be, die for the cause. Some troops were motivated by these high ideals and sense of holy obligation, as evident in the Latin phrase: *Melius est mori quant vivendi perdere causas*.<sup>1075</sup> One French Army chaplain also told his troops that “friends, you are fighting for God’s cause...He has a splendid reward for those who might fall.” Others stressed the great moral issues at stake, the war aims, the “righteousness and justice of our cause,” and the opportunities for “the recognition and renewal of our personal and national obligations to Almighty God in whose cause the Allied sword has been unsheathed.”<sup>1076</sup> Yet other chaplains appealed to the manhood or masculinity of their flock, for example in stating that “there will be no feeble effort” or weaklings among members of the Bible Society,<sup>1077</sup> and that these soldiers should have courage and follow in the example of Christ. Some chaplains made a direct comparison between the suffering of Christ and that of the soldiers during the war.<sup>1078</sup>

In addition to the Allies’ war aims and the cause for which they were fighting, during the final months the Canadians encountered numerous examples and reminders as to why they were fighting. The liberation of cities, towns, and villages, along with thousands of inhabitants, were tangible reminders that this war was about the lives of human beings,<sup>1079</sup> who by all accounts had suffered during occupation; there were many

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<sup>1074</sup> PPCLI Archives, Sub-Series 16, Artificial Collections, Regimental History, First World War, File 16 (1.3) – 1, Currie’s ‘Special Order of the Day,’ 15 November 1918.

<sup>1075</sup> Which roughly translates as ‘Rather die than lose what makes life worth living.’ LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4664, Extracts, ‘Captain Adrien Beausoleil,’ section entitled ‘How Morale can be Built Up.’

<sup>1076</sup> Ibid, and ‘Precis of Reports (monthly), August 1918.’

<sup>1077</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4663, Publicity, newspaper clippings.

<sup>1078</sup> Vance devotes an entire chapter in *Death So Noble* to the connections between Christianity and the war (Chapter 2: Christ in Flanders).

<sup>1079</sup> It seemed that many soldiers appreciated the warm reception they got from the locals upon liberation. This acted as a tangible reminder as to what they were fighting for. Subsequent interactions with civilians, for example helping with the cultivation of the land, were also a reminder as to who they were helping. LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 8, File 1, Operations Valenciennes, 21-20-18 to 9-11-18, October 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, ‘Field Messages’ and ‘Narrative of Operations,’ 116<sup>th</sup> Battalion and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 1, File 1, ‘Agriculture.’

civilians and refugees in these areas. Liberation acted as a morale boost for troops, and Victor Wheeler of the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote that “we felt a deep gratification in our mission to liberate a conquered people and free enslaved spirits.”<sup>1080</sup> The liberation of Denain, for example, brought the reality of the suffering in occupied areas home to the soldiers. In an address on the city’s liberation, its abbot spoke of German actions and “the odious crime of a colossal empire.” He explained that the citizens were “weary of suffering,” of the pillaging, having their rights trampled, their dignity outraged, the theft and looting, families broken apart, and all the other injustices.<sup>1081</sup> Letters of thanks from civilians, being feted as liberators, visits from dignitaries, and messages of congratulations from Currie, PM Borden, the Prince of Wales and others might very well have sustained the soldiers at this late phase of the war.<sup>1082</sup> These messages and visits were also an official recognition of the part played by the soldiers in this final campaign.

Evidence of success on the battlefield and of impending victory in the wider war also helped sustain some of the troops who had been worn down over months and years of war. This also played an important role in keeping war weariness at a simmer. Currie himself wrote that prior to the opening of the Battle of Arras in late August, the troops were already “flushed with the great victory they had just won” at Amiens.<sup>1083</sup> Success on the battlefield beget confidence and a growing belief that the war might be victoriously concluded *before* every last soldier currently in the ranks was killed or maimed. And though Germany was certainly the senior and most important member of the Central Powers, the fall of Turkey and then Austria-Hungary,<sup>1084</sup> and the prospect of ultimate victory, provided added motivation. And aside from wanting to complete the task at hand and see the war through to its (successful) conclusion, many soldiers were also motivated

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<sup>1080</sup> Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 258.

<sup>1081</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 6, October 1918, ‘Address from L’Abbe Pdivin, of Denain, regarding ‘The Deliverance of Denain, by the Canadian Corps,’ 27 October 1918.’

<sup>1082</sup> See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4747, Folder 178, File 2, ‘Currie Order,’ 26 August 1918 and LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4189, Folder 8, File 1, Operations, Valenciennes, 21-10-18 to 9-11-18, October 1918, 9<sup>th</sup> Brigade, ‘Field Messages,’ and ‘Narrative of Operations,’ 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion, 21-24 October 1918.

<sup>1083</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3946, Folder 66, File 2, ‘Interim Report Covering the Operations of the Canadian Corps during the year 1918,’ by Lt.-Gen. Sir A.W. Currie.

<sup>1084</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4574, Folder 2, File 6, Orders, December 1917 to February 1919, 9 November 1918 Orders included a ‘Text of Conditions of Armistice with Turkey,’ and LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4651, Diaries 1, entry for 20 October 1918.

by the desire to ensure the sacrifices of their comrades, who had fallen on the field of battle in the thousands, had not been in vain. To guarantee this, however, the Allies would have to emerge victorious over their foe. This, of course, meant pressing on despite the growing war weariness in all quarters. On the eve of Amiens, Currie instructed his troops to “remember with solemn pride our gallant dead,” and to live up to their heroic example. He reminded his subordinates to remember the Corps’ past achievements, and with an “unmistakable belief in the justice of our cause” and a faith in God, to “fight for freedom, for righteousness, for humanity.” And as a final word of encouragement, Currie admonished his troops that with “high purpose and enduring determination let us ‘carry on’ until the last fight is over and the final victory won” in this war.<sup>1085</sup> During the Hundred Days itself Currie reminded his officers to continue with training and discipline, “united in a burning desire for victory of right over might”<sup>1086</sup> which justified their involvement in this bloody war.

Sometimes this ‘burning desire’ boiled over into acts of indiscipline as moral outrage, a sense of wrath or revenge, or other less-than-honourable motivators animated the soldiers in the final months. Some troops were motivated, frankly put, less by high ideals of duty, hearth and home, service, and Christian sacrifice than by more mundane things like souvenir acquisition and opportunities for plunder. For others, souvenirs were merely a bonus, just rewards in a bloody affair that caused untold suffering. The historian of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion noted the propensity of troops to take souvenirs from the enemy, and getting drunk on captured booze.<sup>1087</sup> In other cases, food and drink were looted from overrun stores and civilian establishments to augment monotonous, and at times insufficient, army rations. For some, with looting and the collecting of souvenirs there was an element of superstition to it.<sup>1088</sup> Soldiers used superstitions, talismans, and other ‘lucky charms’ as a psychological defence mechanism to the horrors of war, and so

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<sup>1085</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4747, Folder 178, File 2, ‘Special Order of the Day,’ 3 August 1918.

<sup>1086</sup> Ibid, ‘Special Orders of the Day,’ Canal du Nord.

<sup>1087</sup> Murray, *History of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Battalion*, 271.

<sup>1088</sup> Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 187.

anything that allowed the men to carry on at the front, without bringing undue dishonour to the army, was generally accepted.

The moral outrage experienced by many Allied troops in the final months of the war also acted as a powerful motivator. During trench warfare, the ability to appreciate the destructiveness of the war and the deliberate destructive behaviour of the enemy was rather limited. During the open warfare of the Hundred Days, however, the atrocities committed and the destruction wrought were evident for all to see, at least in any given area. The liberation of inhabited regions and the meeting of refugees and civilians in countless number brought the Canadians face-to-face with the victims of German aggression. These experiences were also exacerbated by years of rumours and stories as to the frightful behaviour of ‘the Hun.’ Some of these atrocity stories were apocryphal, highly exaggerated, or simply fabrications conjured up by propagandists and politicians. And yet, many atrocity stories were based in reality, as documented by John Horne and Alan Kramer in *German Atrocities, 1914: A History of Denial*. Canadian soldiers in the final months did encounter much evidence of suffering, violence, and destruction caused directly or indirectly by the German invasion, occupation, and defensive measures. One soldier, for example, made reference to houses looted and interiors smashed during advances.<sup>1089</sup> Currie wrote on 9 October that as the troops of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division entered Cambrai they encountered surviving enemy troops, “many of whom I believe were left behind by the Germans to start fires,” explaining that “new fires have been breaking out in different parts of the city all day.” The Canadians also had to send out groups to “look for booby traps,” left behind to kill or maim curious advancing soldiers.<sup>1090</sup> Other troops noted the fires of Cambrai, apparently set in the “spirit of wanton destructiveness.”<sup>1091</sup> This must have invoked the ire of the advancing troops, already frustrated and worn down by the pace of the Hundred Days.

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<sup>1089</sup> Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 127.

<sup>1090</sup> Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 122.

<sup>1091</sup> Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 23 and Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 256. When the troops reached Valenciennes there were also “signs that it had been ransacked.” Hesler, ed., *Interlude: 1916-1919*, 69. See also Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, Letter of 24 October, found at <http://www.shiawasseehistory.com/coxoctober241918.html>.

German occupation and behaviour in the war, the treatment of French and Belgian civilians, as well as captured Allied POWs, further convinced many attacking troops not only of the justice of their cause, but also engendered feelings of wrath, revenge, hatred, and even bloodlust. It became apparent to some that not only should these areas be liberated of the enemy menace, any captured Germans or those met on the field of battle should be punished for their wrongdoings. This punishment sometimes took the shape of war crimes and behaviour that ran counter to military discipline and international norms of warfare. And yet, as these powerful emotions were stirred up in the liberators, officers and COs found themselves unable, and at times unwilling, to rein in their troops. Accounts of wartime service referred to hatred of the Germans, and the ongoing process of de-humanisation throughout the war. Others made reference to the sinking of the H.M.H.S. *Llandoverly Castle*,<sup>1092</sup> and how this tragedy was invoked just prior to the opening of the Battle of Amiens to ‘get the blood up.’<sup>1093</sup> Historian Tim Cook explained the connection between the Battle of Amiens and *Llandoverly Castle* thusly:

For the Canadians, the operations [at Amiens] was informally known as *Llandoverly Castle*, in homage to the hospital ship of that name that was sunk at the end of June by a German U-boat. Eighty-eight of the ninety-four Canadians on board died, including fourteen nurses. Even worse, the U-boat had machine-gunned and rammed a number of lifeboats. This was viewed as the height of barbarity, and as Canadians moved into the line on the night of August 7, many felt that revenge was in order. Brigadier George Tuxford...gave orders that the ‘battle cry on the 8<sup>th</sup> of August should be *Llandoverly Castle*, and that cry should be the last to ring in the ears of the Hun as the bayonet was driven home.’<sup>1094</sup>

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<sup>1092</sup> The *HMHS Llandoverly Castle*, originally the *RMS Llandoverly Castle*, was a 500 foot ocean liner launched in 1914. It was commissioned as a hospital ship in 1916, and it held 622 beds and 102 medical staff. By 1918 it was run almost exclusively by Canadian authorities, and operated by Canadian staff by early 1918. On 27 June 1918, she was sunk by U-86. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4717, Folder 110, File 28, ‘*H.M.H.S. Llandoverly Castle*, Historical Record,’ including newspaper clippings and photos, as well as ‘Part II Daily Orders.’

<sup>1093</sup> Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed*, 142 and 245.

<sup>1094</sup> Cook, *Shock Troops*, 417, citing McWilliams and Steel, *Amiens*, 31. Moreover, in the orders issued to Canadian units prior to the Amiens attack, operational instructions were entitled “L.C.,” for *Llandoverly Castle*. LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3855, Folder 74, File 11, ‘Complete Copy of “L.C.” Instructions Issued by Canadian Corps.’



The calls for revenge and the reference to ‘the Hun’ further encouraged the de-humanisation of the enemy, making it easier to forego taking prisoners and acting in a benevolent way upon contact with the enemy.

The news and literature reaching the soldiers at the front, including information from home (despite censorship and a muzzled and mostly-loyal press), reinforced this sense of German sinister behaviour. It is thus no surprise that soldiers on the eve of battle were motivated by a sense of revenge or hatred. Officers often exploited these feelings to encourage commitment and aggression on the battlefield. This sense of moral outrage was the result of the sinking of *Llandoverly Castle*, but also other actions like the bombing of military hospitals behind the lines. One soldier at a reinforcement camp wrote that the sinking “makes me all the more busting to get there [to the front]” because the Germans do not “deserve to walk this good earth.”<sup>1095</sup> Army publications and newspapers back in Canada, indeed throughout the Empire, were whipping up martial and anti-German sentiment, just as war weariness was becoming a serious problem on both the military and (civilian) home fronts. To provide but one example, on 4 July 1918 *The Canadian Daily Record*, printed for the troops in Europe, published an article entitled ‘The Dominion Aroused: Feeling Intense over Sinking of Canadian Hospital Ship – Outrage Steels the Nation’s Will.’ In this article references were made to “intense feelings of sorrow and horror,” based on the “latest Hun sea outrage,” which was “deliberate in its cruelty,” but just “the most recent exhibition of German infamy.”<sup>1096</sup> And in order to capitalise on this tragedy, the article suggested that “the consensus of opinion...is that by the outrage Canada’s will to defeat the unspeakable Hun will be further steeled and the national effort

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<sup>1095</sup> Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 102 and LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 5, ‘Bulletin of the CAMC,’ Vol. 1, No. 5 (August 1918), including articles on air raids and the sinking of the *Llandoverly Castle*. On the bombings of Canadian hospitals, see LAC, RG 9 III D1, Folder 108, File 20, ‘Outside the Pale: Yet Another Canadian Military Hospital Bombed.’ The author wrote that “there is no possible excuse for such foul and ghoulisish action.” He even compared the Germans unfavourably to the Turks, who apparently had at least gave warning before their actions against the Armenians; but “the Huns are beyond this: they are outside the pale of civilization.” See also Various Authors, *Canada in the Great War*, 112-114.

<sup>1096</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4575, Folder 1, File 5, ‘Bulletin of the CAMC,’ Vol. 1, No. 5 (August 1918), including articles on air raids and the sinking of the *Llandoverly Castle* and LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, Folder 2-8-3, File ‘Hospital Ships.’

increased.”<sup>1097</sup> In other words, this was no time to give into war weariness, despair, or defeatism; this event could act as a powerful motivator.

In addition to the newspaper articles and stories from home, Canadians also personally encountered the victims of German aggression. This acted as a powerful motivator for many at this phase of the war. One soldier wrote that his anger rose to the fore after his unit encountered some recently-liberated British prisoners. These former-POWs were “walking skeletons...[with] rags tied around their feet in lieu of boots, their clothing crawling with vermin.”<sup>1098</sup> And after coming across a POW camp and talking with some of the troops there, it was determined the inmates had been treated poorly; there was not enough food, and no heat.<sup>1099</sup> Upon attestation, soldiers were aware that it was possible to fall into enemy hands; this was a fate they accepted, even if it was not one they hoped to have to endure. And as German resources became stretched to the breaking point, it is not surprising that food and fuel for enemy prisoners suffered as a result.

The poor treatment of civilians and refugees encountered during the advance also acted as a motivating force, and stimulated certain emotions in the troops. In a letter from the front published in *The Cobourg World* in late November 1918, an officer wrote of his experience in liberating a French village. The stories he heard chilled his blood, and he hoped that “Heine’s men” would have to atone for their transgressions, “fourfold.” The German occupiers had routinely stolen food from the villagers, had destroyed a lady’s glassware, wrecked furniture “intentionally,” and drove away cattle.<sup>1100</sup> Encountering tired and hungry refugees driven from their homes angered the soldiers,<sup>1101</sup> and reinforced the view that Germans probably did not deserve mercy. Other contemporaries wrote of enemy atrocities including the shelling of inhabited areas, the rape of women, and the

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<sup>1097</sup> Ibid.

<sup>1098</sup> Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 138.

<sup>1099</sup> Ibid, 144 and Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 399. British POWs encountered in May of 1918 also exhibited signs of mistreatment. They had escaped from German lines, after being captured at the Scarpe on 28 March. They were “in a very weakened state as a result of the treatment they had received,” and at least one had to be hospitalised. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4677, Folder 9, File 3, ‘May 1918.’

<sup>1100</sup> Climo, *Lively Letters from World War One*, 289. The soldiers also encountered destitute civilians and the destruction of cities, towns, and villages, with many areas “greatly damaged and uninhabitable.” LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, Folder 2-4-1, ‘Relations with M.H.C.’

<sup>1101</sup> Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 138; Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 102; Chapman, *A First World War Diary*, 155-156.

kidnapping of civilians for forced labour.<sup>1102</sup> All of this came to be known by the soldiers through indirect channels, and through direct experience in liberating formerly-occupied areas. Agar Adamson also reflected this view of hatred and anger at the Germans. In a letter to his wife Mabel he mentioned “the devastated parts of Belgium and France,” where the people had suffered greatly.<sup>1103</sup> He wrote that “I have not the slightest spark of feeling, but that of hate for any German,”<sup>1104</sup> a rather candid admission. And even Currie admitted in a 1 November letter to Sir Edward Kemp, the Minister of the OMFC, that

We have taken quite a number of prisoners...and furthermore, since our men have released the French civilians in the areas they have traversed, and have talked with these civilians concerning their treatment by the Germans, their feelings towards the enemy have become much more bitter so that this morning I can well imagine there were not quite as many prisoners taken as usual.<sup>1105</sup>

A soldier of the 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion also expressed hatred and even bloodthirstiness as a result of the ill-treatment of locals. After arriving in a French village, he learned that local women were forced into prostitution, and other villagers were tired, hungry, and in rags.<sup>1106</sup> It is often difficult to separate the exaggerated and apocryphal from the genuine stories of the locals, but for many troops, these stories had a direct emotional impact on them. And after the capture of Cambrai, this same soldier wrote of the “vicious enmity we felt for the Hun,” but feelings of pity were also developing. He wrote of the devastation they encountered, that “destruction and misery were everywhere,” and his unit spent an evening in a “typically ravished village.” And finally, he admitted that “our thirst for blood of les Allemands was being assuaged with every passing day” in this period.<sup>1107</sup> A report on the Valenciennes operations indicated similar behaviour, as the desire for revenge led to questionable actions and atrocities. J.M. Ross of the 10<sup>th</sup> CIB wrote that

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<sup>1102</sup> Renison, “A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days,” in *Canada at War*, 399. Another contemporary made reference to the “sufferings and humiliations” endured by the people of Mons. LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, ‘No. 10 Field Ambulance, Historical Records, Synopsis of Operations, Mt. Sorrell to Mons.’

<sup>1103</sup> Christie, *Letters of Agar Adamson*, 354, letter to his wife Mabel, from Bonn Germany, 14 December 1918. He made reference, moreover, to “the poor creatures pushing handcarts along the roads with their few belongings only to arrive at their homes, in many cases not existing.”

<sup>1104</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>1105</sup> Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 131-132.

<sup>1106</sup> Wheeler, *The 50<sup>th</sup> Battalion in No Man’s Land*, 257.

<sup>1107</sup> *Ibid.*, 268, 271-273.

the capture of Valenciennes was completed on 2 November, “to the great rejoicing of the wretched inhabitants who had been in practical slavery for four years.” His troops had learned from the locals of the brutal occupation, such as at Denain, Valenciennes, and other cities, which “stimulated their desire to revenge the wrongs done [to] these wretched people,” and thus the Germans were given no quarter.<sup>1108</sup>

The desire for revenge and to free occupied France and Belgium from the German yoke inspired and motivated the soldiers in this period, but also helped sustain them and allowed them to endure the stresses and strains of war. This was especially important after long months and years of war, and combat, which served to erode the morale, health, and commitment of even the most dedicated volunteer soldiers – they were war weary. Moreover, this period saw increasing war weariness on both an individual and collective level, and on the home front. The endurance of the troops in the final months of the war can be explained in part by both physical and non-physical factors that helped prevent the worst effects of war weariness and shell shock debilitation. War weariness and shell shock did, of course, incapacitate and undermine the performance of many, but it would have been even worse had it not been for these sustaining influences. Medical care, treatment, and the reassurances that this brought were an important element in the endurance of the soldiers near the end of the war. The medical services did not always function properly or were able to effect prompt evacuation, but the chances for survival after being wounded were greater than in previous conflicts. And despite the difficulties inherent in open and more mobile warfare, the medical services had grown and learned much from the previous years of combat. The CAMC and its British counterpart (the RAMC) had expanded substantially in terms of size, resources, personnel, treatment capabilities, administrative reach, and transport capacity. For the wounded and ill, medical services sustained the soldiers, worn down and suffering ill-health from repeated stressors. The CAMC, in addition to the YMCA and Chaplain Service all played an

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<sup>1108</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4214, Folder 2, File 3, Operations Valenciennes, November 1918, 47<sup>th</sup> Battalion, including a ‘Narrative of Operations’ and report of 13-11-18 by J.M. Ross, CO 10<sup>th</sup> C.I.B.’

important role in the health, morale, well-being, and material comfort of the troops.<sup>1109</sup> Chaplains were placed at HQ, at bases, with combat units, along the lines of communication, with railway and labour units, and their duties included “ministering to the spiritual, moral and social welfare of the troops.”<sup>1110</sup> Chaplains in conjunction with the YMCA and other charities also oversaw the entertainment of troops, such as cinemas and concerts, as well as provided stationary, hot beverages, food, parcels from Canada, and other material comforts that helped them endure the often brutal nature of the war. The availability, cleanliness, quantity, and quality of water was also an important factor in the health and endurance of the soldiers, especially while on the move and encountering new sources of water, which may or may not have been contaminated.<sup>1111</sup>

Proper care for the soldiers, and their equipment and animals, went a long way in sustaining the troops in the final months. This care gave the troops the best chance at the front, and also illustrated the paternalism and care of the officers for their subordinates. The supplies and equipment required at the front depended upon the transport services of the CASC, as well as on the Veterinary Corps. Horses and mules needed proper care, forage, and water, in addition to sufficient riders and caregivers (like groomers); veterinarians helped keep these animals healthy and ready for duty. It is not too much to argue that the entire war machine depended on these animals and their services. And especially during the Hundred Days when the soldiers were nearly always on the move, and “from the point of view of maintaining the mobility of the Corps as a fighting formation, it is most undesirable to reduce the veterinary establishment except under the most urgent necessity.”<sup>1112</sup> When manpower shortages and infantry casualties forced the

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<sup>1109</sup> The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM F0038, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, *Canada's Triumph: Amiens, Arras, Cambrai* by Fred James, Official Correspondent to the Ministry, OMFC.

<sup>1110</sup> LAC, RG 9 III C15, Volume 4648, England 1915-1919, ‘Letter from the Director of the Chaplain Service to Currie,’ 1 May 1919.

<sup>1111</sup> Infantry units were served by personnel (including Service Corps, engineers, and MOs) dedicated to ensuring quality water, safe for drinking and sometimes bathing. This group located and tested supplies, informed units in the area of the coordinates, and each Corps had a Forward Reconnaissance Officer for Water Supply and worked in conjunction with Mobile and Forward Laboratories. LAC, RG 9 III C10, Volume 4553, Folder 5, File 8, ‘Water Supply, Reports On,’ 2-8-16 to 20-11-18.

<sup>1112</sup> In July 1918 there was reference to a “considerable shortage of Canadian Army Veterinary Corps officers forthcoming and the D.A.G., 3<sup>rd</sup> Echelon informs me that he is unable to meet his outstanding demands to replace casualties.” LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 3, Volume 941, E-76-3, ‘Organisation and Establishment, Mobile Veterinary

authorities to comb out rear echelon and support units, the case was made that these veterinary services should be exempt.

In terms of non-material aspects of endurance, many benefitted from the religious and spiritual support of chaplains. Aside from holding religious services and providing religious rituals, such as the sacraments, chaplains played an important role in steadying the soldiers prior to attack. Pep talks, informal chats, and prayers before combat helped calm the soldiers, some of whom would meet their maker in the next 24 hours. Moreover, issuing the Last Rites, and promises of a proper Christian burial served to reassure and comfort believers who were mortally wounded. Chaplains oversaw burial services, gave talks to men, in private or in small groups, and even wrote to next of kin when soldiers were KIA. Not all soldiers were Christian, or even religious, of course, but for those who were the chaplains had an important role to play in ensuring the soldiers were aware of their duties, and were to be supported in all matters spiritual. In addition, soldiers also benefitted from rest, relief, respite from trauma, rotation out of the line, and relaxation. During the Hundred Days one soldier wrote that “after the strain of the preceding days, the sunshine and relaxation were a welcome and pleasant relief,”<sup>1113</sup> and rejuvenated the troops. Time out of the line allowed them to reacquaint themselves with their humanity, as well as relaxed their mental, psychological, and biological stress responses to mortal danger, terror, and trauma. The authorities were responsible for the “comfort and convenience of the men” while out of the line,<sup>1114</sup> even if it was not always possible to provide them with all they needed to remain healthy and committed. The reference to ‘sunshine,’ however, raises an important point on how circumstances beyond anyone’s control could both contribute to, and undermine, a soldier’s perception and morale.

Morale, discipline, combat motivation, and endurance are all concepts linked to the phenomenon of war weariness. The nature, pace, and intensity of the fighting in the Hundred Days made this the most fertile period of the entire war for the onset,

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Section for Corps’ and Ibid, ‘G.O.C. Canadian Corps, 6118/1 (Q.B.2),’ report dated 3 July 1918. See also Cecil French, *A History of the Canadian Army Veterinary Corps in the Great War: 1914-1919* (Guelf: Quest Books, 1999).

<sup>1113</sup> LAC, RG 9 III D1, Volume 4715, Folder 107, File 20, ‘1 September – 31 October.’

<sup>1114</sup> LAC, RG 9 III B1, Volume 392, C-18-1, ‘Canteens and Messes Regarding the Sale of Beer.’

development, and detrimental impact of war weariness for both individuals, and the collective (the military unit). Heavy casualties and the continuing use of long-serving veterans only exacerbated this problem. Moreover, the sense of uncertainty, belief in the inevitability of death or disfigurement, and a sense of helplessness or hopelessness also compounded the issue. References to the phenomenon of war weariness, and the use of the term itself, can be found in both contemporary sources and firsthand accounts, and in secondary sources<sup>1115</sup> written by historians and researchers after the war. War weariness also affected both soldiers (combatant and support personnel), as well as civilians on the home fronts. War weariness has also been used to understand the post-war world, and conflicts today.<sup>1116</sup>

For the soldiers at the front and fighting the war in Europe, war weariness often took the form of a longing for home, an end to the suffering, and expressions of how ‘fed up’ they were becoming with all the discomfort and danger. At other times, troops expressed discontent with how the war was being prosecuted, and desired an end to the war itself, or at least their own personal participation in it. And others took this a step further, seeking ways to escape the front or evade duty, if only for a short respite lest they would ‘crack’ or breakdown shortly. Some accounts, such as letters, are also difficult sources to assess, in part because of the censors, self-censorship (soldiers often did not want to worry those at home), and cultural attitudes regarding masculinity and having a ‘stiff upper lip’ in the face of adversity. A few examples should help illustrate how war weariness began to take its toll on the troops near the end of the war. Corporal Frank Davidson wrote to his sister from France on 14 July 1918, even before the heavy, nearly-continuous fighting that began at Amiens. After thanking her for recent correspondence,

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<sup>1115</sup> Over the years my research has uncovered dozens of references to the phenomenon of war weariness, as well as of the use of the term itself. See, for example, Babington, *Capital Courts-Martial*, 117; Boff, *Winning and Losing on the Western Front*, 15, 93, 113; Hart, *The Great War*, 247, 302, 339; Herwig, *The First World War*, 287, 366; Kellett, *Combat Motivation*, 177, 180, 265, 297; Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, 91, 203; Philpott, *War of Attrition*, 8, 281, 284, 287, 291, 253, 307, 313, 317, 325, 332; Stephenson, *The Final Battle*, xi, 8-9, 13, 29-30, 316 and Watson, *Enduring the Great War*, 74, 154, 176; Rogers, ed., *Gunner Ferguson’s Diary*, 11; Travers, *The Killing Ground*, plate/photo following page 136. These are just some of the historians who employed this term and concept.

<sup>1116</sup> Weinberg, *A World at Arms*, 15, and Author Unknown, “Port in a Storm: The War in Yemen,” 40.

he reassured her that he was “feeling fine,” and that the weather had been good of late.

Later in the letter, however, he wrote that he

sure would like to make a trip home this year, as it is nearly three years since I left and I have been over two years in France, and while there never out of hearing of the guns, so you cannot wonder at our getting tired of the awful game...I am living in hopes that we finish this job this year and then home again.<sup>1117</sup>

This letter was written before the start of the campaign, and the hard fighting and war weariness of the next few months was somewhat offset or tempered by the successful battles and prospect of victory.<sup>1118</sup> Other soldiers, moreover, found the inner strength, outlets, and other sustaining forces to carry on *despite* their war weariness. One soldier, W.P. Lajoie, wrote on the opening day of Amiens that “it is a regular hell over here and every man is fighting for all that is in him and facing death with a smile.” It is important to note, however, that Lajoie was not combat infantry, where the heaviest casualties were suffered and we see the largest percentage of war weary soldiers. Would many frontline infantry have described their plight as ‘facing death with a smile?’ But his later remarks expressed more war weariness, especially when he wrote that “everybody over here thinks the fun will be over this fall...[and] I hope it is right for I have had pretty nearly enough of fighting...[but] still, the war is not over yet, and we are too game to keep quiet, as fight is our middle name.”<sup>1119</sup> He admitted that he had had enough of the fighting, but also that his pride and commitment ensured he continued, regardless of the consequences.

Other soldiers admitted that their thoughts often focussed on home and loved ones,<sup>1120</sup> and their hope to return shortly. This is not surprising given many soldiers’ youth, lack of international travel, and the regular hardships of combat. The reality of the war, however, was a sobering prospect that dashed hopes for a quick and easy victory, even at the end of the war. Sergeant T.P. Lapp wrote in August 1918 that “while we hope

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<sup>1117</sup> Climo, *Lively Letters From World War One*, 284-285, Letter of Corporal Frank Davidson, to his sister on July 14<sup>th</sup>, 1918 from France.

<sup>1118</sup> One artilleryman wrote that by October 1918 the fact that they were advancing, and not retreating or remaining stagnant was a “redeeming feature” of these operations that included poor weather and heavy casualties. Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, Letter 3 October 1918, found at <http://www.shiawasseehistory.com/coxoctober31918.html>.

<sup>1119</sup> Ibid, 286, Letter of Gunner W.P. Lajoie, to his parents, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1918 from France.

<sup>1120</sup> See, for example, Cate, ed., *A Soldier’s Memoir of World War I*, 76 and Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 104.



for an early finish we are not building any hopes on leaving the shores of France before the close of 1919,” and that “the main point is – we must win, and win we will, regardless of the time and price.” Not all were so sanguine about ultimate victory, however, and the uncertainty over when the war would end, or even *if* it would end in victory, contributed to the development of war weariness at this phase of the war. Others, moreover, were not so sure that the ends justified the means, or that victory was worth the cost. Lapp admitted that “I am writing this from a forward line where daily the price of blood is paid.”<sup>1121</sup> How much more blood would have to be paid before final victory was achieved? Were the soldiers merely sacrificial lambs led to the slaughter, mere blood offerings placed at the altar to appease Ares or Mars? Some soldiers, certainly, were unwilling or unable to endure long enough to find out. Others expressed discontent at their day to day lives, with one writing that “we get very tired of the soldier life and I hope to be home this year,” whereas others felt they had nothing to look forward to, such as rest or leave.<sup>1122</sup> The horizon only showed the enemy, further death, and suffering.

Deward Barnes of the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion also made reference to the phenomenon of war weariness, without actually using that term. He wrote on 2 October that he was “fed up with war and have [therefore] neglected my diary.” Another soldier wrote in June 1918 that “I hope this year sees the finish of the war, but I think that the enemy is more fed up than what we are,”<sup>1123</sup> suggesting both the Entente and enemy troops were war-weary. My research has suggested that being ‘fed up,’ and admitting as much, was in many cases tantamount to an acknowledgment of war weariness.<sup>1124</sup> Captain Harold

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<sup>1121</sup> Climo, *Lively Letters From World War One*, 286-287, Letter of Sgt. T.C. Lapp, August 8<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

<sup>1122</sup> Ibid, 282-283, Letter of Lance-Corporal J.F. Davidson, to his mother on May 12<sup>th</sup>, 1918 from France, and Letter of Merwin Greer, to his parents on July 19<sup>th</sup>, 1918.

<sup>1123</sup> Lamin, *Letters from the Trenches*, 147. Another soldier wrote that German POWs at Vimy “looked downtrodden and fed up with the war.” Walsh, *The First World War Diary of Private Bert Cooke*, 108.

<sup>1124</sup> Many soldiers used the expression ‘fed up,’ to indicate the phenomenon of war weariness. One British MO wrote that the soldiers were “fed up” with the war. A Canadian MO also admitted he was “fed up,” even after the signing of the Armistice. Others were described as “fed up,” and “fed up and far from home.” The implications of this were illustrated by other soldiers, for example some claimed one was “fed up with life and was doing his level best to get killed.” And finally, entire units, civilians, and nursing sisters could also express war weariness through the term ‘fed up.’ A soldier wrote that “I feel particularly ‘fed up’ with this job today and wish the war was over, or that I was going to Canada for a furlough.” See Laffin, *Soldiers’ Stories from France and Flanders*, 233; Lamin, *Letters from the Trenches*, 147; Davidson, *A Doctor in the Great War*, 217; Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 341; Graves, *Goodbye to All That*, 172 and 98; J.C. Dunn, *The War the Infantry Knew, 1914-1919: A Chronicle of Service in France and Belgium with the Second Battalion, His Majesty’s Twenty-Third Foot, the Royal Welch*

McGill (31<sup>st</sup> Battalion) made reference to the “dreary monotony” of the war as very trying on the troops. There were, of course, periods of intense activity and excitement which punctuated these long stretches of monotony, but duty, day after day, with the attendant “dirt, discomfort, noise and sights of blood and death gradually brought about that condition in a man so graphically described as being ‘fed up.’”<sup>1125</sup> Other soldiers were also ‘fed up’ with the war, with their participation in it, as well as the implications of this reality. A soldier of the 42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion admitted that he and his troops were ‘fed up’ by delayed transports and having missed their breakfast. And though this was a seemingly mundane issue, matters of food, water, leave, mail and parcels from home,<sup>1126</sup> equipment and supplies made an enormous difference to the health, morale, and well-being of the troops. This soldier wrote later that they were “damp and depressed,” and “wet and bone-weary,” from having to wait for transport – ultimately, this left them “fed up to the back teeth.”<sup>1127</sup> And John Becker of the 75<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote that because he was so “fed up,” orders were disobeyed and he was decidedly apathetic.<sup>1128</sup> The editor of Deward Barnes’ journal, moreover, explained his ‘fed up’ attitude as based on the fact that Barnes returned to the line (“misery”), coupled with “mild depression” and a “return to a hellish and uncertain existence at the front.”<sup>1129</sup> This sense of uncertainty, and the stresses and strains characteristic of frontline combat, were contributing factors toward war weariness. It must be noted here, however, that war weariness affected frontline troops, and those on the lines of communication – none were immune to its effects. The Corps Commander also made reference to the fact that the soldiers were worn out, and only wanted to be

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*Fusiliers* (London: Jane’s Publishing Company Limited, 1987), xxiv; Reid, *Personal Memoirs of the First World War*, 167; Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 65, letter from London, 10 December 1917 and DUASC, Duncan Chisholm MacDonald Fonds, Collection No. MS – 2 – 520, Volume 1, Folder 1-3, Letter 8 September 1917.

<sup>1125</sup> Norris, *The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill*, 139.

<sup>1126</sup> One soldier wrote that these letters did “a world of good,” news from home “is the best medicine,” and mail reminded the troops of home and helped them forget “all the terrible things I have seen.” Caughill, ed., *Letters to Janet*, 103, 134, 125. See also Steward, *An Infantryman on the Western Front*, 125.

<sup>1127</sup> Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 116 and 131, 135.

<sup>1128</sup> Christie, *The Memoir of John Harold Becker*, 196-197. Other soldiers, and not just “shirkers,” even previously “good soldiers” began having problems with morale and commitment. See LAC, MG 30 E 113, ‘Back to Blighty,’ George V. Bell Diary, page 113.

<sup>1129</sup> Cane, ed., *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 256-257.

done with soldiering. In an address delivered before the *Canadian Club* in Toronto on 29 August 1919, Currie argued that

You cannot understand how sick we all were of the war, nor our anxiety of finishing it as soon as possible, if there was any chance of success. Your sons and brothers wanted to see it out. They wanted to be done with the cursed thing. They never want to see any more war.<sup>1130</sup>

It is not clear how representative this view was – that the soldiers wanted to see the war through, come what may – but certainly some soldiers were increasingly unable to carry on, even if they had wanted to and been previously committed and dedicated.

Uses of the term war weariness itself are more infrequent, but can still be found in the historical record among contemporary source material, official, and firsthand accounts.<sup>1131</sup> Captain Ralph Bell, for example, wrote that the matron who ran the local estaminet never mentioned the war while the men were there, describing this as a “real kindness to us war-weary people.”<sup>1132</sup> This same soldier wrote that “war weariness” could negatively affect a soldier’s judgment,<sup>1133</sup> which could obviously be fatal or endanger the entire unit in certain circumstances. References to war weariness at this phase of the war can also be found in other firsthand accounts, both Allied and enemy.<sup>1134</sup> War weariness negatively affected the Canadian forces by the final months, and it is therefore a worthy concept for understanding soldier experiences and the impact of war and combat on individuals and military units.

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<sup>1130</sup> Colombo, *Colombo's Canadian Quotations*, 135.

<sup>1131</sup> Chaplains had a role to play in comforting a “war-weary soul.” Various Authors, *Canada in the Great World War*, 130.

<sup>1132</sup> Captain Ralph W. Bell, *Canada in War- Paint* (London: J.M. Dent & Sons Ltd., 1917), 50.

<sup>1133</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>1134</sup> Dawson wrote in October 1918 that pacifists and “war-weary mothers and wives” might call for an end to the war prematurely, but the Allies looked to the US to remain firm “for the reason that she is not war-weary.” The implication of this, of course, was that the Entente forces were, indeed, war weary by this point in the war. And even General Ludendorff admitted that war weariness began to negatively affect his troops in the final months of the war. The maintenance of morale was crucial for the continued functioning of the army, but the reality of life at the front and developments in the wider military situation served to undermine this crucial aspect. He wrote that the soldiers were lacking in strength and determination, as “the armistice offer had had an unfavourable effect on the men’s spirits, and war weariness had increased” substantially. Even if Ludendorff was only trying to save his reputation and explain the poor performance of his forces, he still blamed war weariness for their inability to stem the Allied advance and avoid defeat. See Dawson, *Living Bayonets*, 215-216 and Ludendorff, *My War Memories – Volume II*, 745.

It is also important to note that despite the problems facing the Canadians by the summer and autumn of 1918, as a whole the Corps itself did not break. This is especially important as other formations and national armies on the Western Front experienced serious problems after a similar period of combat and length of time in the field – most armies experiences significant issues by mid to late-1917, including the French, Italian, and British armies. These problems included disciplinary issues, a decline in commitment, morale, and endurance, a reduction in military effectiveness, and increasingly conditional service on the part of soldiers. The Canadians, on the other hand, might be said to have bent, but did not break in 1918. There are a few explanations as to why the Canadians were able to continue fighting despite their wear and tear. First of all, the Corps leadership made a concerted effort to stave off the most pernicious effects of war weariness, especially with their policies that encouraged a homogenous structure, and with the adoption of tactical and technological improvements to assist the soldiers on the battlefield. Secondly, in many ways the Corps was better than comparable units in the French and British forces; their divisions were larger, had more firepower, increased engineering and communications abilities, and a more stable leadership and organisational structure. When the Corps faced serious difficulties in the final months of the war, and when this wearing process was at its most pronounced, there were positive aspects to help offset the stresses and strains that served, over time, to break other armies. And this is also related to a third point, about how during the Hundred Days the results of combat provided a welcome antidote to the worst aspects of war weariness. The act of liberating civilians and settlements, the tangible successes as evidenced by the enormous capture of enemy POWs, and the simple act of movement and advancing were welcome by weary warriors. Fourthly, and in contradistinction to set-piece battles earlier in the war, the operations of the Hundred Days proved surprisingly successful militarily. Previously in the war, such as in 1916 or 1917, battles of similar magnitude would have been catastrophic in terms of casualties and engendered a sense of futility and hopelessness because of little gain. During the final months of the war, on the other hand, these operations were remarkably successful – they were a pleasant surprise to these worn veterans who had suffered for so long. Even with all the casualties and problems facing

the troops between July and November 1918, they were successful, providing a powerful antidote to disillusionment and war weariness verging on collapse. And finally, the Corps was able to avoid complete breakdown and collapse because of the timing of the ceasefire in November. Further action of this nature would have worn the soldiers and units of the Corps perhaps beyond the point of no return. Instead, the Armistice provided relief, even if the troops were unsure if fighting would eventually resume.

Ultimately, the Canadians and other Entente soldiers were victorious on the Western Front, *despite* the collective and growing war weariness in the ranks. This can be explained by the external realities and mitigating factors that acted as powerful antidotes to the worst effects of war weariness. These included the prospect of ultimate victory; tangible successes on the battlefield, including the enormous captures in POWs, weapons and equipment; the liberation of civilians, towns, villages, and cities, as well as vast swaths of countryside;<sup>1135</sup> a continuing belief in the justice of the cause; the influx of ‘fresh’ and conscripted MSA men into the worn units of the Corps; the increasing reliance on technology and more successful and refined tactics; the desire for souvenirs and revenge; and the sense of uniqueness or superiority<sup>1136</sup> on the part of Canadian troops, and the acknowledgement that they were taking part in an historic moment.<sup>1137</sup> And finally, the decline of the German army and nation coupled with the conclusion of hostilities that came with the signing of the Armistice happened at a fortuitous time, ensuring that these worn units and war-weary soldiers would not have to continue fighting throughout the winter of 1918 and into 1919. It is not certain they would have been able to withstand such subsequent fighting.

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<sup>1135</sup> The successes of the period gave some “new life,” and there was excitement after the “previous dull warfare.” Moreover, they began reaching areas not yet completely ravaged by war, and were greeted as liberators. An “enthusiastic welcome” seemed to help the troops, as did “living in houses once more.” Hesler, ed., *Interlude: 1916-1919*, 59, 66; Teed, ed., *Uncle Cy’s War*, 255-257, and Walsh, *The First World War Diary of Private Bert Cooke*, 160.

<sup>1136</sup> See, for example, Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, Letter 3 October 1918, found at <http://www.shiawasseehistory.com/coxoctober31918.html>.

<sup>1137</sup> Though referring to the Vimy Battle, one soldier wrote that despite the “Hell” of battle, he was “glad to say that I was through it, as it will be one of the biggest things in Canadian history.” McClare, ed., *The Letters of a Young Canadian Soldier during World War I*, 107. Another soldier wrote in October 1918 that his spirits were up because they were taking part in a “glorious period of history.” Gunner Bertram Howard Cox, Letter of 15 October 1918, found at <http://www.shiawasseehistory.com/coxoctober151918.html>.

## Conclusion

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The experiences of Canadian soldiers in the First World War allows the historian to discern some salient points. This project examined the contributing factors toward war weariness, as well as its development, manifestations, impact, and potential responses. This study also explored how morale, discipline, combat motivation, combat effectiveness, and endurance affected war weariness and our understanding of the impact of combat on both the individual and the collective. War weariness is closely related to shell shock, war neuroses, and other psychiatric casualties of war, but there were important distinctions. Shell shock debilitation reflected the *inability* of individuals to continue with duty,<sup>1138</sup> whereas war weariness was characterised by the *unwillingness* or *reluctance* to carry on indefinitely. War weariness often developed over time in a cumulative process, as veteran soldiers became worn down by over-use and the lack of proper respite, relief, rotation, and genuine rest. Heavy casualties and the intensity of fighting during the war, especially in the final months, ensured that these same troops were used again and again in combat. Experienced soldiers were crucial to the overall success of Entente arms, but the continued use of these same troops led to health and morale problems, as well as war weariness and discontent. Outlets, material comforts, support services, and ‘safety valves’ helped the soldiers endure, as did the tangible evidence of success/military gain (such as effective combat operations and the seizing of substantial enemy POWs). It is also fortuitous that the German Army – and nation – collapsed when it did, as it is questionable if Allied soldiers could withstand more of this intense combat for much longer.<sup>1139</sup> War weariness and shell shock also existed on the same spectrum, whereby the former was often an important marker on the road to shell shock debilitation and breakdown.

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<sup>1138</sup> And though there were myriad causes of shell shock and PTSD, and every individual reacted somewhat differently to mortal threat and trauma, generally speaking PTSD in the First World War was caused by acute exposure to intense trauma; long-term, continual, or cumulative exposure to trauma, death, and combat; the lack of rest (physical and psychological), relief, respite, rotation, and leave; and exposure to combat and the strains of war itself.

<sup>1139</sup> It is also possible that the Allied administrative system could not support another major offensive for months. See Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front*, 237.

This project attempted to illustrate that war weariness could be minimised, addressed, and partially neutralised with effective intervention strategies on the part of military and medical authorities, and proper care of the troops. There were both physical (material) and non-physical aspects of this care. Of the former, this included the provisioning of sufficient water and edible food, as well as ensuring that equipment, weapons, and supplies were plentiful and in good working order. Of non-material aspects of endurance and care, it was important that the troops were psychologically committed to the war effort and had coping strategies for dealing with the trauma and terror, stresses and strains of war and especially combat. In many ways, the human element in combat was crucial to success, and to our current understanding of often complex and confusing events and historical processes.

This project sought to address some important questions as to the nature of combat in the First World War, and how this impacted both individuals, at and behind the front lines, and the larger unit of which they were a part. For example, did the army husband its resources properly and address the issues that emerged in an effective way? And were army policies conducive to the health and long-term stability of the troops under its care? Chapter 1 on the legal and disciplinary system was designed to illustrate that these structures were unable to properly deal with those soldiers who were approaching the breaking point. The use of courts martial and military law could be a rather blunt object; and as the purpose of the military authorities was to field the maximum number of men as possible, maintain morale, provide a disincentive and deterrent to soldiers, and punish troops guilty of dereliction of duty, individuals who had broken down in combat or became war-weary were treated in a similar manner than to those who willingly and consciously turned their back on duty. Many volunteers who eventually succumbed to the enormous and cumulative pressures, stresses, and strains of frontline service, who otherwise were honourable and committed, were caught up in this system. The expectations of the army, high command, and leadership, moreover, did not always match the reality on the ground. This was a unique and unprecedented war, in many ways, and the troops were worn down over time and also responded in unpredictable ways.

Chapter 2 on the medical system facing the Canadians, was similar to the first in outlining the structures in place to control and shape behaviour. I argued that with the army medical system, the paramount desire to ensure manpower requirements were met and that morale was prioritised above all else could actually backfire and exacerbate the pre-existing problems facing the troops. Soldiers, including many war-weary ones, fell through the cracks in the system and were not adequately cared for, thus ensuring that they became a liability and an even larger problem further down the road. One of the main dangers of war weariness during the war was its potential to transmute into more serious shell shock debilitation. Furthermore, more localised and individual war weariness could also become more widespread and collective, creating even more problems for the medical and military authorities. In many ways, the leadership's response to war weariness was understandable, however. It was a concept not fully understood at the time, akin to shell shock, and the army only had so many resources and time to devote to certain problems. As a cost-benefit analysis, for authorities it seemed that soldiers who were fed up or not faring well in combat, or those who were wearing down but not yet unable to continue with duty (but only reluctant or unwilling), it was simply not worth the resources to address their problems until it became more serious and actually prevented them from carrying on.

Chapters 3 and 4 examined the aforementioned legal/disciplinary and medical structures as they actually played out on the battlefield. To this end, two distinct time periods were examined, April-August 1917 and July-November 1918. In the former period, Chapter 3 looked at the Battle of Vimy Ridge and affiliated operations, to understand how troops reacted to combat and how army authorities and structures dealt with emerging problems. In the Vimy period, the (Canadian) systems in place were mostly able to deal with issues as they developed. Substantial evidence on widespread war weariness were lacking for this time period, which is perhaps counterintuitive considering it was at this point in the war – the spring of 1917 – that other armies were beginning to 'crack' and break down from the cumulative problems and thousands, if not millions of casualties already suffered. For the Canadian forces, however, war weariness did not yet appear to be a big problem, and thus the authorities were able to deal with



problems as they developed. This also meant, unfortunately, that the military and medical authorities were less prepared to deal with problems related to war weariness, shell shock, and other war neuroses when they did finally emerge in the final year of the war. During the Vimy period the Corps leadership was largely able to accommodate medical and morale problems and the beginnings of the wearing process. Fortunately, moreover, the Vimy Battle and other operations in this period were relatively short and successful. And this, combined with substantial preparations prior and extensive rest and respite periods after Vimy, allowed for war weariness to remain at a simmer instead of boiling over into more serious and long-term problems in this period.

The final months of the war, in the Hundred Days Campaign, was a different story entirely. This was explored in Chapter 4, and it was during this period that the cumulative stresses and strains imposed on the individual soldiers and their military units began to take their toll. Though there were efforts on the part of the military and medical authorities to deal with rising war weariness and other issues, they were unable to fully and properly deal with them at this time. Authorities began to recognise emerging problems, but the pace of operations and the urgency of the final campaign militated against more substantive efforts. During this period war weariness became a problem for the Canadian forces, but external factors and mitigation efforts prevented it from seriously undermining the overall combat effectiveness of the Corps. In some cases individuals and military units were worn down, destroyed, and unable to properly attain objectives, but the influx of MSA soldiers and the increasing reliance on technology and more effective tactics helped offset these disadvantages. Moreover, German decline also served to mask the very real decline of the Canadian forces in this period. The tangible successes of the final months of the war, including the seizure of thousands of prisoners, guns, and other war material, in addition to capturing towns and liberating grateful French and Belgian civilians acted as powerful antidotes to the very worst effects of war weariness. And finally, it was fortuitous that the war ended when it did, as it was unlikely that the Entente forces could withstand much more intense combat operations at this time.

War weariness and the negative impact of the war effort affected all combatant armies and nations after a certain period of time. Even successful and ultimately victories

armies experienced war weariness, as evidenced by the problems facing the French, British, Italian, and Canadian forces by 1918 (by 1918 the Russians had already gone beyond the point of no return). This speaks to an important point discerned from my years of research, reflection, and writing on the subject, namely, that individual soldiers could carry on with duty and endure the stresses and strains of war *despite* the onset and development of war weariness. War weariness could shape behaviour and attitude in subtle, yet important ways. It did not preclude soldiers from pressing on in battle, though once individual and localised war weariness transmuted into collective or more general war weariness, problems began to multiply. It was at this junction that military, medical, and other authorities needed to intervene<sup>1140</sup> to prevent deepening war weariness from moving beyond the point of no return, and to prevent worn soldiers from becoming debilitated by shell shock. It was thus crucial for the authorities to provide the troops with mitigating factors and forces, and to allow them to develop coping mechanisms to help them endure over time.<sup>1141</sup> Both individuals and military units could become war weary, and it was important to prevent defeatism, dissent, discontent, and demoralisation from spreading. Of the troops in uniform, both combat soldiers at the front as well as support personnel on the lines of communication experienced the negative impact of war and combat over time. For those at the front such as infantry, however, the contributing factors toward and manifestations of war weariness were more numerous and significant.

Mitigation efforts were important to implement on the battle fronts, partly to ensure that protests surrounding local conditions and complaints about *how* the war was prosecuted did not transform into protests about *why* the war was being prosecuted, or

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<sup>1140</sup> On the home fronts, interventionist and remedial policies could be either positive or negative. Regarding the latter, this could take the form of silencing anti-war or anti-government dissent or the co-optation of certain segments of the population. In terms of positive steps, addressing grievances and implementing reforms could help stave off widespread discontent and prevent war weariness from boiling over into more dangerous expressions of discontent. On the battle fronts, the government could provide the soldiers with 'safety valves,' outlets, distractions, and entertainment, as well as use both 'carrots and sticks' to shape behaviour and thinking.

<sup>1141</sup> The soldiers that managed to stay in the line and avoid permanent breakdown or shell shock debilitation did so for a few reasons, including respite and relief, sleep, rest, leave, and rotation policies; mental and psychological coping strategies (fatalism, apathy/indifference, forgetting, attitude, superstition/faith/religion); songs, music, humour, jokes, parody, satire; unit cohesion, friendship, and camaraderie; connections with home, such as parcels, letters, leave, and (photos of) loved ones; recognition, praise, awards; the use of 'carrots and sticks;' adrenaline and other chemical props (alcohol, caffeine, nicotine); good tactics, leadership, communication, and teamwork; material comforts (like hot tea and warm clothes); female companionship and sex; estaminets and entertainment. This list is of course not exhaustive.

against the war in general. Some soldiers were able to endure the war and military service without long-term medical and psychological problems, and some even came to enjoy combat and killing.<sup>1142</sup> Many soldiers on the Western Front, however, became ‘fed up’ with the way things were going and with the apparent ineffectiveness of attacks in 1915-1917, and thus it was important to provide them with reasons for continuing, despite all the horror and bloodshed. Connections with home were important, whether that entailed leave, newspapers from home, or the regular delivery of mail and parcels, this could not be overlooked. Moreover, technological, doctrinal, and tactical developments needed to be implemented, and if they had a tangible impact on the battlefield there might be hope of a breakthrough. The veteran troops on the Western Front were not naïve, however, and thus both political and military authorities needed to make it clear that all was being done to defeat the enemy and win the war. This was just one reason why calls for the British and other Entente governments to articulate war aims became so urgent by 1917; the troops needed to know that the reasons for fighting, suffering, and dying were still valid and actually worth laying down one’s life for. Exhortations to do one’s duty and protect the Empire rang hollow after just a few short months of war.

Throughout the dissertation several different ideas, concepts, and themes were explored. This included the types of casualties inflicted during the war, such as seemingly ‘legitimate’ battle wounds, versus that of suspicious psychiatric casualties or illnesses. This provided the medical officers with a dilemma and some tension in their duties. It could be quite difficult, for example, to determine which soldiers were genuinely unable to withstand further service, those that were unwilling to further endure duty, and those that were merely malingering or shirking duty. Moreover, some soldiers were certainly in need of a break or rest behind the lines, as recognised by their own MOs, but were unable

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<sup>1142</sup> There was the concept of the ideal soldier or happy warrior during the war. One historian defined the happy warrior as “marching the roads of France and Flanders with a jolly whistle and a bright smile that would not desert him, even in death.” Were these soldiers merely new, ignorant of the reality of war, or naïve? Or were they perhaps mentally unstable? Another historian argued that some soldiers and military institutions glorified and enjoyed killing, and sought to brag and boast about their prowess in combat. Others have noted that only about 2% of soldiers exposed to battle will not break down under stress eventually, perhaps because they are already psychopaths or mentally ill. And one veteran also wrote that only 2% of soldiers can withstand combat indefinitely, but these are those predisposed to “aggressive psychopathic personalities.” See Vance, *Death So Noble*, 257; Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, especially Chapter 2 ‘The Warrior Myth,’ pages 32-56; Gabriel, *No More Heroes*, 79, and Grossman, *On Killing*, 44.

to be sent down the line due to restrictions on what constituted a genuine battle wound and justifications for evacuation from the front. MO and CAMC tension also reflected the difficulty in reconciling the needs of the collective – the army and the nation more broadly – with that of the individual. The historical record suggests that in most cases the needs of the army trumped that of the individual, and questions of morale and manpower at the front took precedence over those of patient choice, genuine recovery, and effective long-term treatment. In many ways, the individual soldier was merely a means to an end, and more traditionally-minded authorities were comfortable with this state of affairs. It was problematic, however, when these authorities refused to acknowledge the reality of modern, industrial, attritional, total war and the inevitability of breakdown over time. Simply banning the use of the term ‘shell shock,’ as the British high command sought to do, was no solution to the problem. In many way, it actually exacerbated the problem. Related to this concept was the idea of emotional versus physical breakdown. Troops could suffer a breakdown in combat and be unable to continue based on the loss of will and demoralisation, or because one’s body refused to cooperate and ‘betrayed the spirit.’ Another important aspect of the project was an exploration of preventative measures and mitigating factors that allowed soldiers to endure the stresses and strains of war, if only for a short while longer. These included chaplain, medical, or CO intervention at a timely manner to address problems and prevent more permanent breakdown amongst soldiers at the front. Other preventative measures included strong connections with home, and alcohol, sufficient food and water, proper equipment, leadership, and support.

This dissertation also explored the distinction between the unwillingness to carry on with combat and duty (war weariness) with that of the increasing inability to endure at the front and on the lines of communication. Just where this transition occurred was difficult to determine and was contextually based, but for soldiers who acknowledged that they were not ‘wearing well’ and might soon breakdown or become permanently debilitated, certain actions and attitudes were adopted to reduce or even evade participation in duty. Soldiers might become overly cautious, for example, or attempt to develop excuses to avoid further service in a hostile environment. Others feigned

illness<sup>1143</sup> or tried to get removed from duty for other reasons. For soldiers increasingly desperate to escape the trenches or service altogether, however, even more drastic measures were taken. Some soldiers administered a self-inflicted wound or illness in order to be medically excused from duty, whereas others sought a Blighty wound that could remove them from the line whilst still keeping (some semblance of) their honour. Other desperate troops actually deserted the battlefield or went AWL to avoid further service. The most desperate soldiers of all committed suicide, or acted in such a reckless way that was tantamount to suicide; for these troops, death was preferable to the uncertainty, suffering, and trauma that was service on the Western Front.

The era of the First World War was in many ways a watershed moment. The death of millions of soldiers and civilians around the globe may have killed the Victorian and Edwardian eras for good, and perhaps ushered in the modern world. And though it is somewhat reductive to claim that an entire generation was lost due to the war, the cultural, social, and political scars outlived the generation that fought and suffered during the war years. For some nations like Britain and France, the nation and society could never truly escape the clutches of the war and its profound impact on all matter of life in these countries. For countries like Germany, Italy, and Russia, only subsequent and traumatic events like Fascism and the Holocaust, Mussolini and occupation, the Bolshevik Revolution and the ‘Great Patriotic War,’ respectively, could overshadow the trauma that was the First World War. And it is also not too far of a stretch to argue that the rise of Hitler and Mussolini, the Second World War, the Russian Revolution and the Stalin years were the direct offspring of the First World War.

The aftermath of the war also helps us understand the post-war disillusionment so prevalent in the English-speaking world after 1919. In Canada and much of the combatant nations, the public was never fully exposed to the reality of the war. This was in large

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<sup>1143</sup> The historical record suggests that some soldiers used illness or health problems, both real and perceived, as a tool or weapon to fight back against army discipline and the strictures imposed by military service. Because of this, we as modern historians cannot always give these soldiers the benefit of the doubt. There were, for example, some troublemakers and ‘bad apples’ in the ranks, but there were also troops who were driven to extreme measures like administering a self-inflicted wound to escape the trenches and avoid further service for the foreseeable future. This all serves to complicate the story.

measure due to propaganda, censorship, and the silencing of anti-war dissent on a systematic scale. When the soldiers did return to Canada after demobilisation, as opposed to the trickle of returning soldiers during the war itself, the enormity of the conflict and the enormous impact it had on thousands became evident. The war and its results would have a profound impact on society, and pensions and other payments would shackle the Dominion government for decades to come. This post-war disillusionment was also based primarily on the period *following* the war, rather than *during* the war. Broken government promises,<sup>1144</sup> the lack of employment and sufficient housing, alienation from wider society, the questioning of veterans' masculinity in this environment, combined with inflation, an economic downturn, rise of Fascism, and eventually the onset of the Depression all served to engender this disillusionment. The post-war bitterness, cynicism, and writings of the (usually) elite war poets was powerful, articulate, and haunting, though largely unrepresentative of the wider veteran pool. Most soldiers during the war did not believe the war was in vain, or that it was merely 'mud, blood, folly, and futility.' It was the post-war world and the problems of the period that led to a re-examination of the purposes and results of the war. Of course, there was no single veteran experience, and the importance of veterans' organisations like the Legion and Great War Veterans Association may have been overstated; less than half of all former soldiers joined these veterans' organisations. It is also important to remember that the governments of both Canada and the UK were overwhelmed by a lack of money, resources, and bureaucracy to deal with the enormous number of war veterans, casualties, and dependents. And the onset of the Depression, the insularity of American thinking in this period, the reality of post-war debt, and the desire of Ottawa to avoid charity long before the onset of the welfare state helps explain this inability to cope with all the veterans and their needs.

The years following the First World War were crucial for how the veteran soldiers approached their lives, as well as for how society more generally viewed the war. The

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<sup>1144</sup> Much of the disillusionment on the part of veterans was based on these broken promises. Various promises emanating from London and Ottawa encouraged an increase in expectations. Some of these problems emanated from the failure to attain fulfilling employment and dignity, national unity, international peace, imperial harmony, the continued support for the League of Nations, as well as other unfulfilled promises.

1922 British War Office Committee of Enquiry into 'Shell Shock,' debates over future foreign policy and interventions abroad, and the problems surrounding the awarding of pensions all illustrate that the history of the war was contested from the very beginning. Debates over the Treaty of Versailles, the (impotence of) the League of Nations, the onset of the Depression, emerging Pacifism, anti-war attitudes, and disillusionment all shaped how historians after 1919, and wider society itself, understood and depicted the war. This, in part, helps explain the inability or unwillingness of the victorious Entente powers to prevent the rise of Fascism, and Italian and German aggression beginning in the 1930s. The history and consequences of the war remained contested, and certain political leaders were willing to re-shape the post-war order in violent ways.

The Second World War provided historians another opportunity to assess the applicability and validity of conclusions made during and immediately following the First World War. The lessons of the Great War were not always learned, or remembered, but there were developments in enlistment, leave, and medical policy during 1939-1945 that can be directly attributed to the experiences of 1914-1919. Studies related to war weariness, in the guise of battle exhaustion and combat fatigue, in addition to continuing research on shell shock and (what came to be known as) PTSD, continued the trend of examining the impact of combat on the individual and the interplay between the individual and the group. The Second World War provided much fodder for these studies, and new research techniques, the use of questionnaires, an increased role for medical specialists including psychiatrists, all assisted in this process. And after the Second World War, studies on breakdown and the medical and psychological impact of combat continued in the context of the Korean War, Vietnam War, and conflicts in the Balkans, amongst other war zones and conflicts. And of course trauma and stress are an integral part of the modern world. Everyone, in all walks of life, around the globe, experiences trauma and stress at various points in their lives. Sometimes this is based on war and conflict, at other times it emerges from poverty and oppression; at other points this stress and trauma is caused by natural disaster, crime, religious fundamentalism, rape, or violence. There are, moreover, professions that tend to have higher rates of stress and exposure to trauma than other vocations. Of the former, air traffic controllers and

surgeons might very well experience significant and dangerous levels of stress on the job, on a regular basis. Medical problems, addiction, and all manner of social issues can be the result. In terms of exposure to trauma, soldiers, first-responders, councillors/therapists, 9-1-1 dispatch operators, and others often suffer from PTSD and other reactions to high levels of trauma, and these can be either direct or indirect. And even for regular civilians in relatively 'normal' and stable professions, there are various sources of stress and strain in the modern world. Some suffer from a lack of purpose, whereas others lament the decline of organised religion and civic engagement; unemployment and insufficient housing continue to plague the developed world, as do problems with education, rising inequality, and health care. Isolation, loneliness, grief, and mental health problems can also contribute to medical problems and other social, economic, and political issues.

And though the human element in combat and warfare will be relevant for decades to come, how will trauma studies and those on the impact of combat on the individual and military unit change with the emergence of modern technology? It is difficult to predict how far and fast the technological revolution in military affairs will go, but there are rapid changes that military historians and researchers need to be aware of. In advanced economies, the shape of war (and military service) has changed dramatically since the mid-20<sup>th</sup> Century. Reserve forces play an increasingly important role, and though professional, volunteer, and career soldiers remain in Canada's armed forces, the international environment has changed in important ways. Civil wars, rudimentary technology and tactics, and drawn-out conflicts will remain for the foreseeable future, but in the developed world technology plays an increasingly prevalent role on the battlefield. The use of autonomous weapons and vehicles, such as aerial and underwater drones, coupled with other types of warfare (electronic, cultural, economic) indicate these changes. Russian 'hybrid' warfare as displayed in eastern Ukraine and the seizure of the Crimea, and the various loyalties and alliances as evident in Syria and Yemen, also suggest this complexity. And yet even with the use of technology, drones, and intercontinental ballistic missiles, there will always be room for the human element in warfare. This also means that there will continue to be psychological problems for combatants and veterans, and one need not look too far, even in Canada, for evidence of



these problems. Suicide, homelessness, alcoholism, depression, dependency and other issues continue to disturb former soldiers, a situation we Canadians should not tolerate. As long as there is trauma and stress in the world, there will be a need to attempt to understand the impact of these on the human body and mind. We ignore these serious issues at our own peril.

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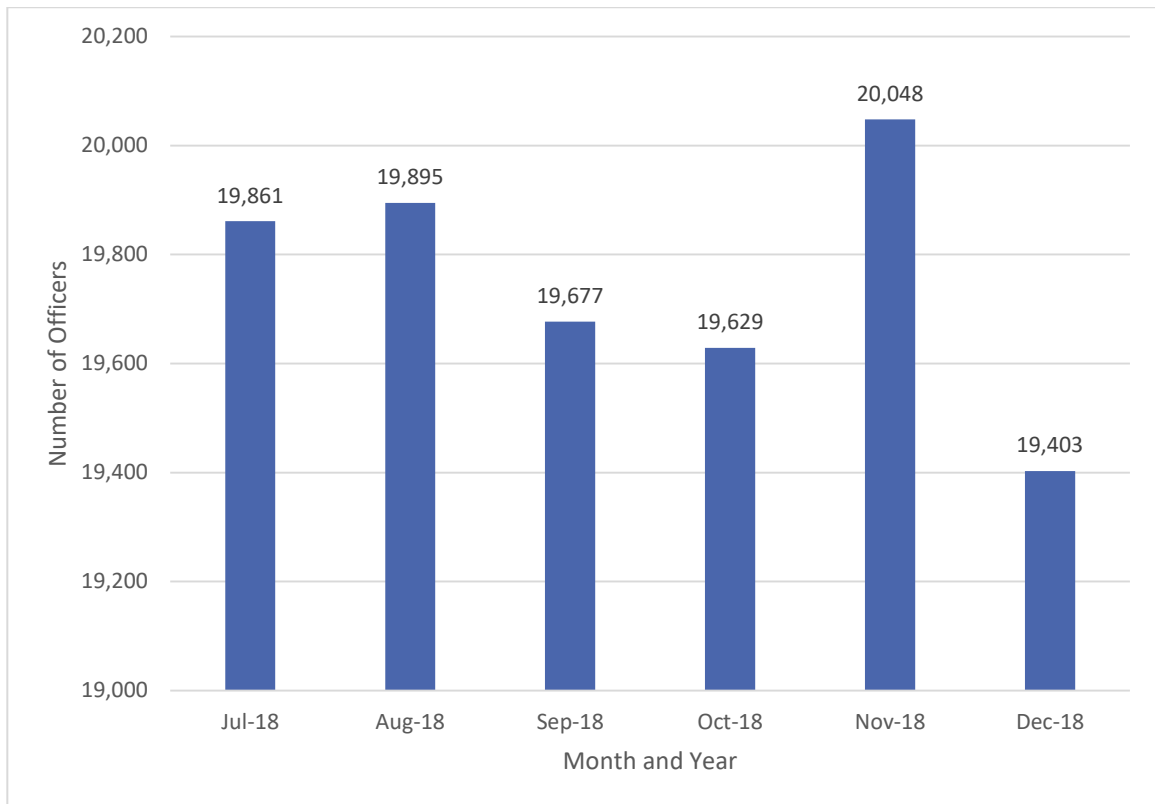
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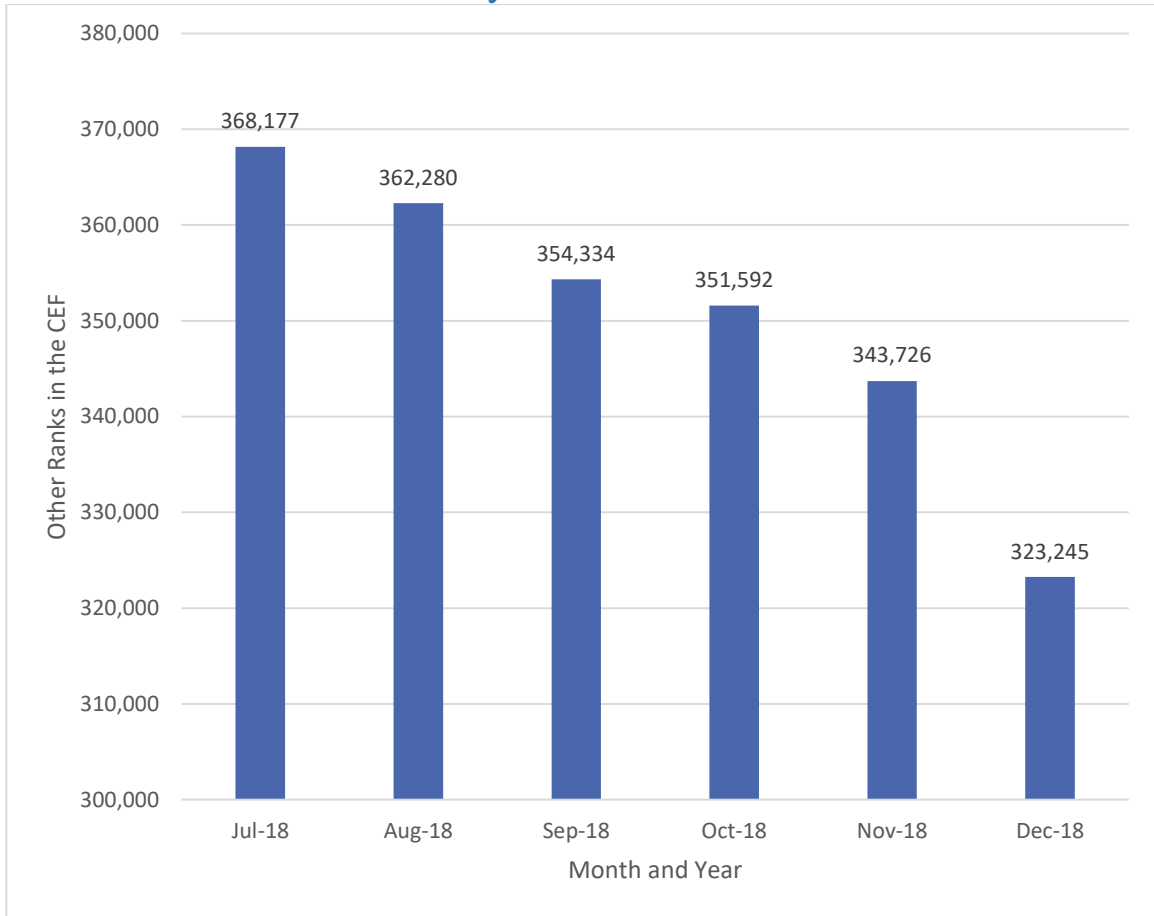
## Appendix I – Charts and Graphs

### Officers in the CEF, July – November 1918



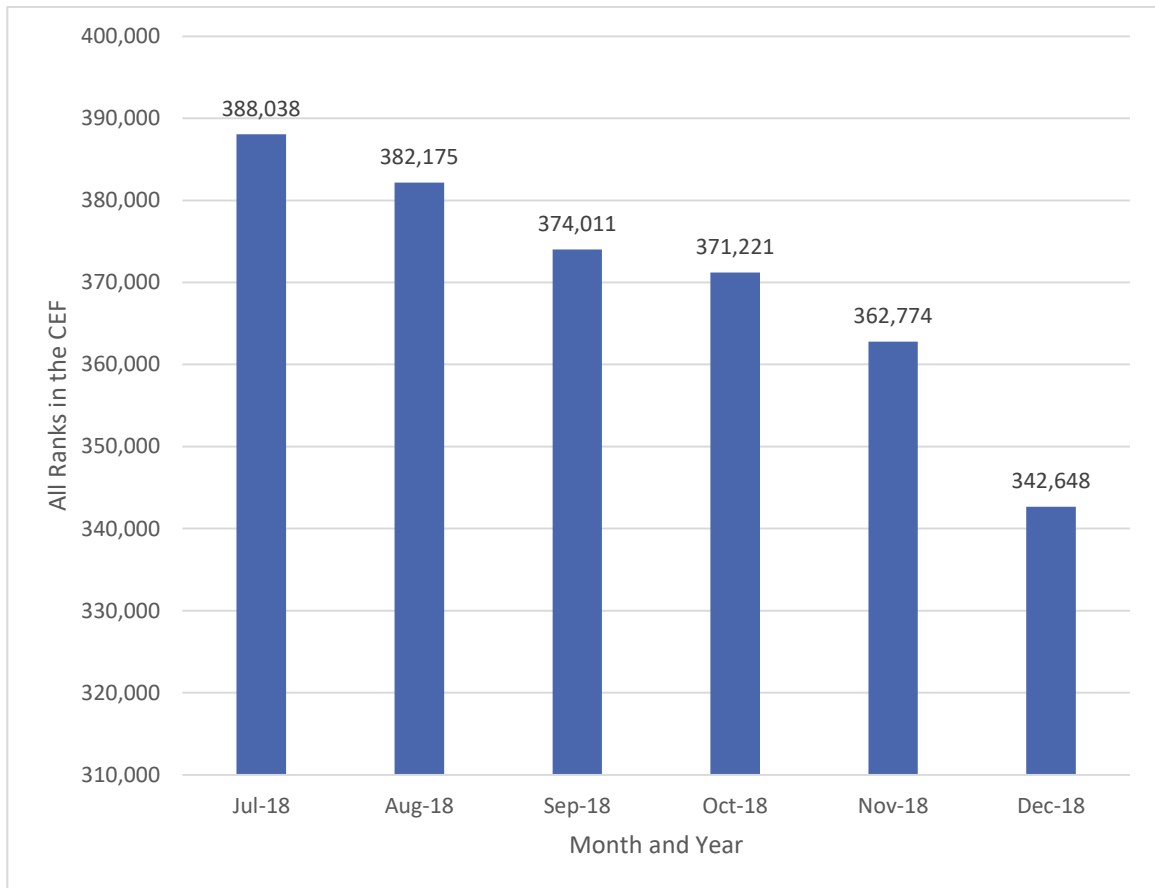
**Figure 1 - Chart of Officers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, July-November 1918 – Illustrates the Steady Decline of Leaders in the CEF for the Final Months of the War – Statistics Taken from Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, Appendix "C," Table 2: Strength at the End of Each Month from 30 September 1914 to November 1919, 547**

## Other Ranks in the CEF, July – November 1918



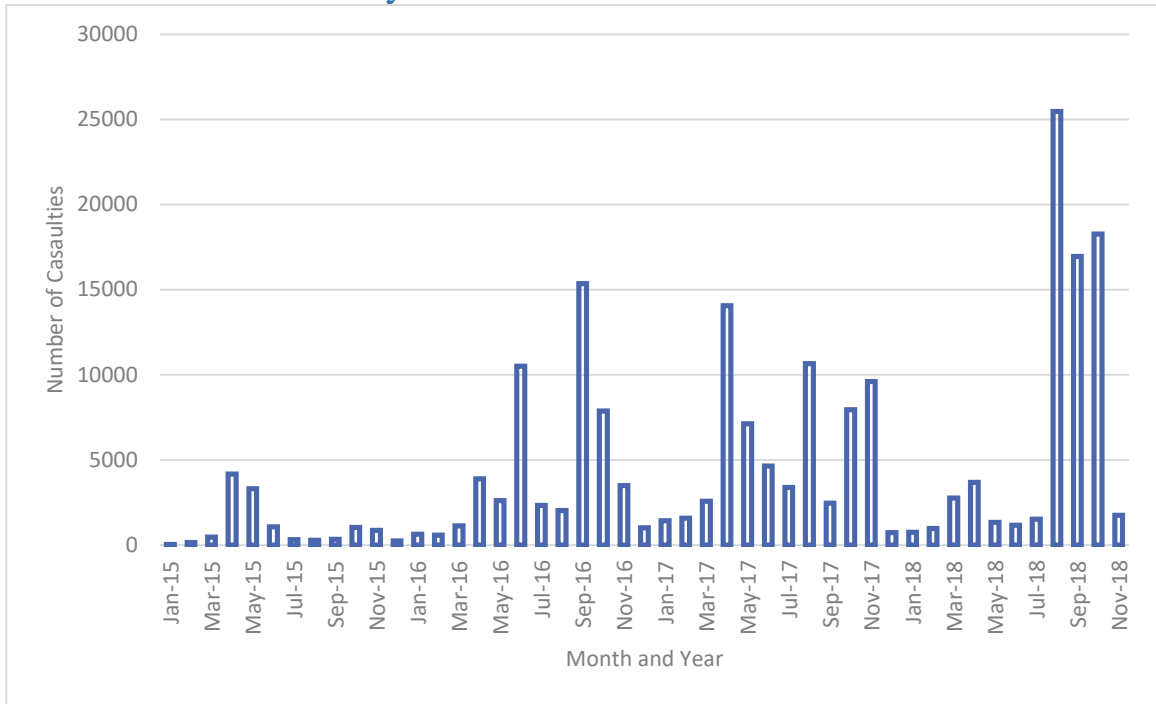
**Figure 2 - Chart of ORs in the CEF, July - November 1918 - Illustrates the Heavy Casualties of the Canadian Forces in the Final Months of the War – Statistics Taken from Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, Appendix "C," Table 2: Strength at the End of Each Month from 30 September 1914 to November 1919, 547**

## All Ranks in the CEF, July – November 1918



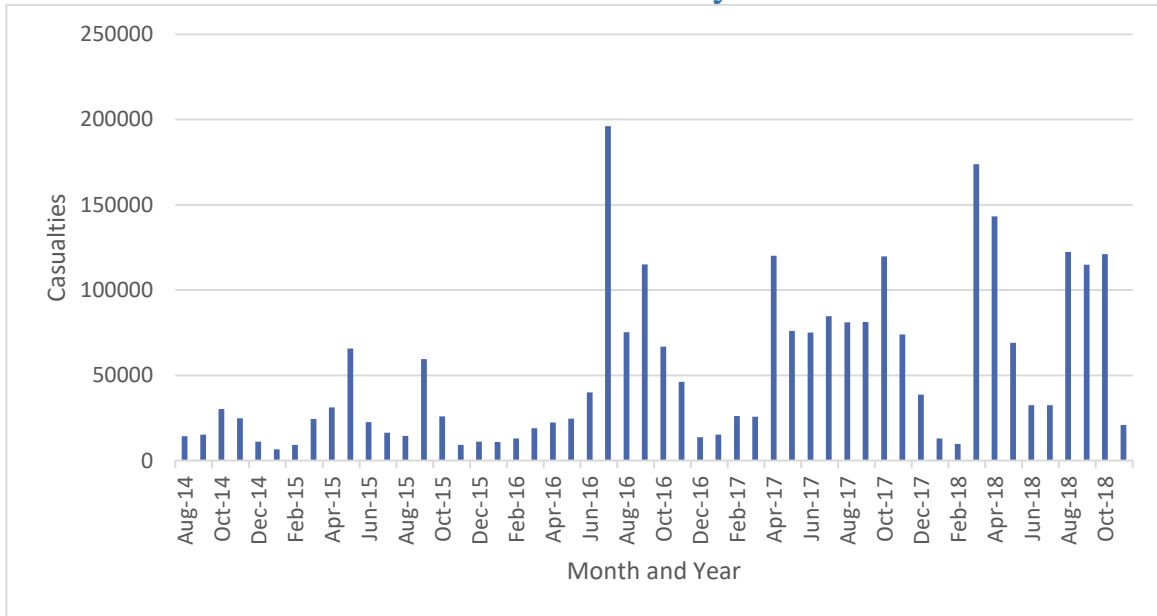
**Figure 3 - Chart of All Ranks in the CEF, July - November 1918 - Illustrates the Overall Decline in Numbers of the Canadian Forces in the Final Months of the War – Statistics Taken from Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, Appendix "C," Table 2: Strength at the End of Each Month from 30 September 1914 to November 1919, 547**

## Canadian Casualties by Month



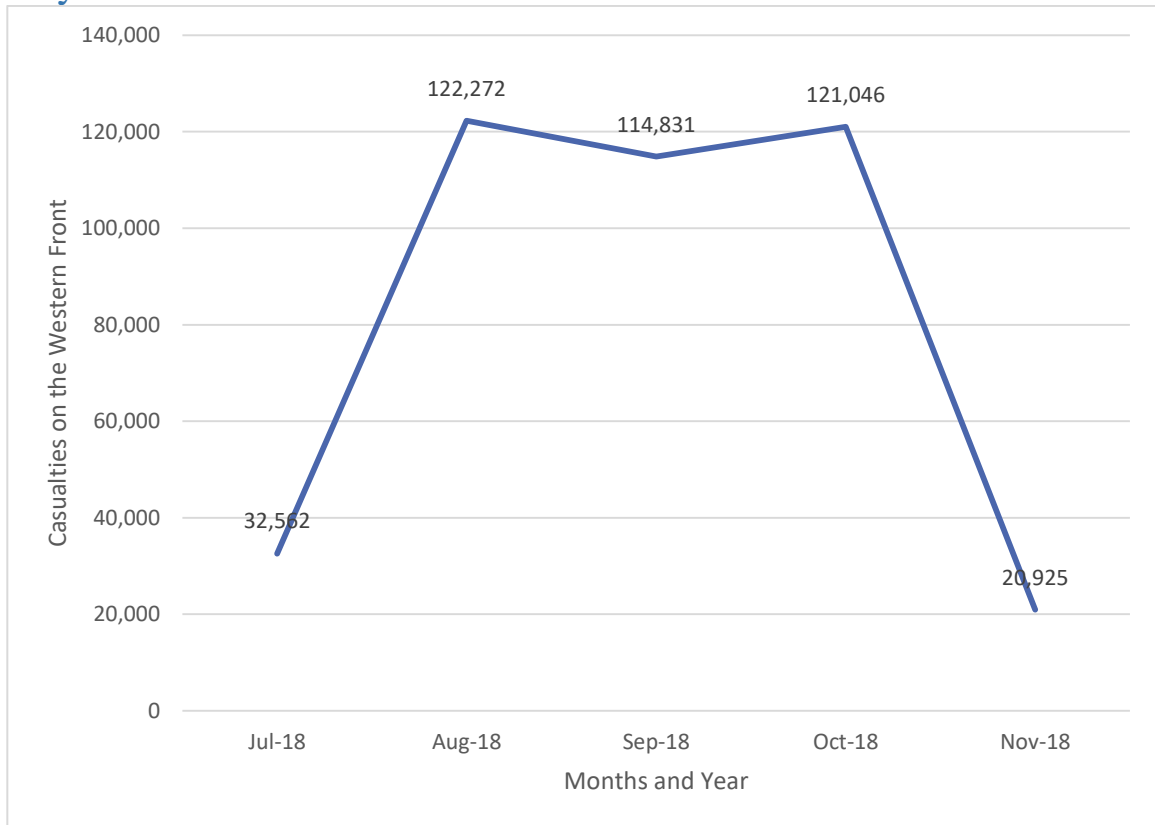
**Figure 4 - Chart of Canadian Casualties by Month - Highlights the Enormous Casualties Suffered by the Canadian Corps in the Final Months of the War – Statistics Taken From Bird, The Communication Trench, 141-142**

## British Casualties on the Western Front by Month



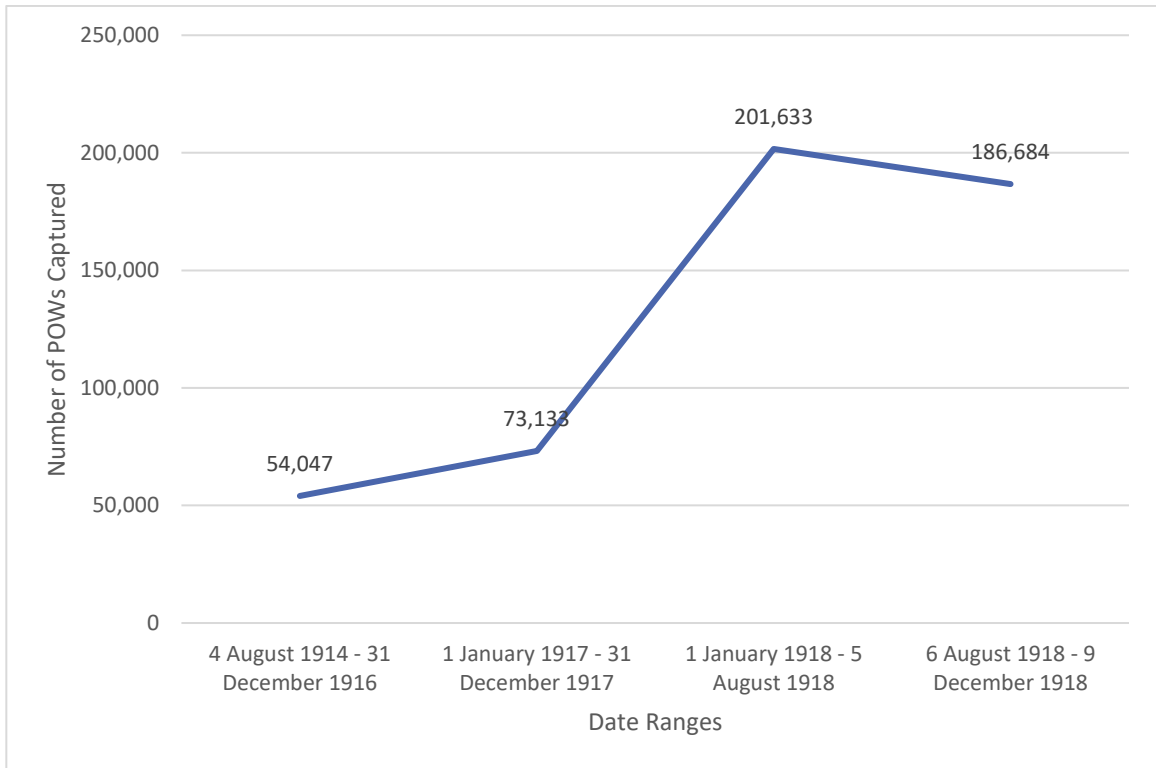
**Figure 5 - Chart of British Casualties on the Western Front by Month - Illustrates the Deadly Nature, Pace, and Intensity of the Fighting in the Final Months of the War – Statistics Taken from Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 845, Citing British War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort*, 253**

## Casualties and Losses to the British Army on the Western Front, July – November 1918



**Figure 6 - Chart of British Army Casualties on the Western Front - Highlights the Enormous Casualties Suffered in the Final Months of the War – Statistics Taken from Churchill, *The World Crisis*, 845, Citing British War Office, *Statistics of the Military Effort*, 253**

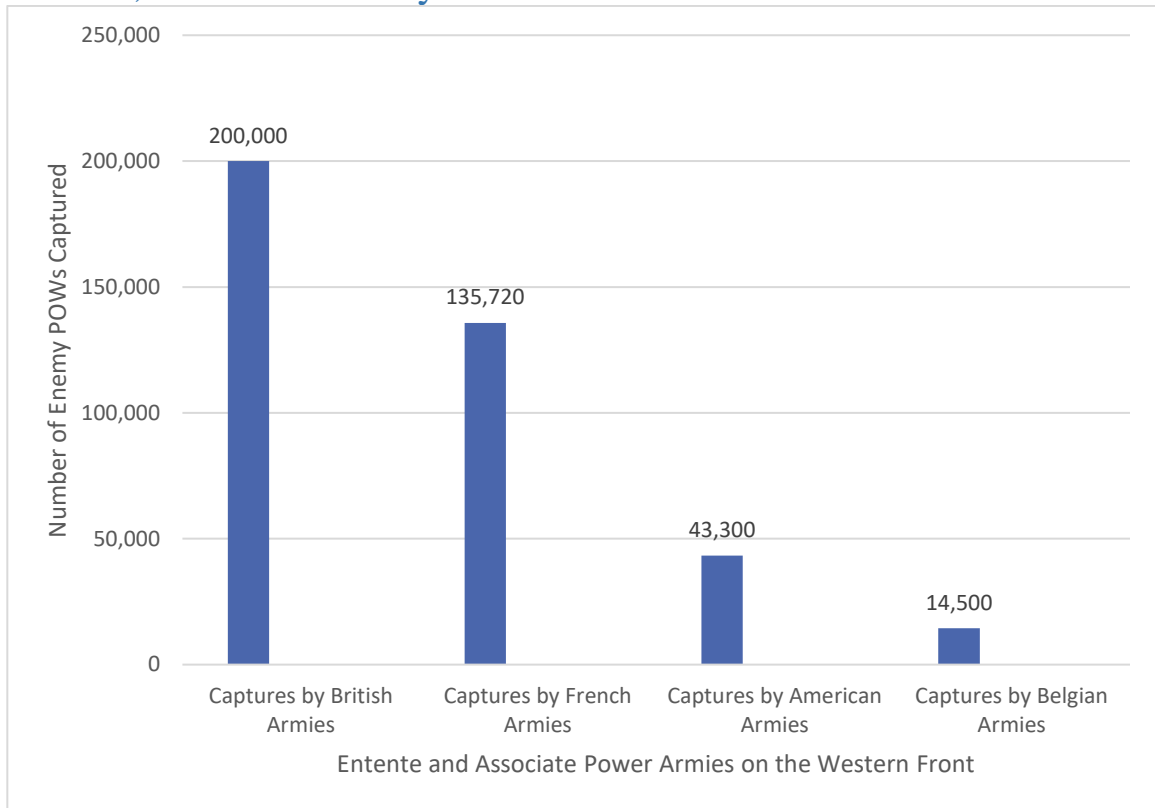
## Number of German Prisoners of War Captured by the British Armies in France



**Figure 7 - Chart of German POWs Captured by the British Armies in France - Indicates the Substantial Number of German Prisoners Captured and Surrendered in the Final Months of the War - Information Taken from British War Office, Statistics of the Military Effort, 632**



## Prisoners of War Captured by Entente and Associate Power Armies, Between 18 July and 11 November 1918



**Figure 8 - Chart of POWs Captured in the Final Months of the War - The Enormous Number of Enemy Prisoners Captured in the Final Months of the War Indicated the Steady Decline of German Fighting Power and the Hard Fighting of the Period - Information Taken from Bird, The Communication Trench, 131**

## Enemy Guns Captured Between 18 July and 11 November 1918

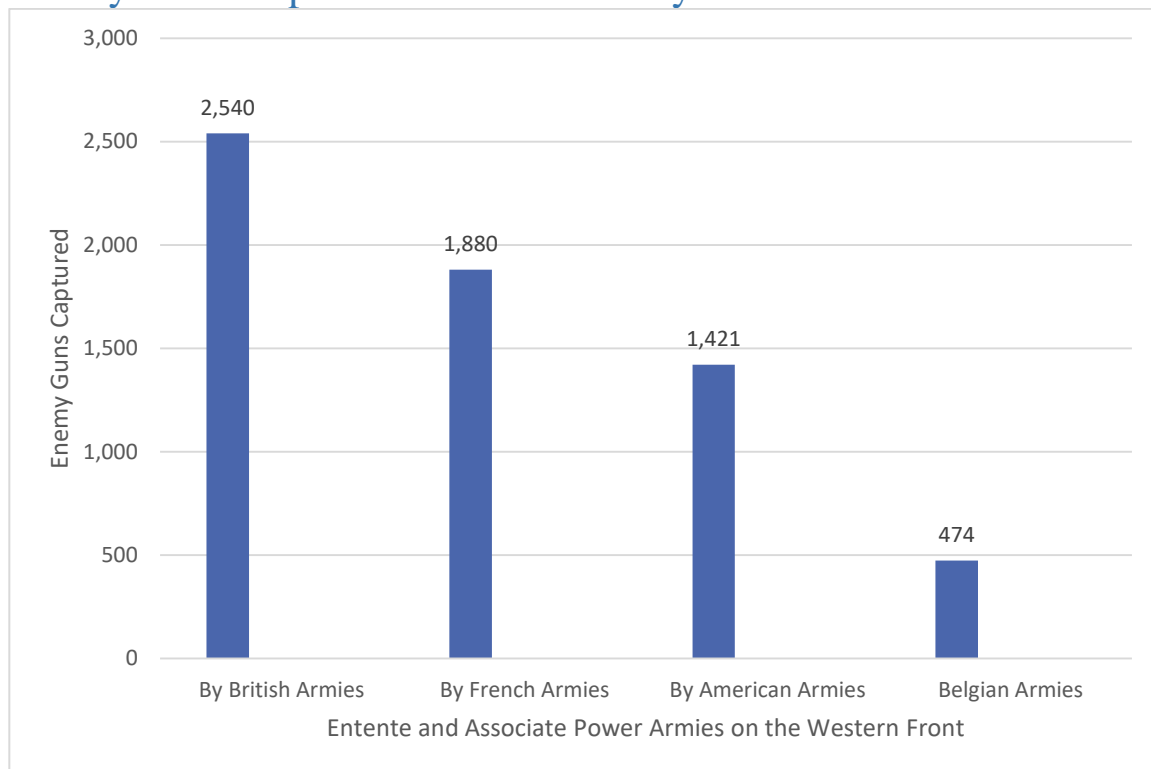


Figure 9 - Chart of Enemy Guns Captured in the Final Months of the War - The Large Number of Guns Seized Reflected the Loss of Will and Ability of the Enemy Forces – Information Taken from Bird, *The Communication Trench*, 131

## Total Captures by the Canadian Corps, 8 August – 11 November 1918

Prisoners of War	31,537
Heavy and Field Guns	623
Machine Guns	2,842
Heavy and Light Trench Mortars	336
Square Miles of Territory	500 +
Towns, Cities, Villages Liberated	228

Figure 10 - Chart of Captures by the Canadian Corps in the Hundred Days Campaign – The Enormous Number of Enemy Prisoners, Guns, Military Equipment, and Territory Seized Reflected the Hard Fighting of the Final Months of the War – Information Taken from Currie, *Corps Operations 1918*, 84-85, Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire*, 132, and Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 303

# Appendix II – Maps

## The Military Hospital Commission in Canada

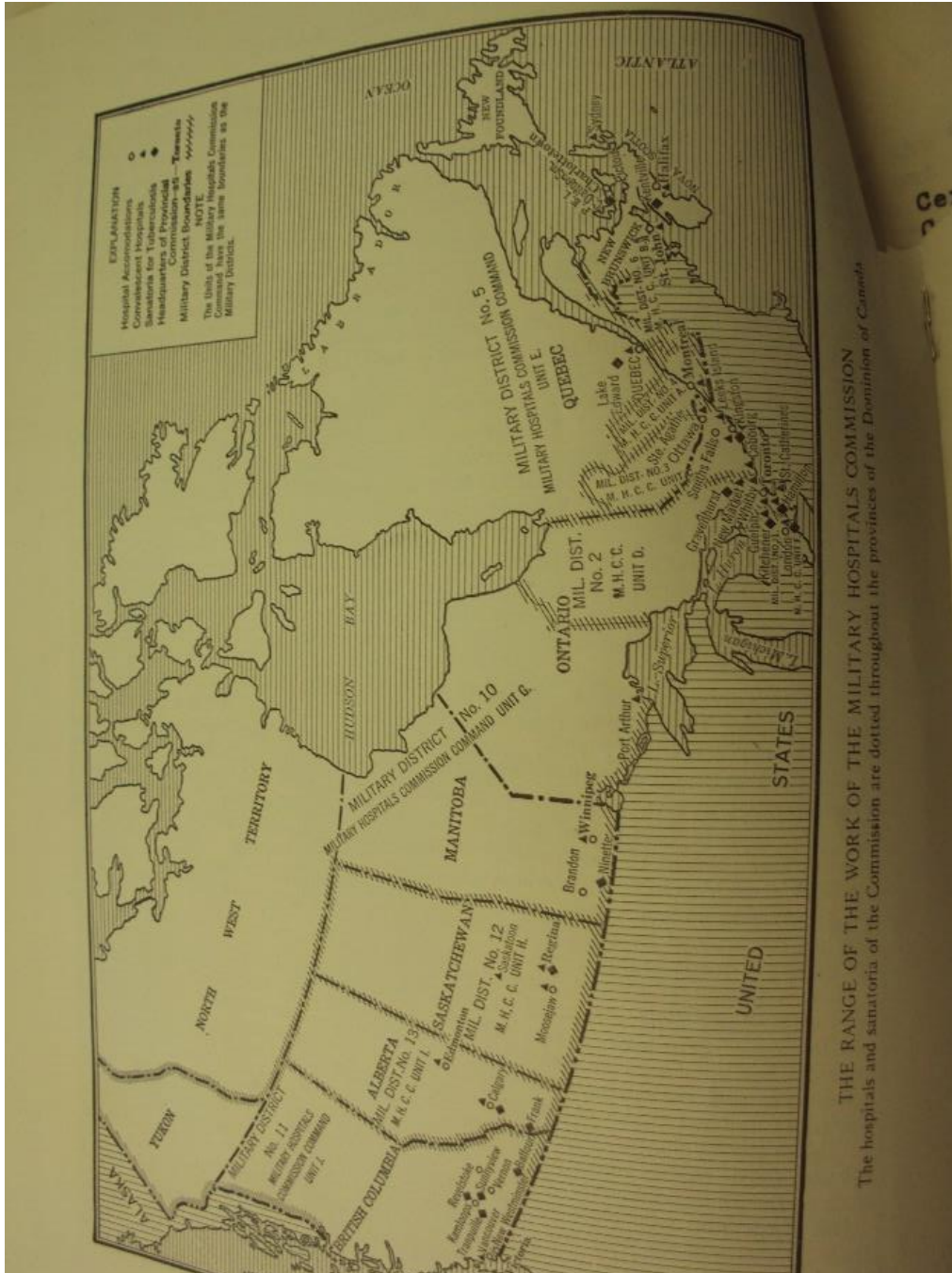


Figure 11 - Map of the Location of Facilities Pertaining to the Military Hospital Commission in Canada - Includes Location of Hospital Accommodations, Convalescent Hospitals, and Tuberculosis Sanatoria, Soldiers Suffering from Shell Shock and other Psychiatric Casualties were often sent back to Canada for potential Recovery - LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751

## Canadian Hospitals in the United Kingdom

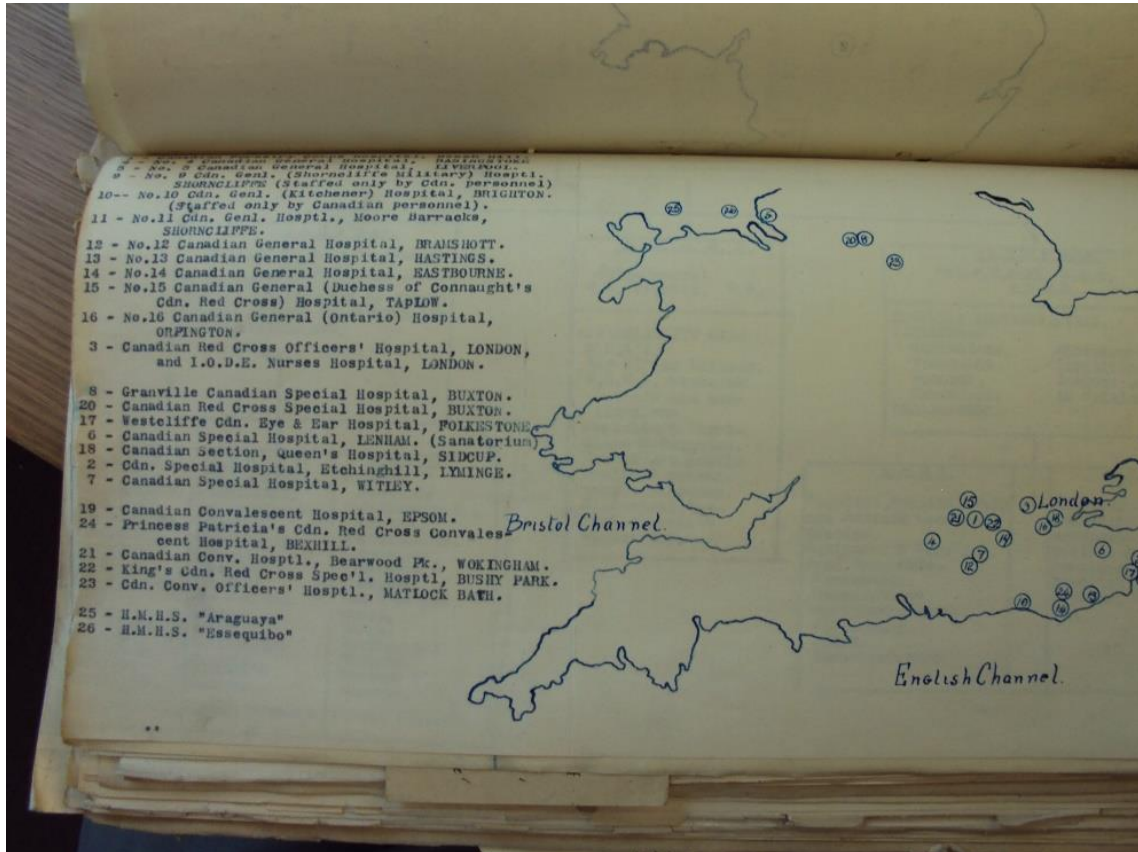


Figure 12 - Map of Canadian Hospitals in the UK - LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3686

## Consolidation Scheme for the Arleux-Acheville Operations

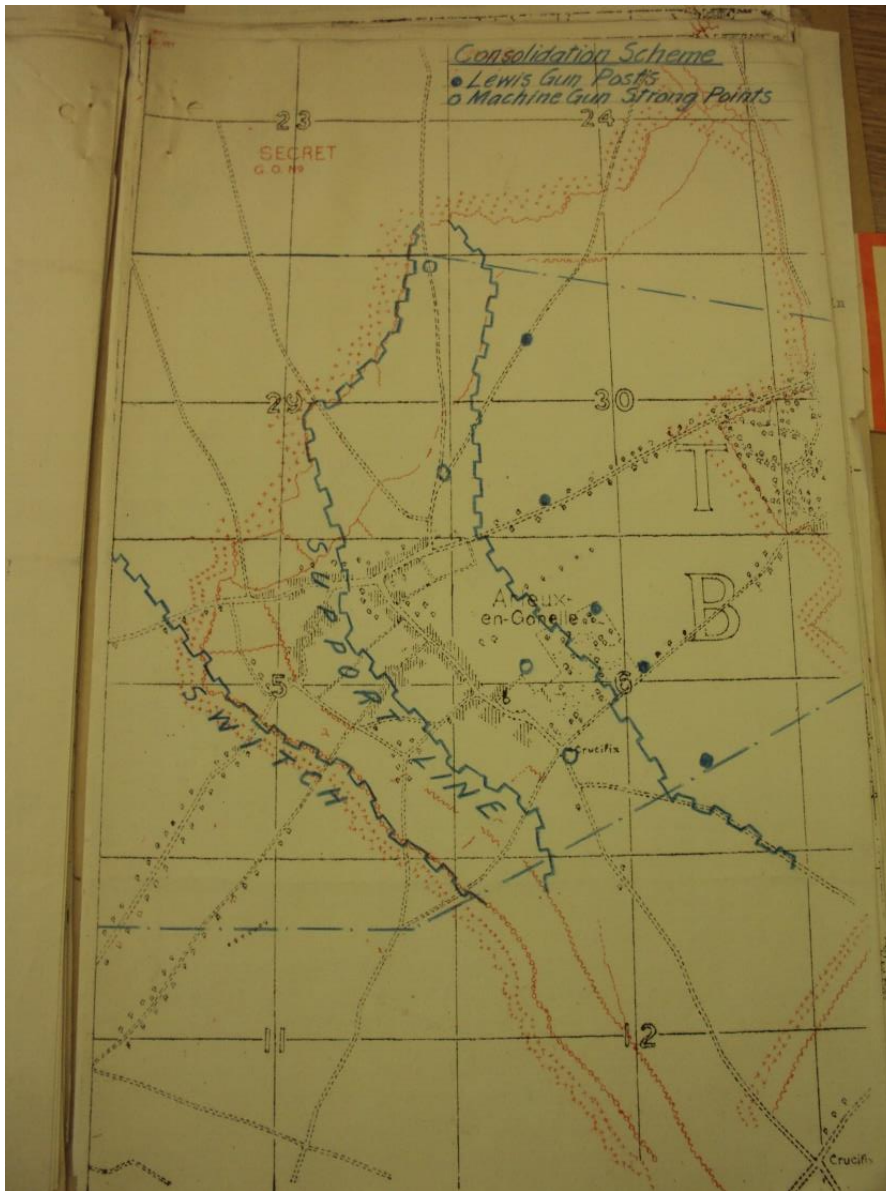


Figure 13 - Map of the Consolidation Scheme for the Arleux-Acheville Operations - The Map Indicates the Position of Lewis and Machine Guns Following the Battle of Vimy Ridge - LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3847, Folder 54, File 1



## Communications Network at the Battle of Third Ypres

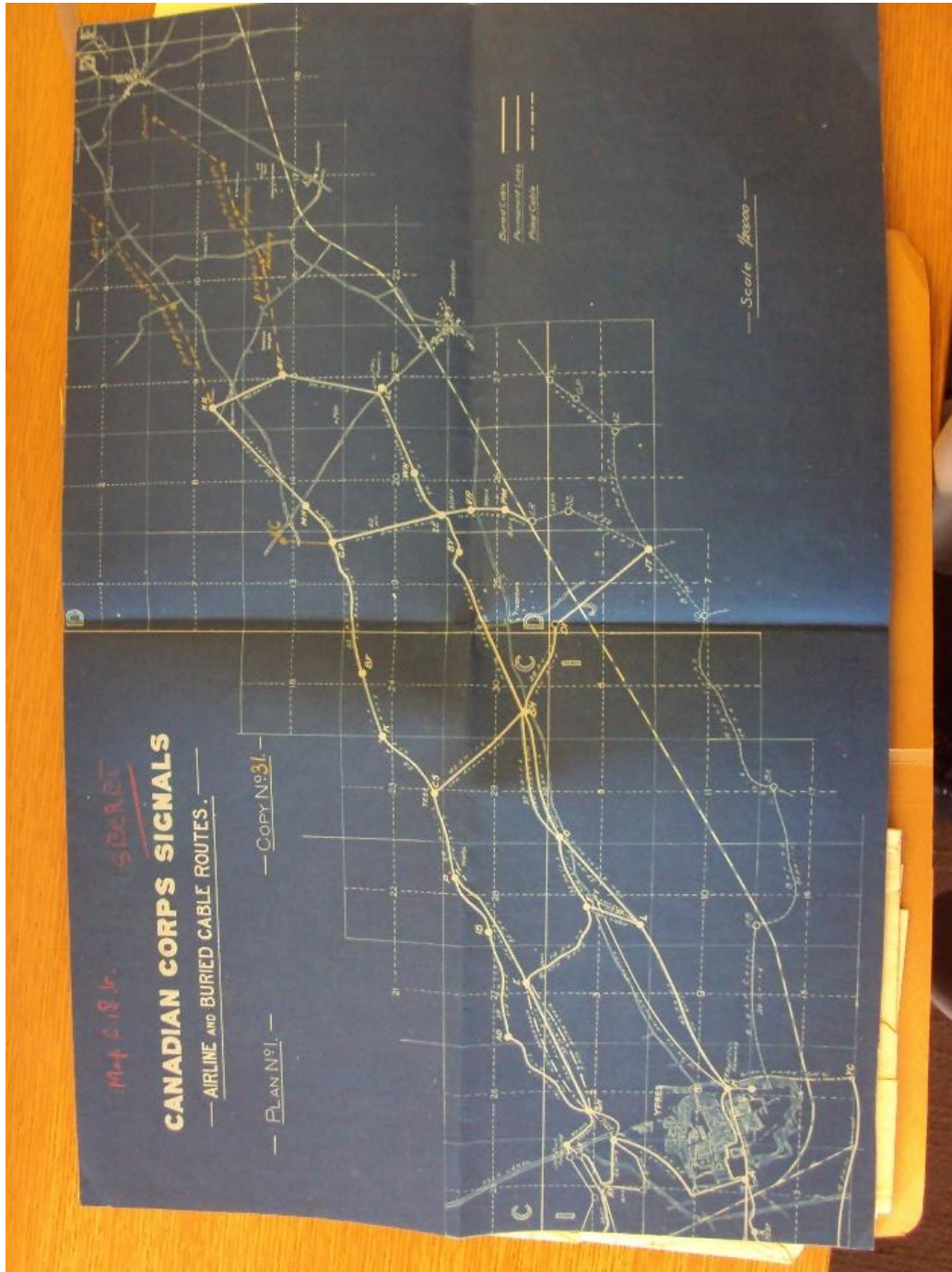


Figure 14 - Map Indicating the Extent and Complexity of the Network of Air and Buried Cables at the Third Battle of Ypres - LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3853

## The Battle of Amiens

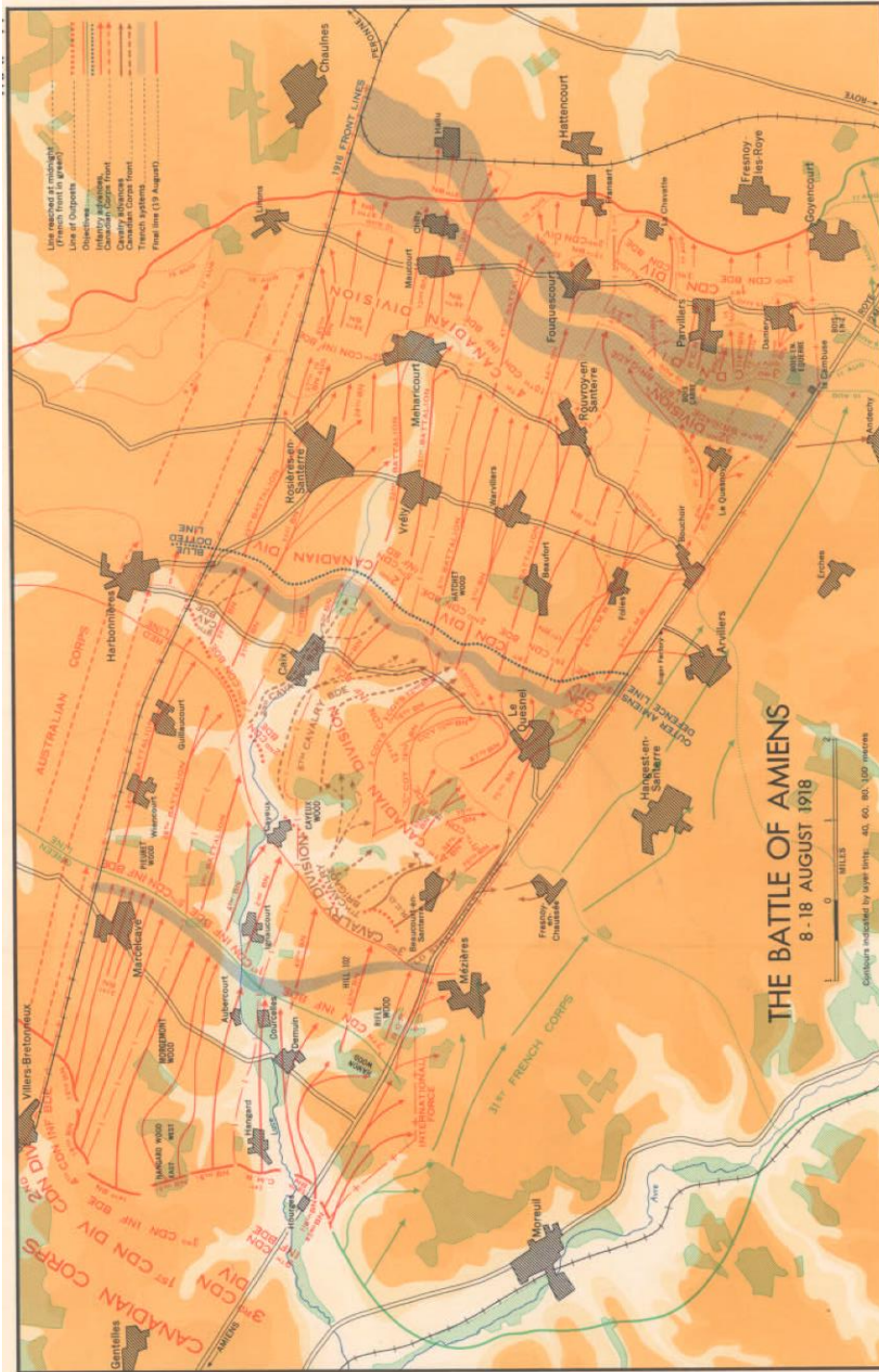


Figure 15 - Map of the Battle of Amiens, 8-12 August 1918 - Map Indicates the Advances of the Canadian Units in the Battle - Originally Reproduced by the Army Survey Establishment for Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, between pages 412-



413, also found on the Veterans Affairs Canada Website, <http://veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/last-hundred-days?filter=range&start=1>

## The Battle of Arras

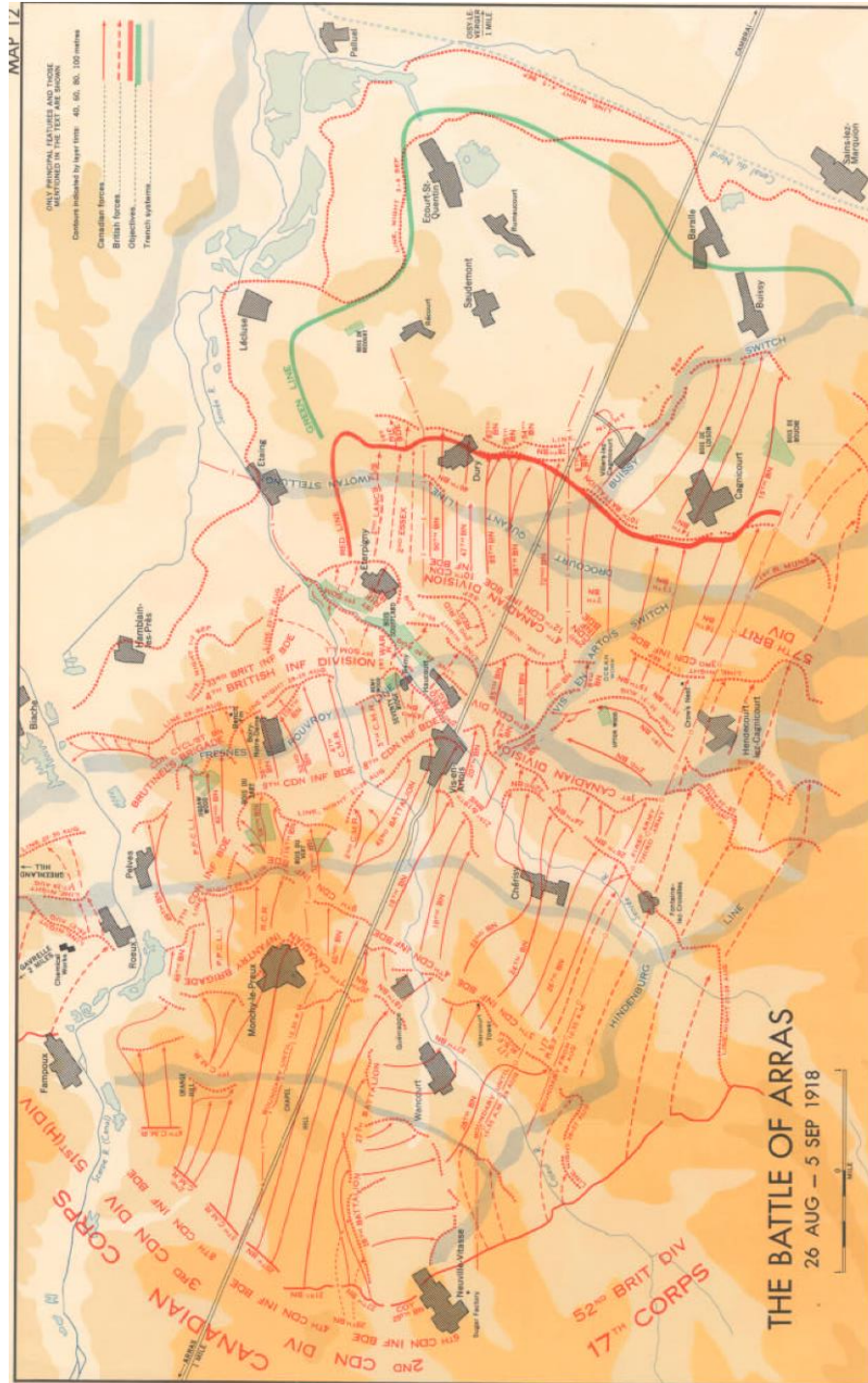


Figure 16 - Map of the Battle of Arras - Map Indicates the Canadian Area of Operations, Objectives, and Units Involved - Found in Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, between 442 and 443, and Veterans Affairs Canada Website, [http://www.veterans.gc.ca/images/feature/hundreddays/maps/map-03\\_e.png](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/images/feature/hundreddays/maps/map-03_e.png)



## The Advance to the Hindenburg Line and Canal du Nord

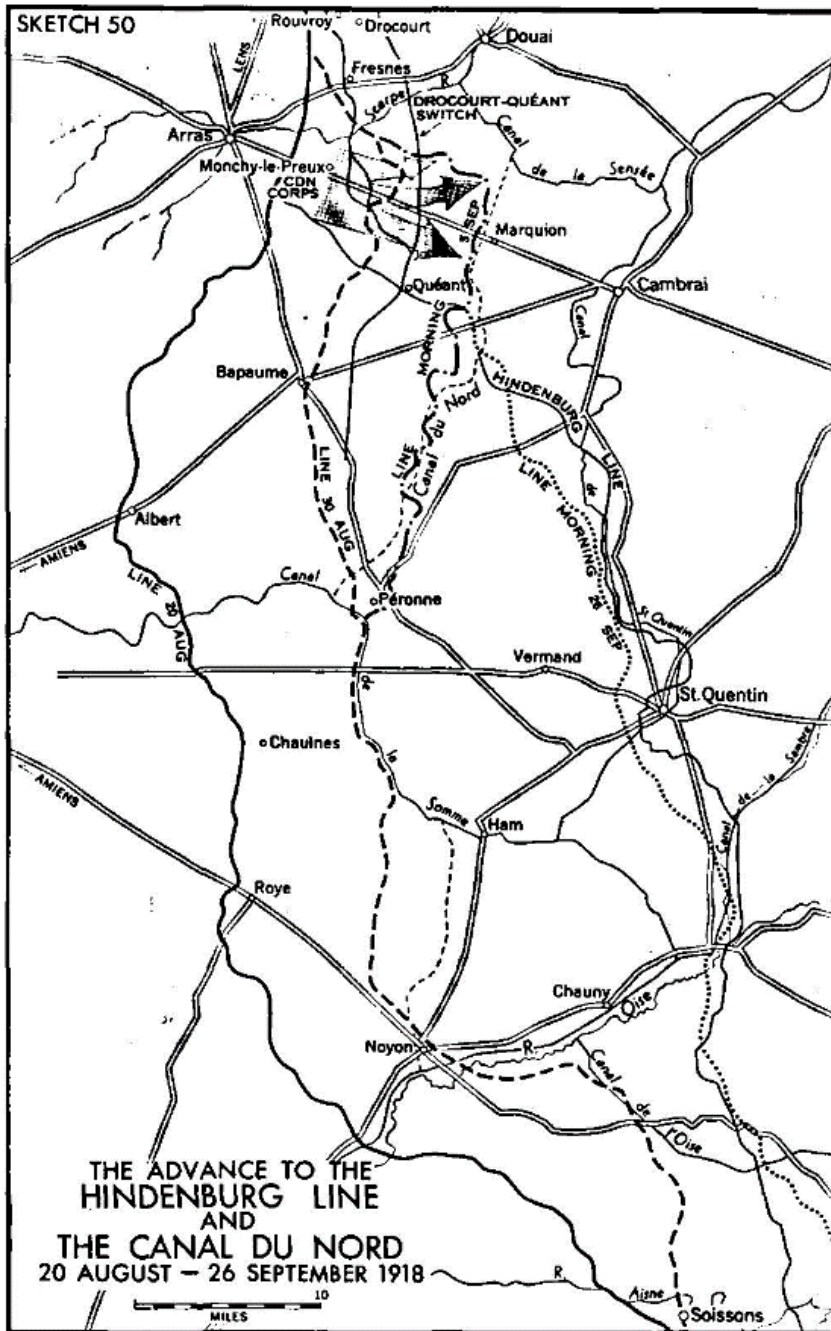


Figure 17 - Map of the Canadian Advance to Hindenburg Line and the Canal du Nord - Found in Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, 439, and Veterans Affairs Canada Website, [http://www.veterans.gc.ca/images/feature/hundreddays/maps/map-02\\_e.png](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/images/feature/hundreddays/maps/map-02_e.png)

## The Final Advance

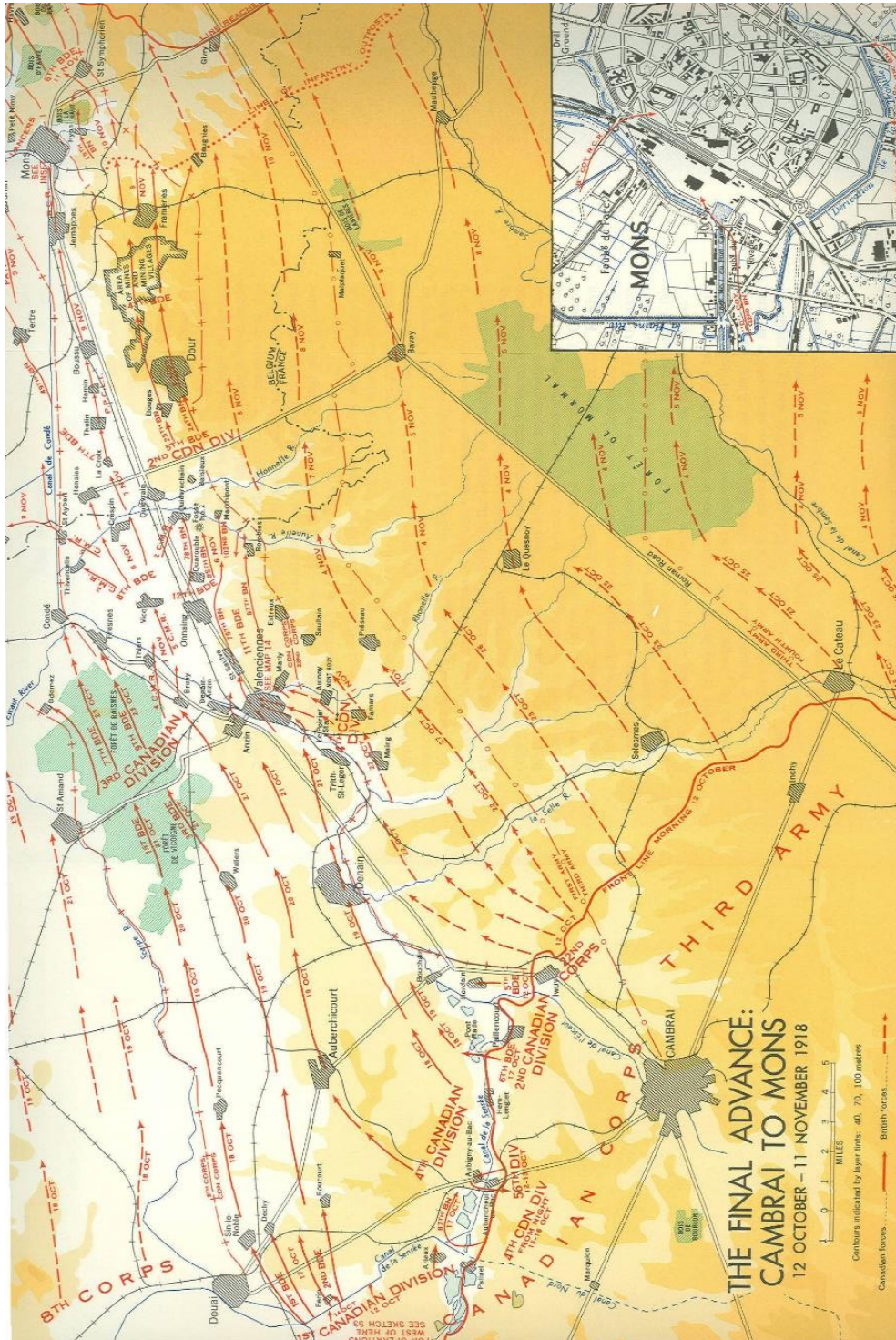


Figure 18 - The Final Advances Beyond Cambrai and to Mons, October to 11 November 1918 - Found in Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, between pages 472 and 473, and Veterans Affairs Canada Website, [http://www.veterans.gc.ca/images/feature/hundreddays/maps/map-06\\_e.png](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/images/feature/hundreddays/maps/map-06_e.png)



## Appendix III – Photos and Images

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### Ambulance Lorry

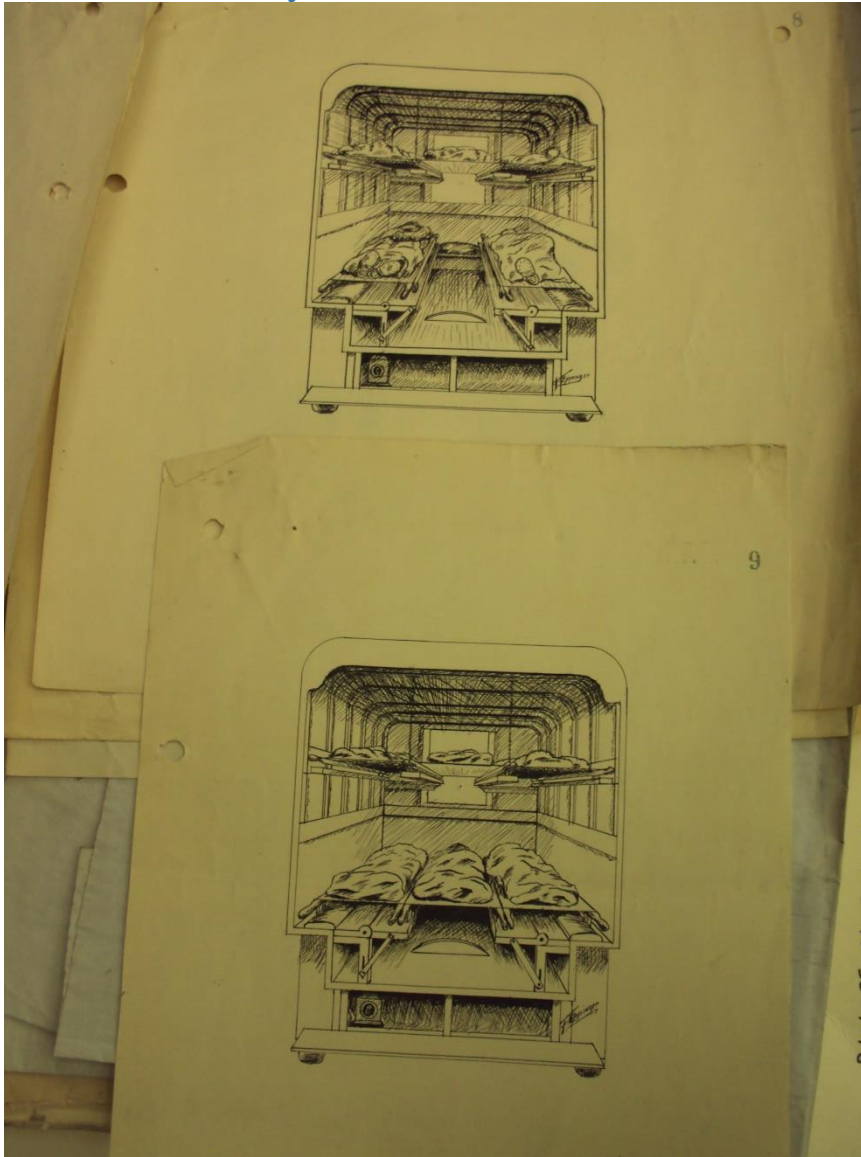


Figure 19 - Contemporary Photograph Showing the Interior of an Ambulance Lorry - Illustrates how Stretchers were Transported Behind the Lines for Evacuation and between Medical Facilities, and used in Conjunction with Mechanical Transport, Light Railways, River Barges, and Draught Animals – LAC, RG 9 III B2

## Ambulance Lorry 2



Figure 20 - Royal Army Medical Corps and Canadian Army Medical Corps Ambulance Lorry - LAC, RG 9 III B2, 3686

## Political Cartoon

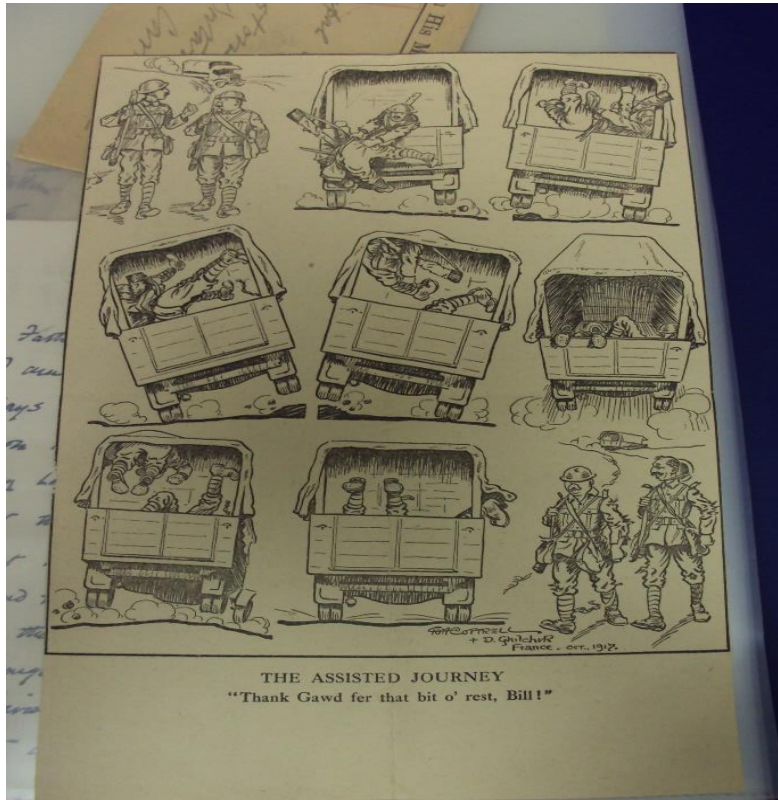


Figure 21 - Political Cartoon poking fun at the Hardships of Frontline Service - Soldiers were often happy to get a lift from lorries and motorcars, despite the poor condition of many roads in the War Zone. Published October 1917 - Taken from the Ley and Lois Smith Military History Collection, Department of History, University of Western Ontario, the Records of Reverend Lt. Alexander M. Gordon

## Invalided Soldiers



Figure 22 - Photo of Invalided Soldiers at Work in a Carpenter's Shop - After Being Evacuated from Europe, these Soldiers attempt to stay busy and learn a new trade. The original caption reads "Here convalescent soldiers, strong enough to move around, are taught carpentry or some other useful occupation whereby they may earn their livelihood and not become a burden to Canada" - LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, Folder 2-4-1, 'Salvaging War's Waste,' by Adam Black.

## The Wastage of War



Figure 23 - Photo of Soldiers Working on Basket-Making - Photo Taken at a Sanatorium in Canada. These activities were good for Soldier Morale, reminding them that though they were unable to continue soldiering, they could maintain their dignity and contribute positively to society. These activities also often had a therapeutic aspect to them. Some companies also gave preferential treatment to veterans in the hiring process – LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume 3751, Folder 2-4-1, 'Salvaging War's Waste,' by Adam Black



## Helping with the Healing



Figure 24 - Photo of the Band of the Granville Canadian Hospital - These groups played an important role in keeping the spirits of the patients up - Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections, Records of the No. 7 Overseas Stationary Hospital, Folder 9.

## The Healers



Figure 25 - Photo of the Nursing Sisters of the No. 7 Canadian Stationary Hospital, in their gowns - Dalhousie University Archives and Special Collections, Records of the No. 7 Overseas Stationary Hospital, Folder 9.77, 'MS-2-128, Laura May Hubley.'



## The Spiritual Well-Being of the Soldiers



**Figure 26 - Photo of Catholic Padre Canon Frederic Scott, flanked by Majors Alexander Gordon (left) and E.E. Graham - Medical Personnel and the Canadian Chaplain Service helped with the health and well-being of the soldiers at the front, behind the lines, and back in the UK – Taken from the Ley and Lois Smith Military History Collection, Department of History, University of Western Ontario, Records of Reverend Alexander M. Gordon**

## Padres and Chaplains



**Figure 27 - Photo of a Catholic Sunday Service, Seaford England, June 1918 - Chaplains played a crucial role in the maintenance of soldier morale - The Archives of the Catholic Diocese of London, Ontario, Bishop M.F. Fallon, 'World War I Photos - 1918'**

## Humour Amongst the Suffering

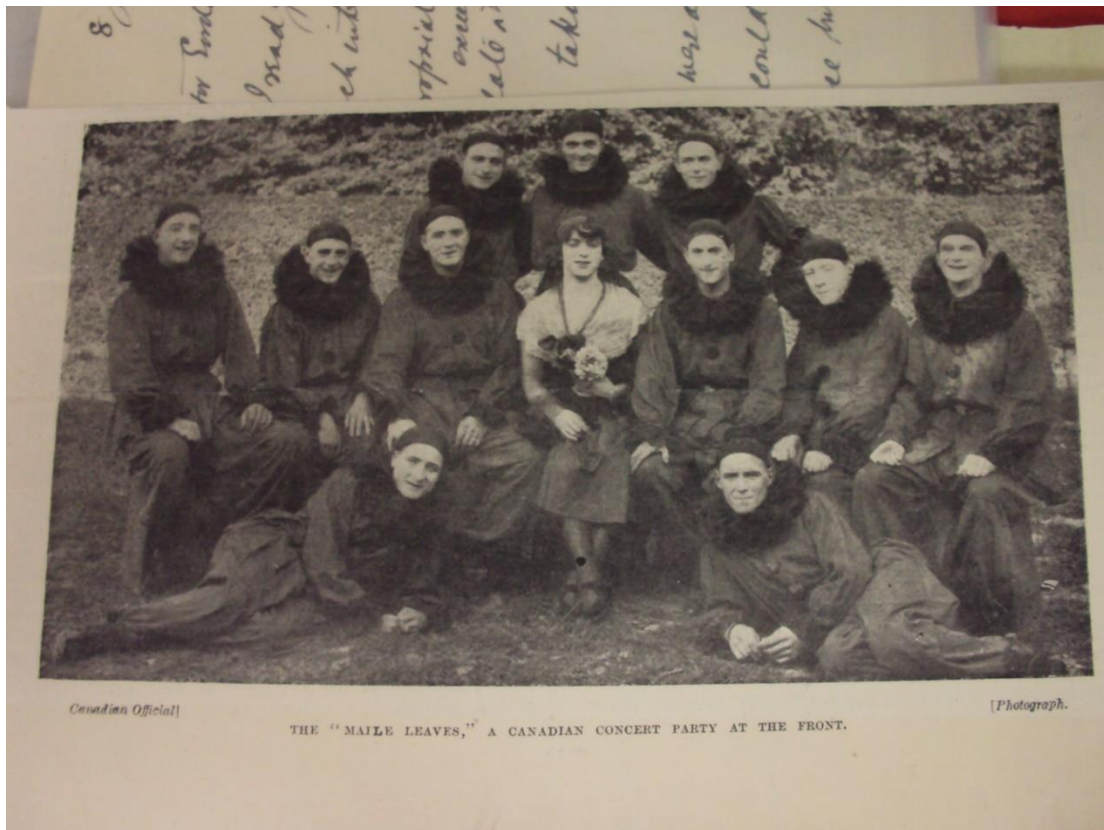


Figure 28 - Photo of the Maple Leaves, a Canadian Concert Party - These concert parties were important for morale amongst the soldiers, forced to endure the stresses and strains of war. Satire, humour, and other forms of entertainment also acted as important 'safety valves,' releasing pent-up emotion and allowing for the ridicule of the army system and superiors without deteriorating into insubordination or indiscipline - Taken from the Ley and Lois Smith Military History Collection, Department of History, University of Western Ontario, Records of Reverend Alexander M. Gordon

## Connections with Home

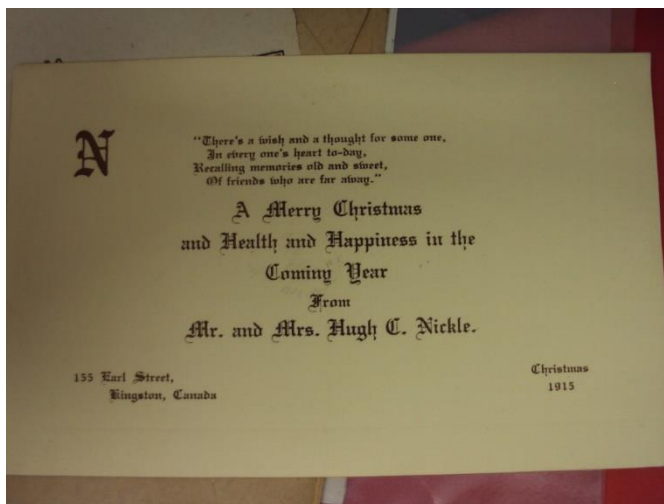


Figure 29 - Photo of a Christmas Postcard - Letters, Parcels, and Postcards played an important role in the maintenance of Morale at the front. It was crucial for the soldiers to know that they were not forgotten by loved ones, and wider society, at home - Taken from the Ley and Lois Smith Military History Collection, Department of History, University of Western Ontario, Records of Reverend Alexander M. Gordon



## Intelligence Photos

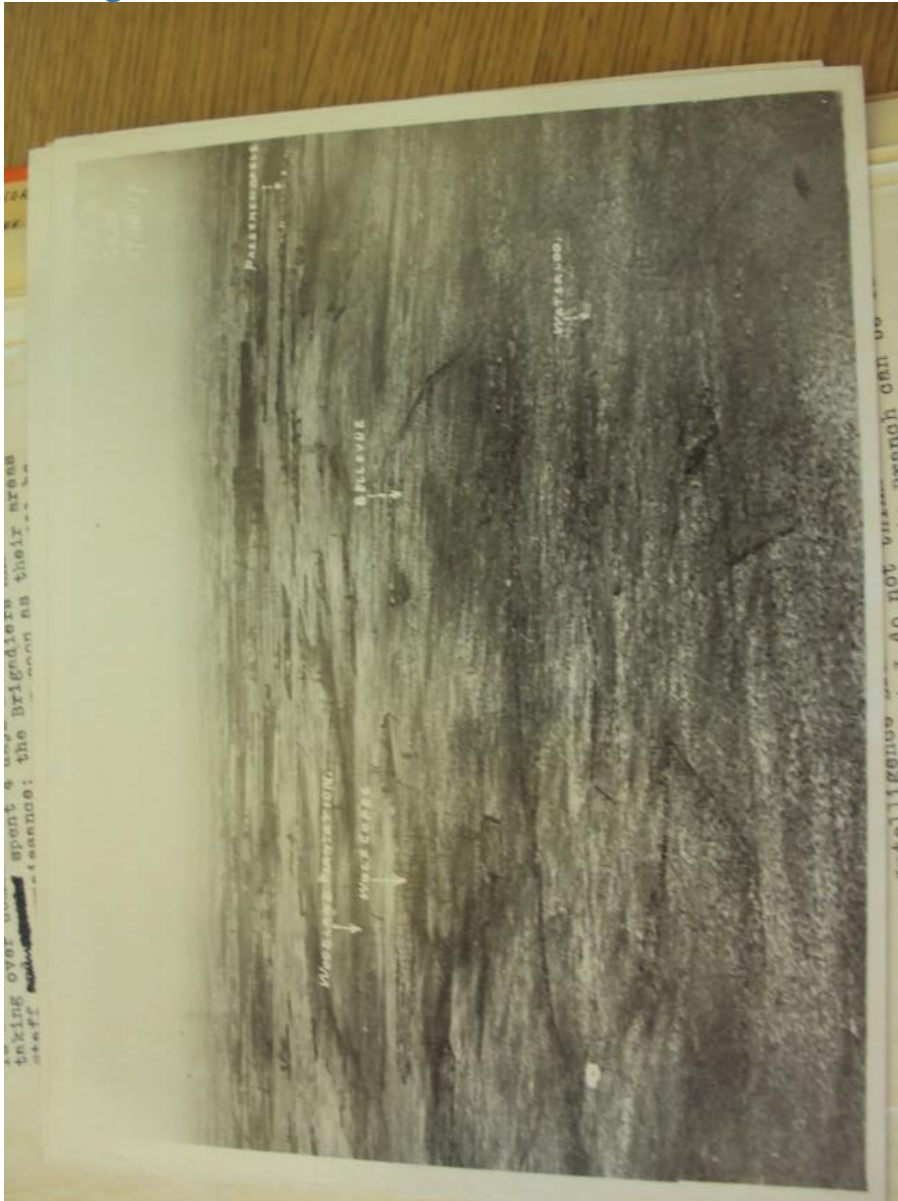


Figure 30 - 3rd Canadian Division Intelligence Photos for Operations at Third Ypres - LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3853, Folder 68, File 7, 'Passchendaele, Bellevue Spur, Operations 26/30-10-17'

# Passchendaele

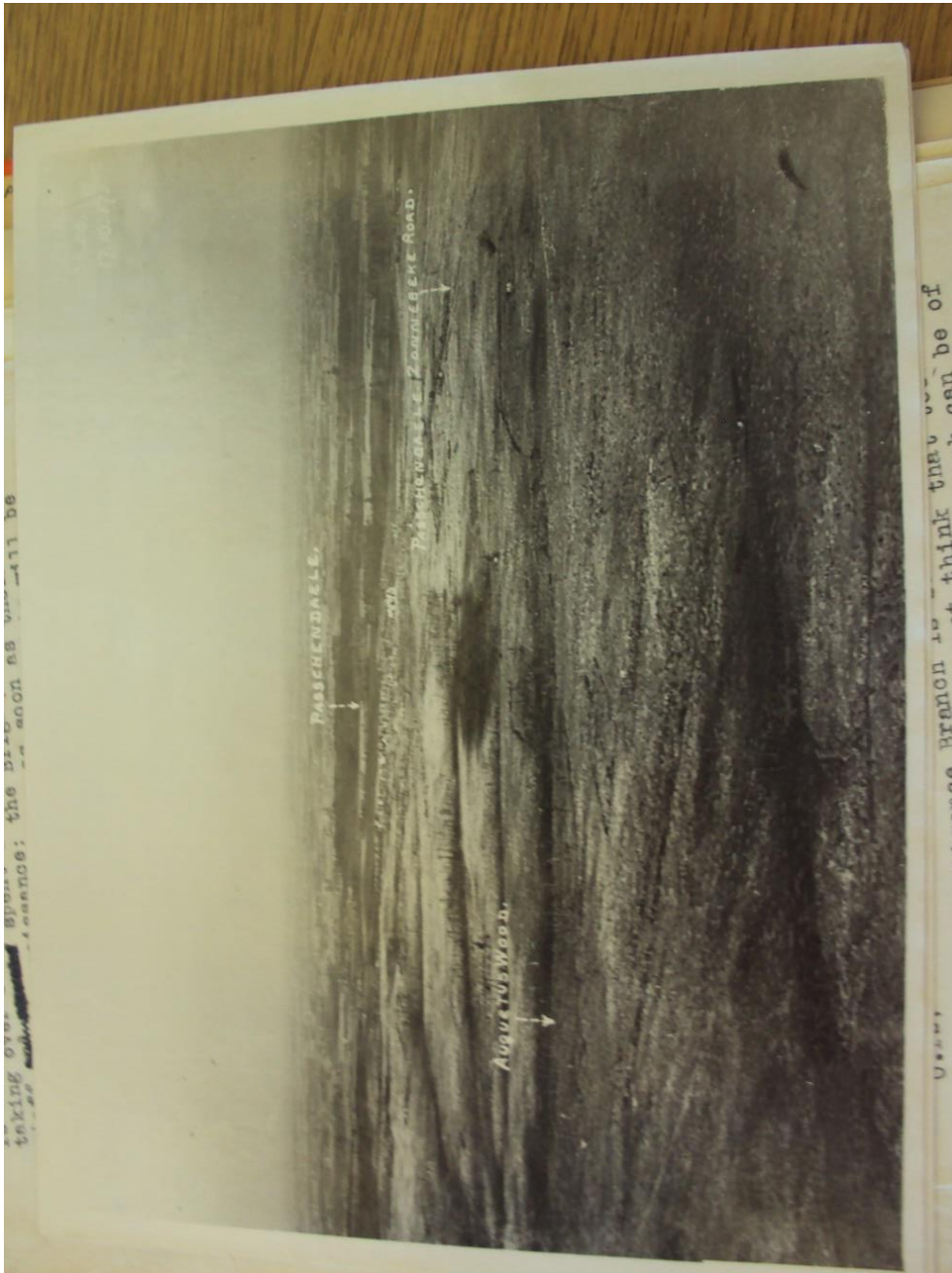


Figure 31 - Intelligence Photograph - LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3853, Folder 68, File 7, 'Passchendaele, Bellevue Spur, Operations 26/30-10-17'

## The Battle of Amiens



Figure 32 - Photo of Armoured Car going into Action at the Battle of Amiens - Library and Archives Canada/PA-003015, taken from: <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war>

## The Spoils of War

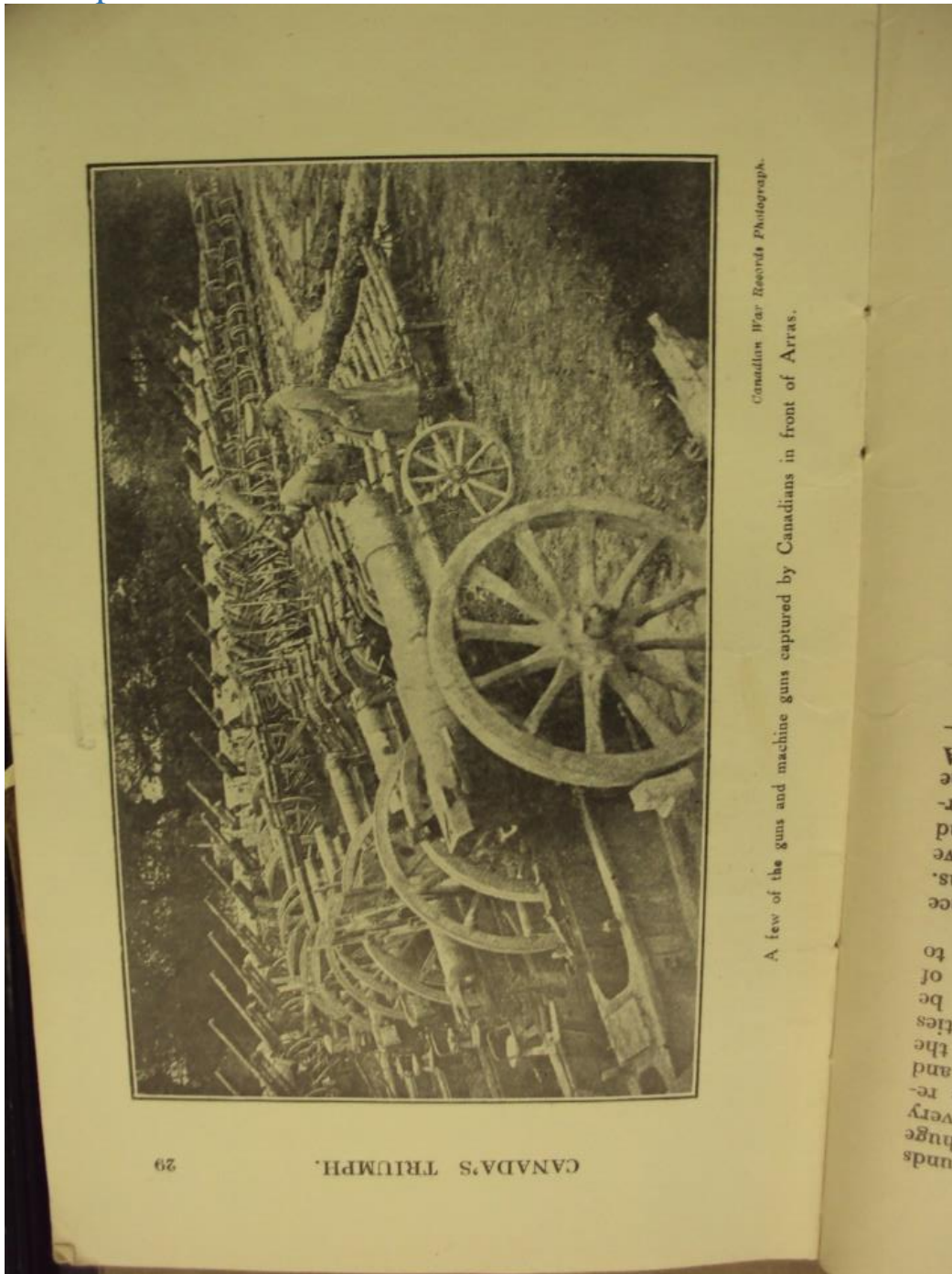


Figure 33 - Photo of Captured German Guns and Machine Guns in the Hundred Days- Captured in the fighting near Arras, summer 1918. The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM FOO 38, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, Box 1 of 1, 3



## The Hard Fighting of the Hundred Days



Figure 34 - Photo of German Barbed Wire at the Hindenburg Line – This was one of the most heavily-fortified positions on the Western Front – The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM FOO 38, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, Box 1 of 1, Folder 6, 'Series: Photographs'



## Engineering Work in the Hundred Days



Figure 35 – Canadian Engineers Constructing a Bridge across Canal du Nord, during the Advance east of Arras, September, 1918 - LAC/PA-003456, taken from: [http://www.veterans .gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/last-hundred-days?filter=range&start=41](http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/last-hundred-days?filter=range&start=41)

## The Canal du Nord

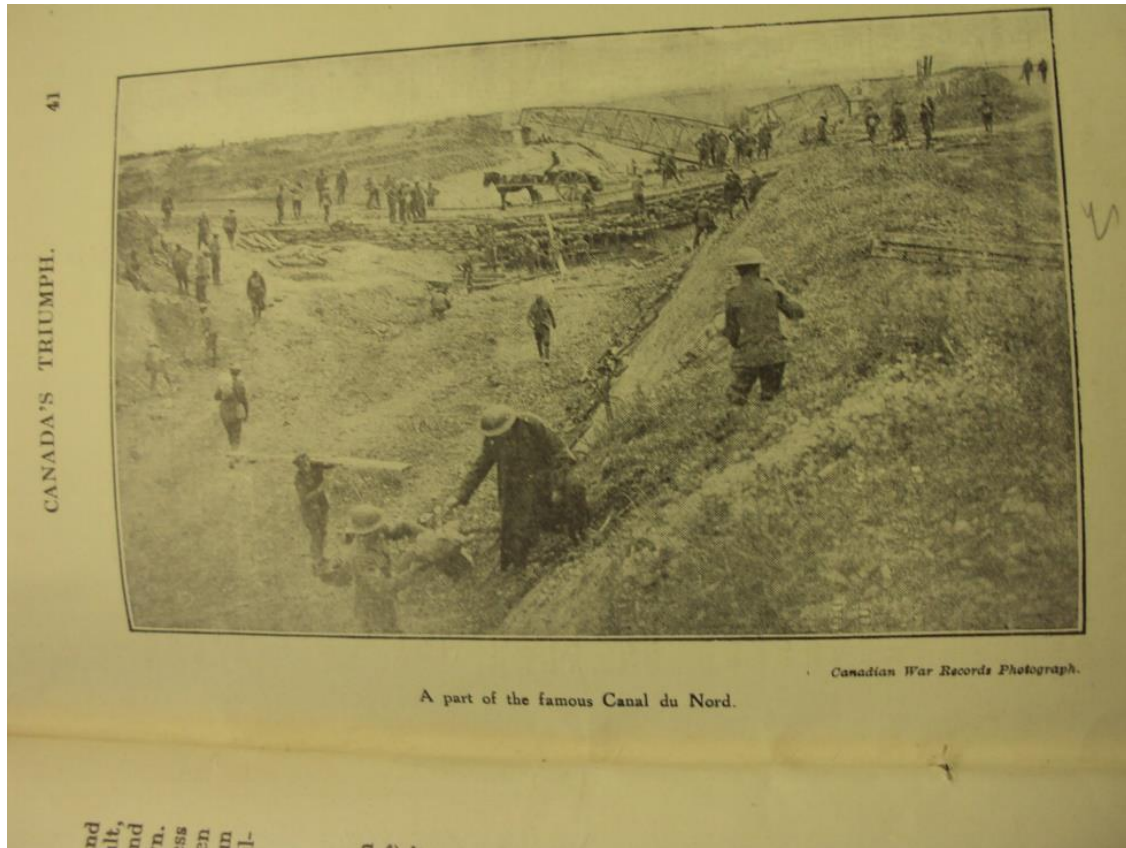
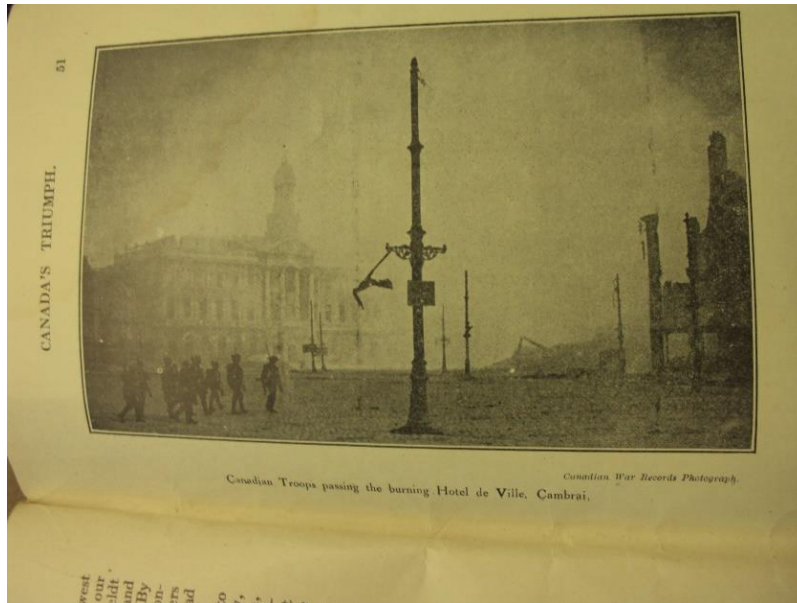


Figure 36 - Photo of the Canadian Engineers at the Canal du Nord - Contemporary view of a section of the Canal du Nord, which the Canadians stormed on 27 September 1918 - The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM FOO 38, Gordon

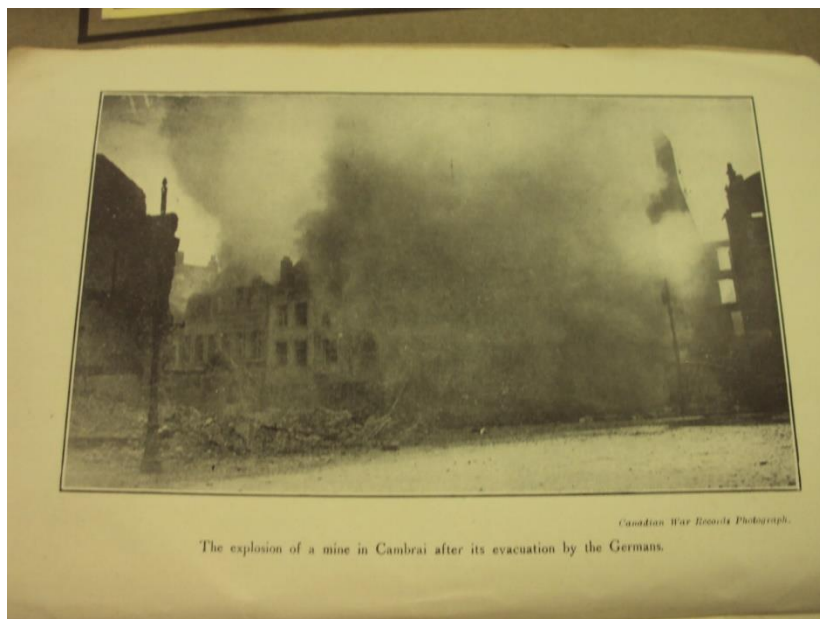
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## Cambrai, France



**Figure 37 - Photo of the Hotel de Ville, Cambrai - The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM FOO 38, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, Box 1 of 1, 3-1-4, 'Canada's Triumph: Amiens, Arras, Cambrai.'**

## German Scorched Earth Policies and Defensive Destruction



**Figure 38 - An explosion in Cambrai - After the Germans had departed, fires and explosions continued. Firsthand and official army accounts indicate that the Germans practised scorched earth tactics during the final months of the war, including the use of fires and booby-traps to slow down the attacking troops - The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM FOO 38, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, Box 1 of 1, 3-1-4, 'Canada's Triumph: Amiens, Arras, Cambrai.'**

## Death and Destruction

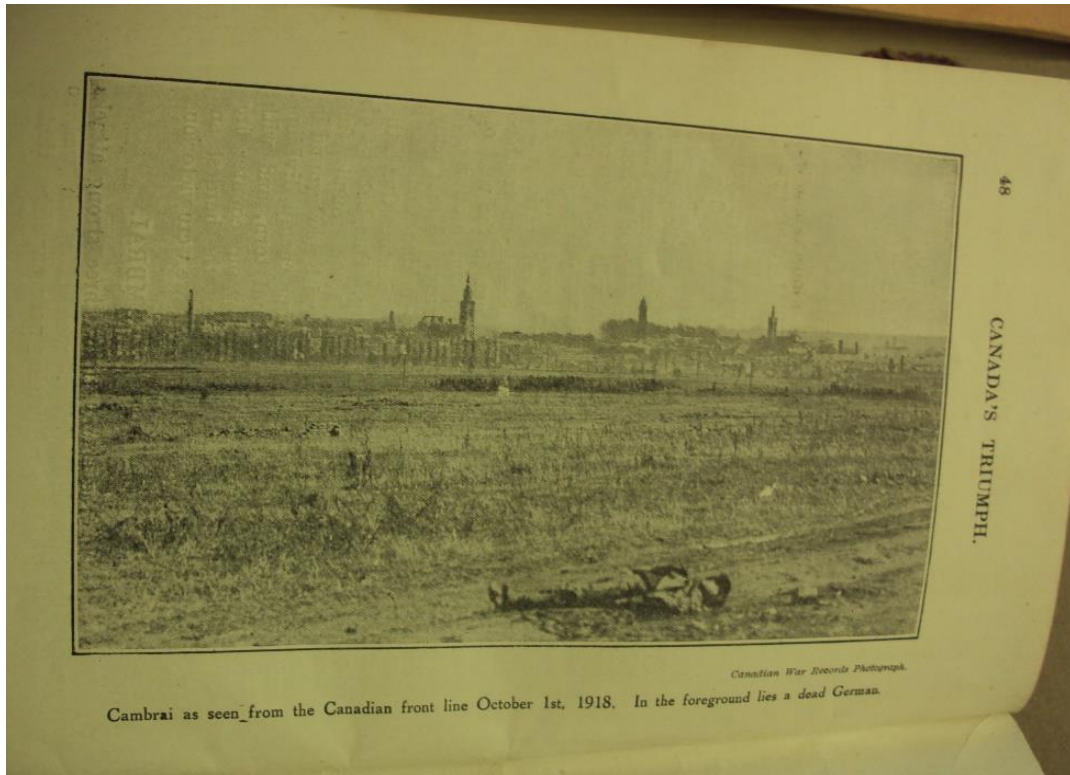


Figure 39 - Cambrai, October 1918 - The Military Museums, W.A. Howard Library and Arthur J.E. Child Archives, TMM FOO 38, Gordon Gilmour Fonds, Box 1 of 1, 3-1-4, 'Canada's Triumph: Amiens, Arras, Cambrai

## The Final Battles



Figure 40 - Photo of Canadian Soldiers entering Valenciennes from the west - LAC/PA-003377, taken from <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/last-hundred-days?filter=range&start=81>



## The End of the Road



Figure 41 - Photo of Canadians marching through the streets of Mons on the morning of 11 November 1918 - LAC/PA-003547, taken from: <http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/history/first-world-war/last-hundred-days?filter=range&start=81>

## The War Comes Full Circle – Mons, Belgium



Figure 42 - Photo of Mons, Belgium - Taken from the Ley and Lois Smith Military History Collection, Department of History, University of Western Ontario, Records of Reverend Lt. Alexander M. Gordon

# Curriculum Vitae

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## **Jordan A.S. Chase – Curriculum Vitae**

Doctoral Candidate  
 Department of History  
 University of Western Ontario (Western University)  
 Lawson Hall, Room 2201, 1151 Richmond Street  
 London, Ontario, N6A 5B8

### **Education:**

Doctor of Philosophy, Doctorate in History (PhD), Specialization in Canadian History and War and Society, University of Western Ontario, Dissertation Defence March 2019, Convocation June 2019. Under the supervision of Dr. Jonathan Vance, and Dr. Brock Millman and then Aldona Sendzikas as Second Readers.

Master of Arts (MA), Canadian History, the University of Calgary, completed: August 30<sup>th</sup> 2013. Title of MA Thesis: *Unwilling to Continue, Ordered to Advance: An Examination of the Contributing Factors Toward, and Manifestations of, 'War Weariness' in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign of the First World War*. Under the supervision of Dr. Patrick Brennan.

Bachelor of Arts (BA – Honours), Double Major in History and Political Science, Honours Thesis in History, Dalhousie University, completed: May 2011. Title of Honours Thesis: *Beyond the Beaches: A Critical Reassessment of the American Involvement in the D-Day Operations and Normandy Campaign*. Under the supervision of Dr. Sarah-Jane Corke.

Ontario Secondary School Diploma (OSSD), Trinity College School, graduated as an Ontario Scholar and as a member of the Dean's List, completed June 2006.

### **Comprehensive Examinations:**

Passed with Distinction - each field average above 85%. Completed in November 2014.

Major Historiographical Field: *Post-Confederation Canada*, under the supervision of Dr. Jonathan Vance. With an emphasis on historiography, military history, and war and society.

Teachable/Minor Fields: *The British Empire/Commonwealth War Experience*, under the supervision of Dr. Brock Millman, and *The United States and the Global Projection of Power*, under the supervision of Dr. Geoffrey Stewart.

**Published, Peer-Reviewed Articles:**

Book Review of *Unwanted Warriors: The Rejected Volunteers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* by Nic Clarke. Vancouver, British Columbia: UBC Press, 2015. 239 pages. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN 978-0-7748-2889-5 (ubcpress.ca). *Ontario History, Autumn 2016*, pages 275-276.

Currently working on an article regarding the Canadian Chaplain Services in the First World War. Working title: *Ministering to the Spiritual, Moral and Social Welfare of the Troops: The Canadian Chaplain Service, Morale and Endurance in the First World War*.

Also currently working on an article about self-inflicted wounds and illnesses. Working title “*The End of His Tether*” and the Actions of a Desperate Soldier: *An Examination of Self-Inflicted Wounds in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1918*

**Conferences:**

Panel Chair at Vimy at 100, the 28<sup>th</sup> Military History Colloquium, hosted by the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, at Wilfrid Laurier University. Panel entitled *Disease: The Invisible Bullet*. Saturday 6 May, 2017.

Paper Presentation at Vimy at 100, the 28<sup>th</sup> Military History Colloquium, hosted by the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, at Wilfrid Laurier University. Presentation of paper entitled *The Curse of Hippocrates: The Canadian Army Medical Corps (CAMC), Problems, Tension and Conflict amongst Medical Officers (MOs) in the context of the First World War*. Friday 5 May, 2017.

Paper Presentation at 27<sup>th</sup> Canadian Military History Colloquium, hosted by the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, at Wilfrid Laurier University. Presentation of paper entitled “*Ministering to the Spiritual, Moral and Social Welfare of the Troops:*” *The Canadian Chaplain Service, Morale and Endurance in the First World War*. Listed in the conference program as *The Canadian Chaplain Service, War Weariness and the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War*. Friday 6 May, 2016.



Paper presentation at ‘Prisms, Paradigms, and Paradoxes: The Fourth Annual History Graduate Conference,’ hosted by the University of Western Ontario. Presentation of paper entitled “*We Return From Fighting, We Return Fighting*” – *The ‘Double V Campaign’ and its Influence on the Post-War Civil Rights Movement in the United States*. Friday 1 May, 2015.

Accepted to present at, but unable to attend, *The Great War’s Shadow: New Perspectives on the First World War*, hosted by the University of Calgary, Calgary and Lake Louise, 25-28 September, 2014.

Paper presentation at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Pierre Savard Conference, hosted by the University of Ottawa. Presentation of paper entitled *The ‘End of his Tether’ and the Actions of a Desperate Soldier: An Examination of Self-Inflicted Wounds in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*. Thursday 14 April, 2014.

Presentation of research findings at the History Graduate Research Forum, in partnership with the History Graduate Student Union, the University of Calgary, entitled *Unwilling to Continue, Ordered to Advance: An Examination of ‘War Weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign*. Thursday 14 March, 2013.

Paper presentation at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual McGill-Queen’s University Graduate Conference in History. Presentation of paper entitled *Disease, Decline and Extinction: The Beothuk of Newfoundland as an Historical and Historiographical Problem*. Friday 1 March, 2013.

Attended panels and workshops at *Directions West*, the third biennial Western Canadian Studies Conference, University of Calgary, 20-23 June, 2012.

### **Academic Work:**

Teaching Assistant and Tutorial Leader for *History 1401E – Modern Europe, 1715 to the Present: Conflict and Transformation*, September 2016 – April 2017. Responsibilities included: attending lectures, holding office hours, grading exams, assignments and papers, hosting exam review sessions, working with OWL online teaching tools, inputting grades using online software and overseeing two tutorial groups.

Teaching Assistant and Tutorial Leader for *History 1401E – Modern Europe, 1715 to the Present: Conflict and Transformation*, September 2015 – April 2016. Responsibilities included: attending lectures, holding office hours, grading exams, assignments and

papers, hosting exam review sessions, inputting grades using online software and overseeing two tutorial groups.

Teaching Assistant and Tutorial Leader for *History 1401E – Modern Europe, 1715 to the Present: Conflict and Transformation*, September 2014 – April 2015. Responsibilities included: attending lectures, holding office hours, grading exams, assignments and papers, hosting exam review sessions, inputting grades using online software and overseeing two tutorial groups.

Teaching Assistant and Tutorial Leader for *History 1401E – Modern Europe: 1715 to the Present: Conflict and Transformation*, September 2013 – April 2014. Responsibilities included: attending lectures, holding office hours, grading exams and papers, inputting grades using online software and holding weekly tutorials.

Teaching Assistant for *History 209 – The History of China*, January – April 2013, the University of Calgary. Responsibilities included: attending lectures, holding office hours, interacting with students, grading exams and term papers, delivering lectures and review sessions.

Member of the Organising Committee for the *Directions West History Conference*, hosted by the University of Calgary, May - June 2012.

Teaching Assistant for *History 307 – The Contemporary World*, September - December 2011, the University of Calgary. Responsibilities included: attending lectures, holding office hours, interacting with students, grading exams and term papers, delivering lectures.

Member of Editorial Staff for Dalhousie University Undergraduate History Journal, *Pangaea*. Dalhousie University, 2011.

### **Non-Academic Work:**

Historical Consultant for play *Dancing in Poppies* by Gail Bowen and Ron Marken, Playwrights Guild of Canada, in association with the London Theatre Company, October-November 2017.

### **Awards and Scholarships:**

Awarded the Kenneth Hilborn Doctoral Completion Award, January 2018.

Nominated for Society of Graduate Studies (SOGS) Graduate Student Teaching Award, May 2017.

Awarded the Western Graduate Research Scholarship (WGRS) for the 2016-2017 academic year.

Nominated for Society of Graduate Studies (SOGS) Graduate Student Teaching Award, May 2016.

Awarded the Ley and Lois Smiths Military History Fund, April 2016.

Awarded the Western Graduate Research Scholarship (WGRS) for the 2015-2016 academic year.

Awarded the Ivie Cornish Memorial Fellowship in History, March 2015.

Awarded the Ley and Lois Smith Military History Fund, March 2015.

Awarded the Western Graduate Research Scholarship (WGRS) for the 2014-2015 academic year.

Awarded the Western Graduate Research Scholarship (WGRS) for the 2013-2014 academic year.

Awarded the Alberta Heritage Scholarship Fund for 2013.

Awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Graduate Scholarship for 2012-2013 academic year.

Awarded the University of Calgary's Faculty of Graduate Studies Scholarship for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Awarded Queen Elizabeth II Graduate Scholarship for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Awarded the Dalhousie University Undergraduate Scholarship for 2010-2011 academic year.

Awarded the Dalhousie University Entrance Scholarship for the 2006-2007 academic year.

**Professional Affiliations:**

Email Reading List for *Journal of Canadian Military History* (CMH), the journal of the LCMSDS.

Subscription to the journal of the *Canadian Historical Review* (CHR).

Member of the *Canadian Historical Society* (CHS).

**Languages:**

Ability to read, write, speak and aurally comprehend English.

Ability to read, comprehend, and translate French and also completed the required second-language exam at the University of Calgary, summer 2013.

Currently seeking to improve my reading abilities in German.