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## Muddying the Lens: Photographs of the Canadian Expeditionary Force

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

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## **Abstract**

Throughout the First World War 4, 507 photographs were produced by the Canadian War Records Office. These photographs were used as propaganda to promote victory overseas and were popularized in exhibitions, magazines, books, and other wartime ephemera. Produced simultaneously to this official record was private soldiers' photography which is comprised of albums, scrapbooks, personal snapshots, and soldiers' portraits and communicate a narrative that is both similar and disparate from the official record. This thesis examines the ways in which private and official photographs were formed and how they were used to communicate soldiers' wartime experience. It argues that the official photographs are not just a piece of propaganda, but rather that of the photographer's and the private photographs are an extension of soldiers' culture and art, as well as an extension of twentieth-century photographic culture.

## **Lay Summary**

This thesis studies the production and distribution of First World War Canadian photography. It understands the photographs as products of soldiers' wartime experience and how they reflect wartime culture.

## **Keywords**

Photography, First World War, Private Photographs, Official Photographs, Trench Art, Conflict Photography, Canada.

## Acknowledgements

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## Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgments	iii
Table of Contents	v
List of Figures	vi
Introduction	1
Chapter 1: Over the Top: Private Photographs and the Soldier's Experience	12
Chapter 2: Cameras at the Service of War: Creating the Official Record	49
Chapter 3: Capturing Art: Popularizing War Photography	89
Conclusion	116
Bibliography	120

## List of Figures

1.1 Unattributed photograph album, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario	15
1.2 Ernest Selby, 8 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance Photograph Album, c.1919, University of Calgary Military Archives	16
1.3 William “Bill” Karn photographic album, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario	18
1.4 Ernest Selby, 8 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance Photograph Album, c.1919, University of Calgary Military Archives	28
1.5 Unattributed photograph 0.11, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario	31
1.6 Reverse of unknown photograph no. 805, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario	34
1.7 Front of unknown photograph no. 805, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario	35
1.8 Unknown photograph no. 407, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario	36
1.9 Unknown photograph no. 411, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario	37
2.1 Harry Knobel, O.3 “The Morning Wash, 10 <sup>th</sup> Battalion,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-000003	57
2.2 Harry Knobel, O.3 “The Morning Wash, 10 <sup>th</sup> Battalion,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-000003, altered by author	60
2.3 Harry Knobel, O.48 “March Past,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-00141	61
2.4 Harry Knobel, O.162 “Nurses,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-000074	65
2.5 William Ivor Castle, O.997 “Mud bespattered Canadian Heroes Returning from trenches,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-000832	68
2.6 William Ivor Castle, O.1162 “29 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion advancing over No Man’s Land through German barbed wire and heavy fire during the Battle of Vimy Ridge,” Library and Archives Canada, PA- 00102	74

2.7 William Ivor Castle, O.1162 “29 <sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion advancing over No Man’s Land through German barbed wire and heavy fire during the Battle of Vimy Ridge,” Library and Archives Canada, PA- 001086. Altered by Author	76
2.8 William Rider-Rider, O.2246 “Passchendaele, now a field of mud, November 1917,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-040139	80
2.9 William Rider-Rider, O.3656 “42 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion resting in the Grand Place, Mons, on the morning of the 11 <sup>th</sup> November, 1918,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-003571	83
2.10 William Rider-Rider, O.2450 “Chinese Labour Battalion in France Celebrating the Chinese New Year,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-002421	87
3.1 Digital scan of <i>Canada in Khaki</i> , volume 1, 1916. Original copy is part of the Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario	93
3.2 Digital scan of <i>Canada in Khaki</i> , volume 2, 1917. Original copy is part of the Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario	96
3.3 Ernest Selby, 8 <sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance Photograph Album, c.1919, University of Calgary Military Archives	100
3.4 Fredrick Varley, “The Sunken Road,” oil on canvas (1919), Canadian War Museum, 1971026-0771	104
3.5 William Rider-Rider, O.3320 “Fate of German Machine Gunner in Canal du Nord. Advance East of Arras, October 1918,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-003202	105
3.6 Attributed to William Ivor Castle, “Canadians occupying old German third trenches, Battle of Vimy Ridge,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-004875	109

## Introduction

One day while helping a family member move, you come across a photo album. It is a fairly ordinary album, simply made out of black leather and barely held together by two metal posts on the left-hand side. The only thing on the cover was the word "Photographs" embossed in gold. And it smelt old. Really old, like the books in the school library that been left to collect dust because no one used them anymore. Upon opening up the album there are pages and pages of black and white photographs; some photos take up full pages, but most are small no more than three inches wide and two and a half inches tall and are scattered in a haphazard fashion on the page. Many of the photos have short annotations written in white ink, describing the place the photo was taken and sometimes indicating who was in the photograph. But that's not the odd thing. The photographs are all of men in uniform, smiling or posing. Some are quick portrait snapshots, not unlike ones taken with friends at a party or special event. They are completely at odds with other photographs you've seen of the war where men's expressions could be described as scowling. The jovial nature of the album supposes that these might have been taken in the post-war period.

Other photographs in the album tell a story about travelling from Taranto, Italy, to Abou Kir, Egypt, and flying biplanes near Alexandria. Surely this cannot be the First World War? But going back to the first pages of the album help date it. Newspaper clippings with titles like "Regina Boat Club to Front in Recruiting," and

“Charles Otton, Crack Athlete In Wounded List” capture your attention.<sup>1</sup> Both clippings talk about 1914 and the rush of young men to recruiting stations and various incidents following the course of the early war in small-town Manitoba. Another smaller clipping talks about Captain A.E. Lough’s transfer to the Royal Flying Corps in 1916.<sup>2</sup> But still, there is something about the photographs you can’t shake; why do these photographs look completely different from the photographs at the local history museum? The photos in this scrapbook are not full of ruined landscapes, wounded soldiers, or even life behind the lines. They are completely at odds with the typical photographs of the war. Instead, these private photographs capture moments of happiness, adventure, and on occasion, ruined buildings, but are completely removed from the war photographs found in books, museum, archives, and other public spaces, despite both sets of photographs being taken in the same time period. In addition, these private photographs tell a story of Canadian involvement in North Africa, an event far removed from the Canadian history of the First World War.<sup>3</sup>

The “typical” war photograph captured the effects of warfare on French and Belgian soil, the success of new wartime technologies like the tank, and how soldiers overseas spent their leisure time. They pervade the visual narrative of the First World War, asserting their space through their use as propaganda during the war,

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<sup>1</sup> First World War Scrapbook of Lieutenant Murray James Nichol, Canadian War Museum Archives, 20120181-009.

<sup>2</sup> First World War Scrapbook of Lt. Nichol, CWM Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Histories of Canada in the First World War, like Tim Cook’s comprehensive volumes, focus on the Western Front and do not discuss the actions of Canadians outside of this European theatre of war. Albums, like Lt. Nichol’s, challenges this history by stating that the Canadian experience of the First World War can also be found in the North African theatre of war.

and their mass circulation as art pieces and photographic reproductions both during and in the years following the war. But beyond that, these photographs were positioned as the images that truly communicated the events of the First World War, because of their ability to capture the realities of war.<sup>4</sup> Out of the 4,705 photographs taken by the Canadian War Records Office and its associated photographers, only a few hundred photographs are purported to encapsulate the experience of the First World War and communicate the visual realities of the war. As a result of the space they take up as propaganda, the official war photographs imply that a photographic narrative of the war exists, when in reality, these few hundred photographs tell one only possible narrative of the First World War. These few hundred war photographs are also only a small sample of the photographs produced during the war, thus begging a series of questions. What other images of war exist beyond the few hundred official photographs? Why have these few hundred photographs pervaded First World War memory? And, finally, why are private photographs regarded as less valuable as sources of material culture?

The histories of Canadian First World War photography begin with a discussion of the March 1916 ban on cameras and how it forced the creation of a photographic record of the First World War. In starting with the camera ban, these histories imply that the photographic record of the First World War was created as a result of absence. This camera ban also implies that the only photographs available to tell the history of the First World War were those produced by Harry Knobel, William, Ivor Castle, and William Rider-Rider for the Canadian War Records Office.

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<sup>4</sup> Lord Beaverbrook, Canadian War Record letters, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-A-1, vol. 19.

Jane Carmichael's *First World War Photographers* is regarded as one of the foremost books in First World War photography, creating the precedent for this study. Her book examines the production of the official war photographs found at the Imperial War Museum's collection and details the production and censorship of the image.<sup>5</sup> Carmichael briefly discusses the role of what she terms amateur photography, but this is quickly passed over in favour of understanding the official photographers and the creation of the official British record of the war. *First World War Photographer* passes over the creation of Canadian war photography, but its focus is minimal, leaving a gap in the historiography. Articles like Peter Robertson's "Canadian Photojournalists in the First World War" attempt to fill this space, arguing that Max Aitken (Later Lord Beaverbrook and in charge of the CWRO) used the photographs as a reaction to the camera ban of March 1916 and as part of the early collection of a wartime record.<sup>6</sup> Robertson starts to examine the photographic record but is largely focused on Beaverbrook's involvement in their production, thereby proposing that the record was not the product of the photographer, but rather the result of Beaverbrook's interference. This argument implies that the importance of the photograph is placed on Beaverbrook and the CWRO, perpetuating the use of the official photographs as propaganda, rather than as a collection of experiences. Studies of First World War propaganda, like Jeff Keshen's *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada's Great War*, argue that war photography was used to help sanitized press reports, thus making the wartime news more palatable for

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<sup>5</sup> Jane Carmichael, *First World War Photographers* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 3.

<sup>6</sup> Peter Robertson, "Canadian Photojournalists in the First World War," in *History of Photography*, vol. 2, no 1, 1978, p. 40.

Canadians on the home front.<sup>7</sup> While this argument might be true, it again asserts that the CRWO was the primary influence over the creation of the photographs. The absence of a shooting script to indicate what Beaverbrook and the CWRO wanted captured undermines Keshen's argument, and thus allows the production of the war photographs to be questioned.

Jennifer Wellington examines British, Canadian, and Australian photo exhibits, arguing that the photographs first served as propaganda to encourage enlistment, but that as the war progressed, the photographs operated as symbols of Allied heroism.<sup>8</sup> Taking this stance asserts that the intention behind the war photographs was dictated by an official body, like the CWRO and further anonymizes the identity of the photographer behind the production of the image. Wellington's arguments are based on the public exhibition of the photographs during the war and asserts that the value of the war photograph lies in the spectacle of the image rather than the contents and varied contexts in which the official war photographs were placed.

More recently, Carla-Jean Stokes has examined the series of photographs taken by William Ivor Castle in order to understand the different approach taken by Castle in documenting the First World War. As part of this study, Stokes argues that the stylistic choices of the photographers must be re-inserted into the conversation since singular images, like Castle's "The Taking of Vimy Ridge," does not encapsulate

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<sup>7</sup> Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 36-28.

<sup>8</sup> Jennifer Wellington, *Exhibiting War: The Great War, Museums and Memory in Britain, Canada and Australia*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), p. 84.

the experience of war, both by those enlisted and by the war photographers.<sup>9</sup> This argument examines the photographer's entire body of work and reveals that the contents and contexts of the photographs reveal more than a single photograph does. This argument serves as one of the starting points of this thesis. If the First World War has only been understood through pre-selected images, what other contents are missing from the visual record and how can examining an entire collection shift the understanding of Canadian war photography?

But these histories do not account for the thousands of private photographs contained in regimental archives, museums and localized research collections. In fact, proposing the camera ban of March 1916 as the start of the photographic record completely removes private photographs and portraits from the photographic record and asserts that only the photographs taken by the official war photographers are able to inform the viewer of the war. In many cultural histories of the First World War, like Tim Cook's *Secret History of Soldiers: How Canadians Survived the First World War*, private photographs are given a passing mention, with preference given to sketches, drawing, or trench art.<sup>10</sup> The books and articles that address private photographs have been very narrowly defined because they are referred to as amateur photographs, thus implying a lack of skill. As a result, private war photography has been understood in contrast to the official photographs.

Articles such as Andrew Rodger's "Amateur Photography by Soldiers of the Canadian

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<sup>9</sup> Carla-Jean Stokes, "Beyond 'The Taking of Vimy Ridge': The War Photographs of William Ivor Castle" in *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies (JMSS)*: vol. 18, 2, 2017, p. 202.

<sup>10</sup> Tim Cook, *Secret History of Soldiers: How Canadians Survived the First World War* (Toronto: Penguin Books, 2018), 278-279.

Expeditionary Force” assert that the photographs taken by soldiers support the themes found in letters home from the front.<sup>11</sup> These themes include adventure and exploration, everyday routines, and training exercises. While this assertion is true, Rodger focuses on the issues of sending photographs rather than their contents, stating “there is relatively little in the subject matter of amateur photographers which cannot be found in the official photograph.”<sup>12</sup> By using both the term amateur and proposing that both photographic narratives are the same, Rodger implies that the official photographs communicate the wartime experiences of the soldiers more effectively than its participants. This is not true, since the remnants of these so-called amateur photographs are were not used as propaganda. Instead, their contents reflect a conscious effort to connect themselves to their families back home. Nancy West’s examination of American-produced soldiers’ photography in *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* supports this, noting that portrait photographs produced in the early 1910s and throughout the war had the ability to connect the father to the home through the placement of his portrait in a noted space in the home, as well as through the soldier carrying personal family portraits on his person during his time overseas.<sup>13</sup> Despite its American context, West’s argument starts to help explain the dominance of soldiers’ portraiture found in university research collections, small-town archives, and personal collections. Other photo histories, like Tina Campt’s *Image Matters: Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe*, note that

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<sup>11</sup> Andrew Rodger, “Amateur Photography by Soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force” in *Archivaria* vol.26 (Summer 1988): 167.

<sup>12</sup> Rodger, “Amateur Photography,” 164.

<sup>13</sup> Nancy West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Virginia: University Press of Virginia, 2000), 191.

sending a portrait photo back home told the definitive story of someone's health by indexing the "real."<sup>14</sup> Soldiers' portrait photographs, which are an extension of private photography, were proof of their safety and acted as representations of the soldiers. Campt's work also provides some material culture theory when dealing with large collections where all the images are similar.

Campt's work reframes Roland Barthes' work in *Camera Lucida*, proposing that instead of looking at punctum (a mistake left by the photographer that pricks you), the studium (everyday codified elements that pass through the viewer's gaze) can tell the viewer more about the photograph because of their general nature.<sup>15</sup> Campt's work proposes a new way of looking at a large collections of images via musical rhetoric to understand the ways in which studio portraits can be examined. But more importantly, Campt's work proposes a way to understand anonymous photographs through the examination of wellness framed in terms of physical health, economics, and letter writing. She also notes that sometimes despite the grand conclusions and reasons historians cite about the production of material culture, the answer can be as simple as "we just made them. That's just what we did."<sup>16</sup> By understanding private photos as a product of a moment, the photographs are understood as products of spontaneous circumstance and are therefore able to inform the view of a moment in the past. This sense of spontaneity also accounts for

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<sup>14</sup> Tina Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography and the African Diaspora in Europe*, (Duke University Press, 2012), 157-158.

<sup>15</sup> Campt, *Image Matters*, 151 and Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, (Internet Archive, 2014, accessed January 2020).

<sup>16</sup> Campt, *Image Matters*, 157.

the ambiguity of the photograph as the photographs were more likely to be used as aide-memoires rather than part of an explicit documentary process.

Other theories on visual culture that have informed this thesis include Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, who proposes that photographs are not statements about the world, but rather pieces of it and that their status shifts and changes as culture (and memory) shifts and changes.<sup>17</sup> In addition, her notion that time positions most photographs, regardless of their skill, as art greatly informed arguments that photographs can be elevated as art both directly after their creation, like in chapter three, and for lack of a better word, posthumously like the private photographs discussed in chapter one. Allan Sekula's "Reading An Archive: Photography Between Labour and Capital" and his thoughts on aesthetic objects versus historic documents have informed the two approaches this thesis takes when examining photographs. As aesthetic objects, the war photographs are understood as representations of the past and are subject to nostalgia and popular ideas of what the war was like, thus reducing them to spectacle.<sup>18</sup> As historical objects, war photographs are fragments of history, able to communicate moments of the past but as a result of their visual ambiguity require additional primary sources to deconstruct their contents. Laura Brandon's "Words and Pictures: Writing Atrocity into Canada's First World War Official Photographs" provided the language to describe how violence was connoted instead of denoted in both private and official photographs. Violence in both the

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<sup>17</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Nostalgia, according to Nancy West, filtering the past as to warmly remember it. For more about this, see Nancy West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

private and official photographs are images of the aftermath of war and are representations of violence and evokes the sentiment of war and destruction rather than explicitly visualizing violence as it happens. In the official photographs this is done through taking pictures during training exercises and later manipulating the image or by taking photographs of war machinery like tanks. The connotation in private photographs can be found in the ruined landscape or of the men in uniform, thus implying violent action to come.

Finally, E. McClung Flemming's "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model" provided a framework of questions which allowed the photographs to be examined as material culture. These questions include those of identification and authenticity (what is it? Who made it? Is this a single image, a composite, or part of a larger series?), cultural analysis (why was the photograph created? How was it used? Who used it?), and the intersections of product analysis and content analysis, or in other words how did society use the artifact, versus how is culture reflected in the artifact.<sup>19</sup>

This thesis will examine the kinds of photographs produced during the First World War and argues that the reason only a few hundred set photographs pervade the visual record of the First World War is the result of a carefully constructed narrative by the Canadian War Records Office that was then co-opted and perpetuated by soldiers in the years following the war. In order to illustrate this argument, the first chapter will explore why private photographs have been

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<sup>19</sup> E. McClung Fleming, "Artifact Study: A Proposed Model" in *Winterthur Portfolio* vol. 9 (1974): 153-173.

neglected in the creation of the photographic narrative, by examining the contents of photographic albums like the one described above, to understand what kinds of personal photographs were taken and for what purposes. The chapter will then move into understanding the thousands of unidentified and unattributed photographs and how they can be understood within the confines of the photographic record as an extension of conflict art and an in-between form of material culture. The private photographs are then given space within the broader artistic record of the First World War. The second chapter examines the production of the official war photographs and how the images were shaped by the individual taking them, instead of by the Canadian War Records Office. This choice to examine the photographers' role in the production of war photography re-inserts the photographer as the producer and primary filter of the photograph, instead of asserting the Canadian War Records Office's authority and censorship on the image post-production. By re-inserting Harry Knobel, William Ivor Castle, and William Rider-Rider the collection of photographs can be better understood as multi-faceted images that communicate a variety of narratives that are dictated by the experiences, backgrounds, abilities, and aesthetics of the individual photographers instead of by the unifying propagandistic lens of the Canadian War Records Office. The final chapter will address the disparities between the official and private photographs by addressing the circumstances in which the official photographs gained popularity and how only a few hundred official photographs came to dominate the photographic record of the war.

## **Chapter One – Over the Top: Private Photographs and the Soldiers' Experience**

First World War photographs can be divided into three camps. The first is private or amateur photographs taken by the soldiers, followed by official war photographs which were produced by a governing body for public circulation. The final variety is photojournalism which is comparable to modern-day freelance photography and sits between private photographs and the official war photos. This chapter attempts to understand the circumstances in which private photographs were produced and circulated and why these photographs have been neglected as part of the visual record. As part of this discussion, private photographs and their collection will be understood through museum practices and their evolution over the past 100 years, as well as through the aesthetic values of soldier-produced art during the conflict. These private photographs reflect a desire to capture a sense of nostalgia by taking a snapshot of places an individual was attached to, perhaps remembering the building as it once was rather than in its ruined state. As such, private photograph albums act as sites of nostalgia and subverted the dominant memory of the war. Private photographs of individuals, which include gravesites on the Western Front, as acted as a testament to an individual's humanity and asserting their presence in the home, as well as acting as a stand-in for a local burial site. But due to their overwhelming numbers, visual ambiguity, and the dominance of the official photographs, these images have been relegated to the world of ephemera, asserting that they do not hold valuable space in the visual narrative of the First World War.

What then is a private photograph? At a basic level, a private photograph can also be called an amateur photograph. They are images produced by soldiers using their own cameras that were either compiled into an album or sent as individual photographs to loved ones. But they can also be photographs of soldiers that were commercially produced in portrait studios. But the biggest defining factor about private photographs is that they are often compared to official photographs and ascribed the term “amateur” because their aesthetic qualities are lesser than the mass-produced official images of the war. The use of the term “amateur” assumes that all of these photographs are lesser than those produced by official bodies and forces these personal photographs of the war into the background of the visual narrative by supposing that one visual narrative tells a better story than the other. By using the term private photograph, these narratives of the war are able to be understood as part of the memory-making process that occurred in the post-war period. It re-negotiates the space taken up by photography in the First World War and indicates that these photographs were relegated to private spheres of memory because of their supposed aesthetic inferiority. The term “private” asserts that these photographs are separate from the dominant memory, but still part of the First World War visual record.

By March 1916, a routine order prohibited the use of cameras along the front lines, noting the “constant occurring [events] which tend to show that the provisions of General Routine Orders which prohibit the taking of photographs... instructions under instructions from General Headquarters all cameras are to be sent home, each

camera being examined by the censor... to ensure there is no film in it."<sup>20</sup> While the reasons why this order was implemented are not clear in the record, it can be assumed that the British Headquarters (and by default the Canadians), were concerned with the contents of the photographs and how they might affect morale at home. If dead people at home were to see the number of dead Canadians, or the conditions the soldiers were living in, support for the war would go down, along with the national morale. There was also a concern that soldiers were selling photographs to the press to supplement their income, thereby producing a record of the war outside of the control of the CWRO and the Press Censor and further affecting morale. As a result, this routine order forced a shift in the way soldiers were able to photograph the war. The majority of the albums located in archives and research collections are post-censor photographs. Over the course of this research, out of numerous photo albums, none can be definitively considered as a pre-censor album. There may be traces of pre-censor photographs in them, but many of the photographs are undated, or uncaptioned making it difficult for archivists and historians to precisely place a month and year to the albums beyond the service record of those to whom the album belonged. Additionally, many of these photographic albums are dated to the 1920s, thus implying that the photographs were taken after the creation of Routine Order No. 189. The visual contents further enforce this narrative since the photographs are mundane, as many of the albums contain photos of unnamed friends, ruined buildings, and every so often a

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<sup>20</sup> Routine Order no. 189 (20 March 1916), 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division Orders, Volume 1, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9-III, box 202638.

photograph of a named wooden cross (see figures, 1.1 and 1.2). But even the dates on the crosses leave the date of the photo ambiguous since the photograph could have been taken any time after the individual's death.



Figure 1.1 – Unattributed album, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario.



Figure 1.2 – Ernest Selby, 8<sup>th</sup> Canadian Field Ambulance Photograph Album, c.1919, University of Calgary Military Archives.

If specific dates cannot be determined via the contents, what then constitutes a censored photograph? There are at least three contexts in which censorship could be enacted. The first is by the postal censor at home, the second is by unit officers, and the third is self-censorship. The latter is the most difficult to prove in the case of correspondence and photographs since it was the personal choice of the creator. Looking at the wide variety of private photographs, this self-censorship is the most apparent in the themes of the photographs. They all attempt to capture the sense of adventure and fun that many soldiers cited as their reason for enlisting. The photographs of foreign unidentifiable landscapes, pictures of friends made overseas, and training exercises, all demonstrate a sense of what was appropriate to send back home. There are no explicit photographs of dead bodies; instead they show graves and sites of mourning, likely adhering to ideas of appropriate grieving structures and Victorian propriety.<sup>21</sup> Beyond this, there are some indications in looking at the wide number of private photographs that soldiers decided to censor themselves, or at the very least, create staged images to represent their training and time overseas, rather than capturing it as it happened. William “Bill” Karn enlisted with the 56<sup>th</sup> Battery, Canadian Field Artillery in March 1916.<sup>22</sup> At some point during the war, Karn started amassing his personal album, starting with his time at Camp Petawawa. He seemed to like taking (or at least compiling) photographic series that demonstrated things he was learning. One such series is that of fights from his time

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<sup>21</sup> For more information on wartime mourning practices see, Suzanne Evans, “Marks of Grief: Black Attire, Medals, and Service Flags,” in Sarah Glassford *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War* (2012)

<sup>22</sup> William Karn, Personnel file, Library and Archives Canada, RG150, accessed October 7, 2019. See also Jonathan Vance, “Bill Karn’s War” in *Canada’s Great War Album* (Toronto: Harper-Collins, 2014).

at Petawawa (see figure 1.3). This photograph was set up because there is no blurring motion in the hands and, though the men are in striking distance of each other, they are clearly not in harm's way. Another indicator that the photograph has been set up is the fact that the men are wearing spurs. Spurs were banned in close combat sports and so the scenario has been set up. It is a simulated effect used to demonstrate the training these men were undertaking, and likely part of a reassurance to female family members that were well equipped to fight in the war.

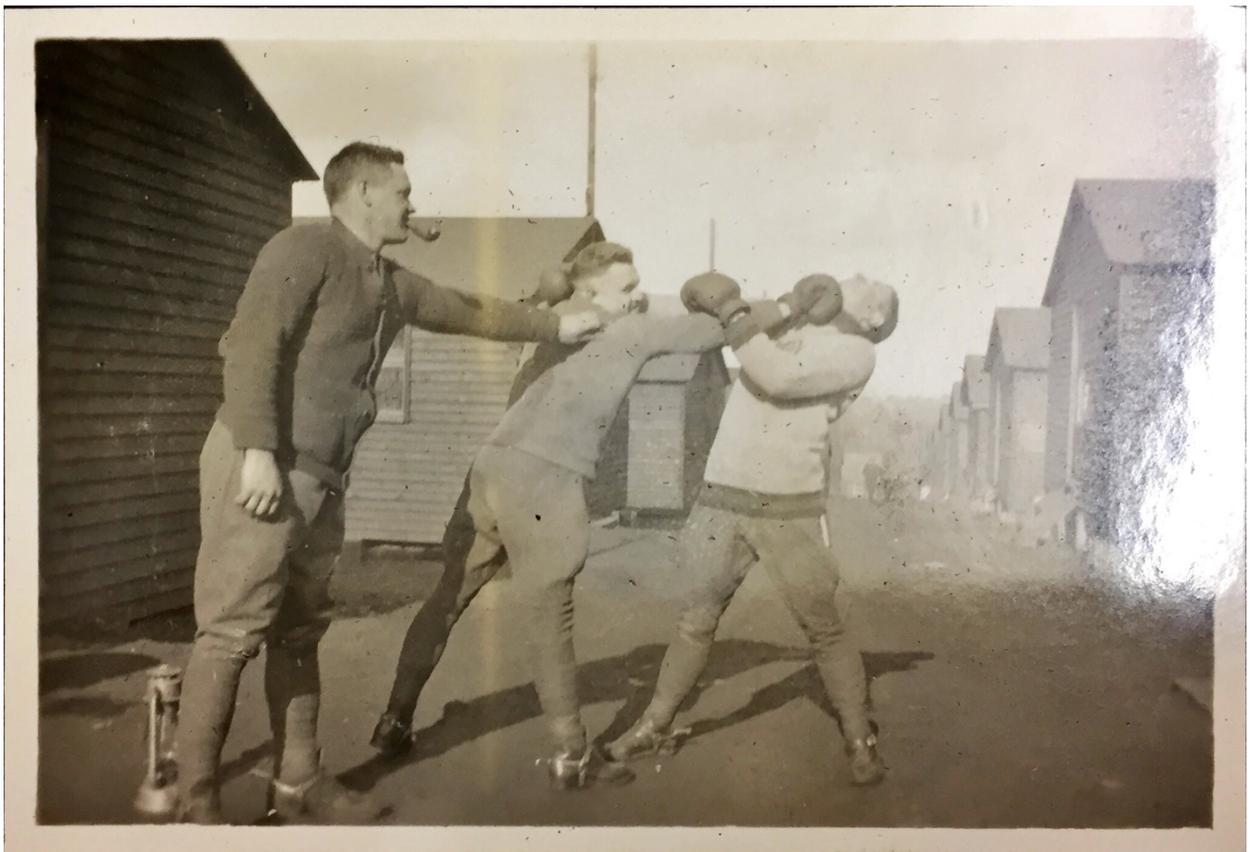


Figure 1.3 – William “Bill” Karn photographic album, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario.

A second case of photographic censorship is found, not in the photographic record, but in a series of court-martial trials. In mid-1918, a private with the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion was sent to the court-martial for violation of a Routine Order 168.<sup>23</sup> Private John Clarke was caught with a camera behind the lines and was recommended for trial, due to the potential subject matter of the photographs since he had come from the trench lines two days earlier. There is little indication of what these photographs had captured since they were not developed, but through tracing his personnel file, and sheer dumb luck, a sample of his wartime experiences can be found at the City of Calgary Archives and Mount Royal University's archival holdings. Clarke's photographic records are a little questionable since five of them show heavy artillery on the front, yet there is enough ambiguity to conceal the exact location of the photograph.<sup>24</sup> But otherwise, his surviving photographs follow the typical travel photography narrative of First World War soldier's albums. In Clarke's case, censorship was the result of two violations of Routine Order 186. His recommendation for court-martial was imposed because it was his second violation of the order. His personnel file reveals that he has previously attempted to send a letter home with sensitive information about the Canadian Expeditionary Force and, on the recommendation from his Sergeant, his letters were to be monitored and his camera was to stay with his kit behind the lines.<sup>25</sup> The severity of his punishment for this second violation, which included a proper trial, went beyond the typical "Christ

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<sup>23</sup> "Recommendation for Court Martial," Photographic records, CEF, Library and Archives Canada, RG III- B-1, vol. 1221, folder C.49.5.

<sup>24</sup> Due to restrictions by the City of Calgary Archives and effects of COVID-19 reproductions of these photographs were not possible to acquire under the time constraints of this thesis.

<sup>25</sup> Censorship & court martial papers, Library and Archives Canada, RG9 III-B-1, vol. 919, file Mar 74.

on the cross”<sup>26</sup> punishment that was typical for similar levels of deviance and indicated that cameras were starting to become a larger problem on the front lines and a bigger part of soldiers’ lives on the front. Since the recommendation to court-martial occurred in July 1918, a month before the start of the Hundred Days Offensive that ended in armistice, the punishment was likely due to the potential information leak associated with the camera and its contents. As a result, Clarke’s punishments for his photographs was probably done to make an example of what happened when a soldier was caught with a camera in the days leading up to the start of a major offensive, rather than a punishment for repeated violations.

In the case of William Antliff, the censored photograph could be a portrait photograph he was trying to send home. In a letter, dated June 1917, there is an attached card from the Canadian Postal censor, noting “image removed.”<sup>27</sup> In a letter sent home the following month, Antliff responded to his mother’s concern that his photograph did not reach her and the family, but that he was still doing well and would try to get another photo to show the family his “present state of health.”<sup>28</sup> He then indicates that it was odd that his photograph did not reach home, since many of his mates were able to send portrait photographs like his home. Since these portrait photographs were produced in sterile photographic studios, often with the back of

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<sup>26</sup> This treatment, formally called Field Punishment No. 1, meant that a soldier was tied to a wheel with arms stretched outwards and tied to a post, with the legs straight down, similar to the position of Christ on the crucifix. The soldier receiving this punishment would only be left in that position for two hours a day and was given other labour duties. By 1918, this punishment was changed, and the soldier was merely cuffed. For more information see Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1916-1918* (Toronto: Penguin, 2007) and Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson. “Military Law in Action, 1914-1916.” In *Blindfold and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War* (Cassell Military Paperbacks, 2001).

<sup>27</sup> William Antliff letters, CWM Research Collection.

<sup>28</sup> William Antliff letters, CWM Research Collection.

the portrait indicating the photo studio, one possibility for the censorship of Antliff's portrait is that the studio was in an area that the Canadian postal censor deemed unfit or questionable. Or perhaps that the censor broadly understood that all photographs were banned, and therefore, Antliff's photograph was removed from the envelope.

These three sets of censored photographs demonstrate that all images produced during the war were subject to the filter of different authorities for different purposes. Those authorities deemed what the surviving record of the war was, and the resulting narrative is not only one of photographs that remain after one hundred years, but one that shifted, changed, and evolved as it was being produced. As a result of these forms of censorship and the threat of confiscation of photographs, most soldiers did not end up making a visual record of their time on the front lines of the war. The private photographs that exist after 1916 do not depict the events leading up to a battle, how it unfolded, or even the aftermath of those events, thus unintentionally capturing elements or situations. Instead, the photographic record from 1916 to 1918 is comprised of photo albums, scrapbooks and soldiers' portraits. Running concurrent to these private photographs are photos from American photojournalists and the Canadian Official war photographs produced by the Canadian War Records Office (CWRO). But due to a variety of factors, discussed in the next chapter, the CWRO-produced photographs dominate the photographic record of the First World War. Private photographs were relegated to private spaces and private memory, forced to serve as ephemera, memento mori, or a site of nostalgia in the post-war period. The photos produced by American

photojournalists occupy a middle ground between private photographs and the official photos. Their visual contents are both similar to the private photos in their depiction of a personal and almost intrusive view of the war while maintaining a narrative that could be co-opted by the press to depict the war overseas. On one hand the photographs depict soldiers' everyday life on the front lines, but on the other, they depict military tactics like the use of bombing and the calvary. In addition, these press photographs note the shift to professionalizing war photography and prioritizing experts in photojournalism over photographs produced by soldiers. As a result of this cooption into the early official record, the photojournalist photographs were exempted from the private photographic record. Yet their inclusion into the early wartime visual record prevented them from being later classed as ephemera and allowed them to become part of the lived experience of the War. But upon the creation of the Canadian War Record Office (CWRO) and the production of official photographs, these American-made photographs ceased to be included in the visual record.

Photographs attributed to the International News Service, the Press Illustrating Service, and Underwood and Underwood (a company noted for its stereoscopes) appeared in Thomas H. Russell's *The World's Greatest War: A Thrilling Story of the Most Sanguinary Struggle of All the Ages, Its Battles and Strategy; with a Concise Account of the Causes that Led the Nations of Europe into the Awful Conflict* and Colonel George Naismith's *Canada's Sons and Great Britain in the World War: A Complete and authentic history of the commanding part played by Canada and the*

*British Empire in the World's Greatest War*.<sup>29</sup> Both books (published in 1914 and 1919) discuss the early history of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) overseas and used American-produced photographs to supplement their narrative. These photographs depict a universal war fought by two opposing sides and across three different European countries. The narrative of these American produced photographs was tied to the official histories in the books. The photos served to help illustrate the fighting conditions, the uniforms and the faces of the men fighting the war in the early years while trying to make sense of recent events. These photographs were taken in sharp focus with clear visual intent, unlike the photograph albums, which were often blurred, and their visual intent obscured. The American photos were technically superior to private photographs and denoted the professionalization and consolidation of early war memory. This process of professionalization, signified with the inclusion of photos in 1915 and 1916, indicated the importance of these private photographs in building the early official visual record.

Given the cooptation of the photojournalist photographs into the early photographic record, private soldiers' photographs can simply be described as those outside of the official photographic record. Of course, this approach is reductive and does not account for the nuances of the photographs that appear from 1914 into the 1920s. Some archives have broadly defined soldiers' private photography as images

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<sup>29</sup> Thomas H. Russell, *The World's Greatest War: A Thrilling Story of the Most Sanguinary Struggle of All the Ages, Its Battles and Strategy; with a Concise Account of the Causes that Led the Nations of Europe into the Awful Conflict* (London: 1914); Colonel George Naismith, *Canada's Sons and Great Britain in the World War: A Complete and authentic history of the commanding part played by Canada and the British Empire in the World's Greatest War* (Canada: 1919).

taken during wartime where an individual or groups of individuals are depicted in uniform.<sup>30</sup> For other institutions, like the Military Archives at the University of Calgary and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI) Museum and Archives, the collection of private photographs is tied to the institution's collection mandate and is therefore associated with an individual's service record and series of events that can accurately date the photograph. The PPCLI Museum and Archives will only take photographs (and other objects) that are directly attributed to someone who was part of the regiment and have a traceable service record. The Military Archives at the University of Calgary took attributed items of soldiers, nursing sisters, and other military members who resided in Calgary but did not meet the mandates of the other museums and archives in the building (this includes the PPCLI, Lord Strathcona (Royal Canadians), the King's Own Calgary Regiment, the Calgary Highlanders, and the Army Museum of Alberta).<sup>31</sup> Other institutions, like the Canadian War Museum's research collection, will only take photographic collections if they are deemed to enhance knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of events, experiences, and people that have shaped the history of Canada at war.<sup>32</sup> The CWM is unique in its collecting practices because of the need to tell a national history that transcends regional identity, as well as maintaining the individual

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<sup>30</sup> Ley and Lois Smith Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario. Note that this description is broad, due to the ad hoc nature of collection by Dr Jonathan Vance and Dr Graham Broad.

<sup>31</sup> In person conversation with Jason Nisenson, archivist at the Military Archives at the University of Calgary, and Sergeant N. Blackmore, Museum Manager of the PPCLI Museum and Archives, August 2019 and December 2019.

The Military Archives at the University of Calgary had also suspended its collection process in order to re-evaluate their collection mandate and to evaluate textual documents that were being transferred from the Glenbow Archives to the University of Calgary in 2019.

<sup>32</sup> In person conversation with Alain Simard, head archivist at the Canadian War Museum, February 2020.

experiences. Like the PPCLI Museum and Archives and the Military Archives at the University of Calgary, the emphasis and value is placed on the individual and their records' ability to tell a story, rather than their value as cultural objects, regardless of identification. As a result museums and archives, through creating their very narrow collecting scope, have determined that the only wartime photographs worth collecting and preserving are those that are tied to an individual's experience of war. The scrapbooks and photographic albums contained in these spaces depict the daily activities of soldiers during training and leisure activities in training camps at Petawawa and Valcartier and overseas in England, France, and Belgium. The vast majority of the albums are devoid of captions or any indications of the intent behind the photograph and they leave the ambiguity of the viewer's gaze to determine the contents and importance of the photograph. This ambiguity forces the viewer to use their own experiences and knowledge of the First World War as methods of interpretations, thus letting individual experience shape the contents of the photograph thereby determining the value of the album. Albums with full captions are difficult to find, but often these captions hold little meaning for researchers as they act more as an aide-memoire for those who created and compiled the photos for viewing. As a result, the majority of photographic albums contained in archives have not been the subject of extensive research, nor have they been considered as important for understanding soldiers' culture during or after the First World War. These albums and scrapbooks have been relegated to their own space in museums and archives because of how these photographs intersect with the official history produced by the Canadian War Records Office. Many of the albums contained prints

of the official war photos, often with new captions made by the owner. This coopted the official photographs as part of the owner's history, thus enforcing private memory of the war while also asserting that the official narrative was the history experienced by the owner. This process further destabilized the photographs and the histories are assumed to be part of a personal narrative.

Ernest Selby's album contains a mix of personal and official photographs. Selby was a Lieutenant Colonel with 8<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance and compiled a photographic album of his experiences overseas. His personal photographs are intermingled with prints of official war photos. But despite this intermingling of the photographic record, Selby's photographs are easily discernible through smaller details within the photograph. The key markers in the album that identify Selby's photos from the rest is his use of personal pronouns in the caption as well as the size and quality of the photo. Selby's private photos are small in size, measuring about three inches long by two inches tall (see figure 1.2). The majority of the photographs capture the shell-pocked landscape in Belgium and Northern France and have little or no explicit meaning beyond some sort of attempt to record a moment in time. This theory assumes that the act of taking a photograph is a deliberate act and that individuals do not take photographs without some sort of intent to preserve or remember a particular thing at a particular time. The context of these landscape photographs eludes us since the captions act more like aide-memoires than explicitly telling the viewer what is going on. In one example, found on the second page of his album, Selby presents a photo of something that is a little more than a pile of wood and dirt. His caption, "my old home - Bailleul" provides context to why

he chose to capture that particular mound.<sup>33</sup> Further context is given when we read the photograph along with others on the page (figure 1.4). By keeping the photographs in context with each other, they are able to speak and produce a dialogue that tells us more. The photographs indicate that Selby's home was part of a larger building and was therefore significant in his experience of the war. In adding further context via Selby's personnel record and the six letters that form the rest of the Selby fonds at the University of Calgary Military archives, Selby indicates that Bailleul was a town he was fond of since it was his first posting when he was attached to the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion as a medic and that he wished to visit when the war was over.<sup>34</sup> The other one hundred photographs taken by Selby chronicle a similar narrative. Through his landscape photographs Selby attempted to build a literal narrative of his experiences as a medical officer with the 43<sup>rd</sup> Battalion during the First World War. The nineteen photos that diverge from capturing the landscape are photographs of the temporary crosses and memorials that commemorate the fallen and continue the Victorian practice of death photographs and the larger tradition of memento mori. Since soldiers' bodies were not repatriated to Canada, these death photographs were stand-ins for a gravesite on Canadian soil and acted as proof that an individual was given a proper burial, as well as to commemorate the fallen individual. All of the photographs in Selby's album attempt to create a visual reminder of his time during the First World War and in fact other photographic albums and scrapbooks mimic this desire to understand the war through photos. A

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<sup>33</sup> Ernest Selby Photographic Album, Military Archives at the University of Calgary, page 4.

<sup>34</sup> Ernest Selby, letter to his wife, dated April 1917, Military Archives at the University of Calgary.

selection of images from other photographic albums, while removed from their context, enforce this idea. These photographs acted as a way for soldiers to create a personal narrative of the war that asserts both their own experiences, therefore creating private memory of the war, and the dominant narrative through the inclusion of the official war photographs.



Figure 1.4 – E. Selby, 8<sup>th</sup> Field Ambulance Photograph Album, University of Calgary Military Archives

As previously noted the majority of photographic albums that exist in museums, archives and research collections are attributed to officers in the CEF or

to Nursing Sisters. Both classes of people were part of affluent classes moving into the war and were able to purchase, transport, and hide cameras and access film. A decent camera like the popular Kodak Vest Pocket camera was an expense, at an estimated fifteen dollars for the camera alone.<sup>35</sup> For context, a Lieutenant-Colonel made five dollars a day, with an extra dollar and twenty-five cents while they were overseas.<sup>36</sup> A Private in the CEF made a dollar a day, with an extra ten cents while they were overseas.<sup>37</sup> Nursing Sisters were appointed to the rank of Captain, and their pay was equal (and in some cases more than) to their rank, at three dollars a day, with an extra forty cents while overseas.<sup>38</sup> The pay rates of a Lieutenant-Colonel and Nursing Sister allowed them to have extra money to afford the luxury of a camera. Officers and Nursing Sisters, by virtue of their rank, were also less likely to be caught with a camera or at least could mitigate the consequences of breaking Routine Order 186. This economic understanding further explains why the vast majority of attributed albums belong to Officers, and further study into the albums of Nursing Sisters is necessary to determine if gender influenced the kinds of photographs taken during the war.

The Officers' experience of war is cohesive and carefully curated via photo albums that often resemble travel albums. They include photographs of ruined towns, open Belgian or French countryside, and, in some rare cases, photographs of

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<sup>35</sup> Lt. Col Ernest Raymond Selby, letter home, September 1916, Military Archives at the University of Calgary.

<sup>36</sup> Unknown, "Pay Rate of the Canadian Military," Canadian Great War Project, accessed October 20, 2019. <http://www.canadiangreatwarproject.com/writing/payRates.asp>.

<sup>37</sup> Unknown, "Pay Rate," chart 1.

<sup>38</sup> Unknown, "Pay Rate," chart 1.

A sample of nursing sister personnel records from LAC indicate that their pay could go as high as six dollars and eighty cents a day, but no sister was paid less than \$3.40.

travels to Paris and London. These albums are a complication of the evidence of being overseas and enforce the notion that many of the men signed up for adventure rather than to fight a war. The photo albums also indicate the importance of those moments and that there was something worth remembering or capturing. With a retrospective eye, this something can be the people photographed, or it could be the experiences surrounding the moment of the photograph. It is uncommon for these First World War photo albums to contain descriptions, letters, or anything else that might provide context. This forces the historian to ask questions like “what is this a photograph of?” and “what is the photograph trying to tell us?” It is because of these self-evident questions that this thesis has taken a deconstructionist approach to understanding the photographs. That is to say that rather than asserting a specific narrative on the photograph and then placing the photograph into that narrative, this thesis looks at the contents of the photographs and identifies common objects or themes that provide insight into understanding the photograph.<sup>39</sup> In many instances, the broader context of the photograph is unknown, especially with the majority of records in the Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection. When possible, an attempt to connect the album to a soldier’s broader history has been made through the inclusion of a personnel file or broader still, the use of Battalion war diaries to attempt to understand why certain photographs were taken.

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<sup>39</sup> This is similar to Roland Barthes ideas on punctum and Studium found in *Camera Lucida*. Punctum literally means pricking and is a part of an image that resonates with the viewer. Studium is the photographer’s intention and visual codes that tell the viewer about the image.

While the expense of a vest pocket camera (VPC) was large, it did not prevent a lower-ranking soldier from purchasing one of the many Kodak Brownie models that were popular in North America. In fact, many of the anonymous, stand-alone photographs taken during the war were shot on a Brownie. These one-off photographs are no less important than the attributed photographic albums in understanding how photographic culture evolved during the war. Their scattered nature and ambiguity have provided a different understand of the war since their visual resonances have not been tied to an individual. Instead, these photographs provide insight into life at home.



Figure 1.5 – Unattributed photograph 011, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture

Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario.

Brownie cameras were much bulkier than the VPC, measuring three inches long and two and a half inches wide and made of cardboard covered with thin leather. They were also cheaper than the vest pocket camera, at around one to five dollars depending on the model. Photographs taken with Brownie cameras tend to reflect life on the home front. These photographs also tend to be the one-off photographs in research collections. These stand-alone photographs are typically group shots, with soldiers either as the main focus or as part of the set (see figure 1.5). Unlike scrapbooks and albums, these photographs are devoid of their contexts. There is no writing on the reverse of the image that would indicate who the individuals are, or where the photograph was taken. Instead, historians are left to understand the photographs through the image itself. Based on the ladies clothing and hats, the photograph was likely taken in the spring or summer. The hats are made of lighter material, like a woven straw which indicates warmer weather, and the colours are lighter and the fabrics appear to be airier. The three visible cameras (and implied fourth that produced the photograph) indicates the popularity and affordability of these cameras. The dominance of the cameras also indicates the shift to cameras as a significant cultural object, and the growing interest in cameras and picture-taking during the war. Unlike photographs taken on the front of soldiers, this is a happier moment, indicated by the expressions on the faces of everyone in the image. The enlisted members are in the army and navy respectively, but what unit or ship the men were assigned to is ambiguous. There is no battalion patch on the upper bicep of the army man and the collar dogs (metal tags worn on the uniform collar) and cap badge are not clear enough to give the viewer more information. But

other than these details and the knowledge that at least two people wanted to capture a specific moment, we cannot place this photo beyond a moment during the First World War. It is an ambiguous photograph.

Portrait photographs operate on a similar level of ambiguity, perhaps even more so since they are staged images. They can only be understood through the contents of the photograph and, if available, the short message placed on the back. Photographs, like the photograph and the portrait photograph force the viewer to use their gaze to reconcile with the image presented.

Portrait photographs were professionally produced in studios across Canada at minimal cost, a penny or two at the most.<sup>40</sup> For people who lived in urban centres, it was normal to pass by these spaces and stop in to have a portrait taken. By the start of the First World War, Montreal and Toronto had numerous portrait studios, but in other cities, particularly those out west like Calgary, Edmonton, and Vancouver, these studios were not all that common.<sup>41</sup> The cities out west were not as densely populated, and for places like Calgary and Regina, their main purpose was to act as a focal point for the agricultural industries surrounding them. Even when we look at the statistics of who enlisted during the First World War, the majority of recruits from out west were from rural areas. Their attestation papers indicate that they enlisted in urban centres, but their occupation, addresses, and next-of-kin note that they did not grow up in spaces where they had access to a photo studio, and

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<sup>40</sup> Art Gallery of Ontario, Introductory Panel, "Photography: First World War 1914-1918, Part II," December 2018.

<sup>41</sup> Edmonton City Directory, 1913, Peel's Prairie Provinces, Provincial Archives of Alberta, accessed March 12, 2020; Calgary City Directory, 1913, Peel's Prairie Provinces, Provincial Archives of Alberta, accessed March 11, 2020; Vancouver City Directory, 1913, Vancouver Public Library, accessed March 25, 2020.

their access to a Brownie camera is questionable at best. When seen in this context, the number of soldiers' portraits found in museums and archives take on a new meaning. The portrait is transformed from a relatively common occurrence to a novelty. And indeed, many soldiers saw it this way. The back of one unidentified soldier portrait-postcard (figure 1.6) enforces this significance by stating "please pass this around for the boys to see."<sup>42</sup> Though he does go on to say that it is not a very good one, his opening sentence indicates that the image significant and important. Even Antliff in a letter home to his mother described that the line outside of a portrait studio nearest his accommodations in London went around the corner.<sup>43</sup>

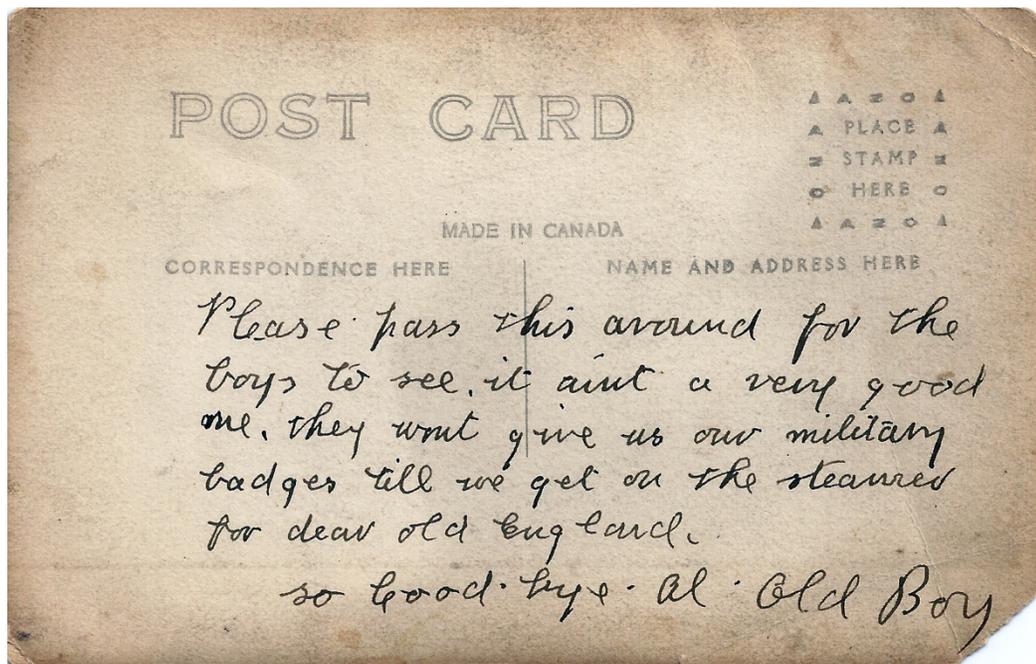


Figure 1.6 – Reverse of unknown photograph no. 805, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario.

<sup>42</sup> Unidentified soldier's photograph, no. 805, Ley and Lois Smith Research Collection.

<sup>43</sup> William Antliff, letter to his Mother, July 1916, Canadian War Museum.



Figure 1.7 – Front of unknown photograph no. 805, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario.



Figure 1.8 – Unknown photograph no. 407, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture  
Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario.



Figure 1.9 – Unknown photograph no. 411, Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture  
Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario.

The visual content of these photographs is the same. Each portrait photo depicts an individual in uniform, often with a neutral expression. There is a slight variance in the photos, with soldiers depicted sitting or standing with different objects in the image (figures 1.8) or the portrait is taken as a close-up, framing the upper chest and face of the individual (figure 1.9). As a result of these similarities, and their nameless nature, wartime portrait photographs have been reduced to ephemera. Their temporality was marked by their significance to the recipient, as well as their double nature. That is to say, often these portrait photographs acted as both portrait photo and letter home. This combined nature of the portrait photograph allowed the soldier to assert his wellbeing through his likeness on silver nitrate, as well as express a brief update to the recipient, thus enforcing his wellbeing.<sup>44</sup> In terms of marketing, this was a brilliant technique because it meant that both parties, the photographed soldier and the recipient, were able to double up on the cost of sending a message home. This inclusion of a message indicates that the portrait photographs were seen as both a tool of communication and a significant memento. These latter forms of private photographs outnumber the photo albums, but the content of both sets of private photos are similar. They all attempt to capture an important experience of the war for those directly involved in the conflict. Yet, their visual significance has been underplayed due to their aesthetic contents and for whom they were produced. Their visual ambiguity has allowed them to become detached from the visual culture of the First World War.

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<sup>44</sup> Other studies on wellness and portrait photography include Tina M. Campt, *Image Matters: Archive, Photography, and the African Diaspora in Europe* (Duke: 2012).

In the post-war period, these photographs served a secondary purpose. Their objecthood after the war transformed them into sites of memory. But the memory they enforce is not like the consolidated memory by the government, nor do they resemble photographic memory perpetuated by the Canadian War Records office, which is discussed later in the following chapters of this thesis. Instead, the memory produced by the private photographs resembles what Jonathan Vance calls private memory, which is the idea that the memory of those who experienced the war subverts dominant memory and goes against the idealized past.<sup>45</sup> But perhaps these photographs go further than private memory and are sites of nostalgia and filter the past so it can be remembered warmly.<sup>46</sup> The interaction with these photographs is a confrontation with people from the past. They are photographs that challenge what is remembered about the First World War since the photographic albums assert the idea that the war was an adventure. What is captured is not the horrors of the past, but a travel album of Belgium and northern France, and its images punctuated by the aftereffects of the war.

Another reason why these photographs were relegated to the private memory has to do with their aesthetic qualities. These photographs are not idealized shots of the past, nor do they have dramatic composition that would elevate them as an art that emerges out of the First World War. As discussed earlier, the private photographs were produced to capture a moment deemed worthy of remembrance,

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<sup>45</sup> Jonathan Vance, *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997), 9

<sup>46</sup> This idea of a filtered past comes from Nancy West's *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* in which she employs nostalgia as a gaze or lens through which to view the photographs.

or in the case of the portrait photographs, they are a testament to someone's humanity, serving as proof of their existence. The private photographs have not been considered as aesthetically significant because of who produced them and their intended audience. As photographs age and their meaning becomes ambiguous, their historical significance to museums and archives is less explicit than other objects of First World War material culture. These factors, when combined with the similarities in their subject matter, allow them to be disconnected from the visual narrative of the First World War. A small sample of photographs from the Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection reveals that soldiers were photographing the same thing: training exercises in Quebec and Britain, and ruins of various towns they travelled through. But what if these photographs were understood as a product of war and conflict, becoming part of the broader trench art genre?

Trench art, as defined by Nicholas J. Saunders, is "any item made by soldiers, prisoners of war and civilians, from war material directly, or any other material, as long as it and they are associated with armed conflict or its consequences."<sup>47</sup> While Saunders' book explicitly refers to materials like shells turned into vases or bullets made into picture frames, one cannot help but wonder if the idea of conflict art could be expanded to include photography. In a recent travelling exhibition entitled *Keepsakes of Conflict: Trench Art and other Canadian War-related Craft*, curator Heather Smith has expanded the definition of trench art and classifies trench art as a subsection of conflict art. According to Smith, conflict art is work produced by or

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<sup>47</sup> Nicholas Saunders, *Trench Art: Materialities and Memories of War* (Oxford: Berg, 2003), p 11.

sold to soldiers in conflict zones, and can encompass objects like embroidered postcards and bullet casing picture frames, which were often mass-produced and marketed specifically to Empire soldiers to send home.<sup>48</sup> If textiles and the frames that surround photographs can be incorporated into the body of conflict art, then perhaps soldiers' photographs need to be re-examined as part of this body of art. The term "conflict art" is used over "trench art" because, as Smith argues, these pieces of art could be made by the hands of soldiers or prisoners of war, but they could also be made in large numbers by women who used factory resources to help supplement their income, or in the case of women in Northern France, to create an income and support her family despite the loss of a husband, father, or another male figure who was responsible for their care.<sup>49</sup> The term "trench art" assumes that the making of these works was a masculine act and removes the agency of women in both creating these works of art and in helping collect the works for museum use today. Using the term "conflict art" and expanding it to include photography also acknowledges the popularity of photo studios, both at home in Canada and overseas in England and France.

The inclusion of private photographs as conflict art needs to be understood through the materiality and objecthood of the private photographs, as well as their aesthetic qualities. Both of these modes of analysis examine the photograph as both object and art in similar ways to how First World War conflict art has been collected,

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<sup>48</sup> Introductory Panel, *Keepsakes of Conflict: Trench Art and Other Canadian War-Related Craft* Founders' Gallery at the University of Calgary, June 2019.; Informal discussion between the author, Heather Smith, exhibition curator, and Katherine Ylitlao, curator at the University of Calgary Founders' Gallery, June 2019.

<sup>49</sup> Correspondence with Heather Smith, June 18, 2019.

examined, and understood over time, as well as the current shift in understanding conflict art as evidence of soldiers' culture during the war.<sup>50</sup> Through examining the aesthetics of the photographs, the experience and culture of the soldier overseas can be understood as an cultural product of the war rather than a common experience captured via a camera. This analysis also helps account for the inclusion of scrapbooks and photographic albums and the exclusion of private photographs in the visual narrative, as well as the abundance of unnamed photographs and portrait photographs as objects of ephemera.

Wartime Canada and its Co-Directors, Dr Jonathan Vance and Dr Graham Broad, describe ephemera as disposable material that was omnipresent in the lives of those who lived through the conflict.<sup>51</sup> The vast majority of private photos, especially soldier's portraits, are nameless. The identities of the people contained in the silver nitrate are unknown and, as previously discussed, pose a different set of questions and tools, when trying to understand the visual record of the First World War. In trying to understand private photographs in the Smith Collection (which is part of the physical collection for Wartime Canada), as conflict art, the materiality and objecthood of the photographs needs to be accounted for and understood. Photographs, like objects collected in a museum, take up space. On one hand, these photographs are objects. They are things that can be held, examined, and understood as products of a broader event.<sup>52</sup> Their objecthood is dictated by the

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<sup>50</sup> More on this can be seen in Tim Cook, *The Secret History of Soldiers: How Canadians Survived the First World War* (Toronto: Penguin, 2018).

<sup>51</sup> Wartime Canada, "About Us" accessed March 28, 2020 <http://wartimecanada.ca/about-us>, para 1.

<sup>52</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 4.

fact that a viewer can examine the photograph from a variety of angles and perspectives that can change and alter the photo and its meanings by simply flipping the photograph over and reading the back. The photographic object takes up space, but its space is dictated by the collection and collection practices.

By trying to understand war photographs as trench art, these two art forms must be understood as part of the larger collecting process in museums and archival repositories and how their contents and aesthetics have dictated their collection. Within museum collections, conflict art has been labelled as souvenirs, trench art, folk art, ephemera, and, in some rare cases, has been unclassified due to the “strange shape and size of what was once a shell.”<sup>53</sup> Other museums have resisted collecting trench art as it does not clearly fit their collections mandate, nor help communicate the larger exhibition narrative.<sup>54</sup> This issue of classification has left trench art to be collected in specific contexts that adhere to and uphold larger museum narratives. It is only recently with exhibitions like Heather Smith’s and various master’s research projects that trench art is starting to be examined as material culture and art form, rather than an act of collecting as the term souvenir implies. Additionally, the visual content of trench art is similar, and museums do not tend to collect objects that might be perceived as duplicates. Frames made out of bullets, shell casing vases, and letter openers with bullet handles are strikingly similar at first glance and are ignored unless the significance of the individual who purchased, owned, or made the item is significant. Often times the significance comes from details in the piece that

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<sup>53</sup> Army museum of Alberta, CFAMS entry for a cut shell casing.

<sup>54</sup> Aero Space Museum of Calgary Collections Policy, 2012. It should be noted that this policy along with the museum’s branding, and exhibition and collections policy changed in late 2017.

makes it unique, like Mandarin or Cantonese characters etched into the brass, or if the piece is dramatically different to others in the collection. Within the Military Museums in Calgary, the pieces of conflict art resemble each other but are only differentiated based on the attribution of who owned the piece, its significance to a regiment, or the specific artistic motifs inscribed on the brass.

The similarities between these objects can be largely attributed to the mass production of these items on the Western Front and their accessibility to the soldier, as well as who made them. The typical narrative found within the museum enforces a white Anglo-Saxon Protestant history of the war, and conflict art often asserts this narrative since the pieces are largely collected by these men, but conflict art was also made by Chinese labourers and French women who have been hidden from the narrative as a result of the collection process.<sup>55</sup> The pieces of conflict art that are found in museum collections are there because of their unique nature, like Corporal Frank Patonenfabrik's tea set at the Canadian War Museum.<sup>56</sup> The tea set is the only one of its existence in Canadian War museum and because it can be attributed to a specific person who supposedly made it by hand, it is deemed worthy of collection and preservation.<sup>57</sup>

Private war photographs operate in a similar vein but are often even more neglected due to their ambiguous nature. All of the private photographs examined as

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<sup>55</sup> French women were often the ones embroidering postcards or working in factories that produced embroidered postcards, but their work has been hidden by the dominant narrative of the war.

<sup>56</sup> CWM online collections, "tea set" accessed May 22, 2020.

[https://www.warmuseum.ca/collections/artifact/1320547/?q=material%3ABrass&page\\_num=2&item\\_num=73&media\\_irn=1104699](https://www.warmuseum.ca/collections/artifact/1320547/?q=material%3ABrass&page_num=2&item_num=73&media_irn=1104699)

<sup>57</sup> More detail about this tea set can be found in Tim Cook, *The Secret History of Soldiers: How Canadians Survived the First World War* (Toronto: Penguin, 2018), 263.

part of the research for this thesis contain the same subject matter or tell a similar visual narrative. As stated earlier in this chapter, the contents of private photographs blur together. Their contents resemble each other yet vary wildly in who they capture and where they were taken. The individuals have been lost to time, but the proof of their existence remains. Because it has been assumed that these portraits cannot tell us something unique about the sitter and the intention behind their creation is ambiguous, museums and archives have excluded them from their collecting practices, deeming them unworthy of examination. Yet, their numbers and presence in the public sphere outnumber the number of attributed albums and official photographs that were created in the four-year period.

Conversations with various regimental archivists at The Military Museums of Calgary and the head archivist of the Military Collection at the University of Calgary have revealed that the collection of the photograph, especially of portraits, is only done if the individual can explicitly be connected to a regiment in the building.<sup>58</sup> This choice to collect only attributed photographs explains the dominance of scrapbooks and photographic albums in museum collections, while portrait photographs are found in smaller university collections like the Ley and Lois Smith Research Collection, or in the hands of private collectors. This move to collect scrapbooks and albums also implies that one set of private photographs is more important than the other and that they can tell historians more about the past because they are a

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<sup>58</sup> The Military Museums is the building which houses the regimental museums of the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians), The Calgary Highlanders, and the King's Own Calgary Regiment, as well as the Army Museum of Alberta, the Naval Museum of Alberta and the Air Force Gallery of Alberta.

collection of one individual's experience. Their comprehensive nature, with its histories tied to an individual's experience of war, is assumed to tell public historians more about the visual narrative of the war, when in reality, scrapbooks, albums, and individual photographs all tell different, but continuous narratives of the war.

Trench art, here defined as objects made of excess war materials like shell casings, have similar hallmarks of uniformity and ambiguity to portrait photographs. Both objects lack attribution, forcing the object to be considered as a piece of ephemera, even more so since trench art has often been imagined as art produced to occupy time in the trenches. The notion that some of these pieces of trench art were mass-produced as souvenirs asserts that trench art was not just a time-occupier, but an industry that mimicked the industry of the studio portrait. Additionally, the collecting process of trench art resembles that of the portraits. They are something that is distinctly different than the art produced during the war and have been relegated to the back corners of collections with little examination. Even amongst the variety of trench art produced in the war, many of these items have not been collected or accessioned into museum spaces because their similarities, non-attribution, and insignificance have not made them worthy of collection. The majority of conflict art held in regimental collections at the Military Museums in Calgary are attributed pieces, with names and distinct histories. A letter opener, with its flattened brass blade and bullet handle, is deemed worthy of collection because of its ties to a corporal who made the piece for his sister since she had

complained about not having one.<sup>59</sup> This is not just the case with regimental museums, but large institutions like the Canadian War Museum, where all the pieces in their collection can be directly attributed to an individual and their wartime experience. During his time overseas, Private Charles Shawcross, made three picture frames out of bullet casings.<sup>60</sup> If this frame made out of bullet casings can be considered conflict art, the picture placed within it ought to be given the same consideration and included in the artistic canon as another product of the war.

By understanding private photographs as an extension of conflict art, the materiality of the photograph is asserted. They become objects, filling a time, a place, and a specific purpose. These purposes changed depending on the context afforded to them by the viewer, and later the collector. But no part of their record becomes subsumed into a larger narrative on aesthetic experiences of the First World War; instead the photographs are understood based on their potential meanings. Private photographs can be used as an aide-memoire, a medium to understand individual wartime experiences, a memento, or a marker of importance or significance. The objecthood of a photograph also helps us understand the photos as things. They have a front and a back and their meaning, like a piece of trench art, can shift when the photo is examined from its different angles and different contexts. As art-objects private photographs are deemed worthy of collection based on their ability to visually communicate the experience of war. By asserting the photographs' value,

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<sup>59</sup> Brass Letter Opener, PPCLI Canadian Forces Artefact Management System (CFAMS), accessed July 15, 2019 with permission of Sergeant N. Blackmore.

<sup>60</sup> "Picture frame, brass," PPCLI CFAMS entry, accessed December 2019, with permission of Sergeant N. Blackmore.

the images are no longer classified as ephemera, but as part of a larger attempt to document and record the soldiers' wartime experience and how this experience has been at the mercy of memory and narrative-making over the past hundred years. By using the lens of conflict art, photographs can be understood as part of a different aesthetic. They were not produced to be pretty and look good, but rather they reflect the personal aesthetics of those who produced the image. They do not have to conform to the dominant aesthetics of the war, but rather to personal narratives and contexts that help form their meaning for those in the past.

## Chapter Two- Cameras at the Service of War: Creating the Official Record

On March 20, 1915, Routine Order 189, Withdrawal of Cameras was issued. This order stated, “...all cameras are to be sent home, each camera being passed through the censor... to ensure that there is no film in it.”<sup>61</sup> A month later the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) was thrown into the Second Battle of Ypres. It is interesting timing that the orders to send cameras home came before the CEF’s first major battle of the war. This meant there was no available record of the battle beyond oral testimonies of those who survived Second Ypres. At the same time as this routine order, Max Aitken, also known as Lord Beaverbrook, was appointed as the Record Officer of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. This appointment, along with Aitken’s newspaper business, allowed him to start collecting information about the Canadian experience at war. Later that year he published *Canadians In Flanders: The Official Story of the Canadian Expeditionary Force*.<sup>62</sup> By January 1916, Aitken had forged a reputation for himself among the Canadians. As a newspaper mogul, Aitken had connections to hire a network of people to document the war, including skilled interviewers and writers, who made up the bulk of people at the War Records Office. As part of the Canadian War Records Office (CWRO), Beaverbrook hired Harry Knobel, William Ivor Castle, and William Rider-Rider to produce photographs that could tell the visual record of the war. Over the past hundred years, these

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<sup>61</sup> Routine Order 189, Library and Archives Canada RG9 III-C-3, vol. 4134, file 19.2.

<sup>62</sup> Max Aiken, *Canadians in Flanders* (London: 1916).

photographs have been understood as propaganda and visuals that supplement the material culture of war rather than photographs that tell a visual narrative informed by the culture, context, and personal experiences of the three photographers. This chapter will attempt to draw the connections between the visuals of war and the experiences of Knobel, Castle and Rider-Rider.

By 1916, the Canadian War Records Office had its bare bones, including the start of a visual records department with a handful of painting commissions. But with events happening rapidly and painting being a slow medium, there was a disconnect between the visual record of the war and the events that were taking place. Beaverbrook expressed a sense of irritation or frustration regarding the delayed nature of painting: "I am waiting with passionate interest to see what Mr. Jack may produce in the coming months, should he finish at all."<sup>63</sup> Running alongside this irritation was the American photojournalists and their ability to quickly and effectively produce images for various news agencies and publishers. Some of these images even made it into the British edition of Aitken's *Canadians in Flanders*, which indicates not only the geographical proximity of war to Britain but Britain's later interest and investment into war photography.<sup>64</sup> When coupled with the mass-production of these photographs into postcards and personal objects like matchboxes, the visual narrative of the war was controlled by outsider knowledge. Aitken noted that the early war photographs were "[an] instrument of knowledge, if

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<sup>63</sup> Aitken correspondence, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 III-A-1, vol. 19, folder 4.8.25.

<sup>64</sup> The Canadian and American editions of *Canadians in Flanders* published in the same year do not include any images beyond what some would call a frontispiece. Additionally, by early 1917 Britain would be the focal point for the popularity of war photography and art.

only it was rightly used.”<sup>65</sup> While this comment was in his personal correspondence, it is clear that Aitken sensed that photographs were able to say something important about the war in the eyes of the public. In order to truly record the actions of the Canadians at war, Aitken, and more broadly, the War Records Office would need to have a photographer. In May 1916, Harry Knobel was appointed as the CWRO’s official war photographer.<sup>66</sup>

Little is known about the process in which the official photographs were taken, how they were produced, and how the Canadian War Records Office (CWRO) received them. There is also no evidence that shows the CWRO had a clear shooting list that told the photographers what was expected in their photographs. Instead, the CWRO produced an index of the Official War photographs, simply titled “The Canadian Official War Photographs,” that details the order in which the CWRO received the photographs and indicated the dates that each photograph was taken. For the most part, the index is in numerical order, but there are jumps in the numbers. These sequence jumps happen under Ivor Castle and Rider-Rider’s tenures as war photographers and are likely the result of the photographer self-censoring. There is evidence that the CWRO was censoring images as they came into the office, but this was typical with Knobel’s photography more so than that of the later photographers. In addition, it is likely that Castle and Rider-Rider had an innate sense of what to capture since they were both established photographers before

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<sup>65</sup> Report submitted by the Officer in charge to the Right Honorable Sir Robert L. Borden, KCMG, MP (London (1917), p.3 and Appendix 'A'. Canadian War Records Office (CWRO), quoted in Robertson, “Canadian Photojournalism in the First World War,” in *History of Photography*, vol. 2 no. 1 (1978), 40.

<sup>66</sup> Harry Knobel, Personnel File, Library and Archives Canada, RG150.

they were hired by the CWRO. This ingrained photographic skill could also explain why the numerical sequence of the index jumps. The numbers in between the jumps were likely destroyed, before even reaching the CWRO office, by the photographer not only conserve his status as a lauded photographer but also because that the shot was just a bad shot and should not be included in the record.

Knobel was an anomaly compared to the other official war photographers, as he was the only one who had no professional photographic experience. The details surrounding the circumstances in which Knobel was appointed official war photographer are unclear, but it likely has to do with Knobel's service record and work he might have done for the CWRO following the Second Battle of Ypres. Knobel enlisted on August 27, 1914, and like others who enlisted shortly after war was declared, he trained in Canada and England before he was stationed in Belgium in early 1916.<sup>67</sup> According to Knobel's obituary, he was at the Battle of Second Ypres, the same battle that Aitken later writes about.<sup>68</sup> It is likely through this event that Aitken and Knobel met each other and started working together as the Chief Records Officers and Official War Photographer respectively.

All of the official war photographs were recorded as they came into the CWRO in the Catalogue Index of War Photos. The war photo index notes the year and month the CWRO received the photograph what number the photograph was given (which was also marked on the glass plate on the right or left bottom corner) and the title. The assigned title indicates the subject matter of the photograph, but at

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<sup>67</sup> Knobel personnel file, RG 150, accessed October 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Harry Knobel obituary, *Port Arthur Chronicle*, Thunder Bay Library and Public Archives, accessed January 2019.

times lists which photographs were censored. The index provides an overview of what types of images were taken and the general locations and battalions to which the war photographers were assigned. But more importantly, the index implies the evolution of war photographs not only over the course of the war but with each photographer. While Harry Knobel, Ivor Castle, and William Rider-Rider are not directly named in the index of war photos, their attestation papers, Lord Beaverbrook's correspondence, and dates listed in the ledger create a general sense of when each photographer was active and a general time frame to understand the aesthetic changes in the official photographs.

There is evidence of explicit censoring by the CWRO in the first third of the index with a number of photographs described as "censored."<sup>69</sup> Censorship in the First World War is complicated as it was legislated by larger bodies, like the postmaster, but was expected to be managed by a sergeant or by the soldier himself.<sup>70</sup> This meant that the process of censorship, at least relating to soldiers, was inconsistent. An item could slip through the mail one week and the same item or information may not slip past the censor the next.<sup>71</sup> The official photographs were subject to a different censorship process. The photographers reported directly to the CWRO, so the censorship of the official photographs could have occurred within these offices.<sup>72</sup> But because the official photographs were intended to be part of the press, the censorship could have been conducted by Ernest Chambers and the Press

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<sup>69</sup> See Index to Official War photographs, Library and Archives Canada, RG24, vol. 20404

<sup>70</sup> Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship in Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 18.

<sup>71</sup> Censorship form contained in personal documents of Mont Babbit, Canadian War Museum Research Collection.

<sup>72</sup> War Office Administrative Records, Library and Archives Canada, RG9 III-A-1, vol. 73, file 10.8.12.

Censor.<sup>73</sup> In regards to war photography, there is little information about what was considered appropriate to photograph. There were no direct orders from Lord Beaverbrook or the CWRO to the war photographers beyond pieces of information in correspondence between the two bodies, and even then, these letters are few and far between. One of the few instructions Beaverbrook gave the war photographers was about dead bodies. Beaverbrook noted that the photographers should “take precaution not to photograph our fallen Canadians, but by all means photograph all the Germans you want!”<sup>74</sup> As a result, the vast majority of dead bodies in the war photographs are German bodies. There are some exceptions to this, but they can be explained with Castle’s aesthetic approach.

The other two-thirds of the index do not have censored images. Instead it is filled with the jumps in the number sequencing. One possible explanation for these sequence jumps lies in the backgrounds of the other two war photographers. Castle and Rider-Rider were established photographers who had an innate sense of what to capture. They were likely self-censoring and self-selecting which shots they thought should be included in the official record. It is likely that the photographer decided to remove the photograph because the shot was bad (over- or under-exposed, or blurry), or that the shot compromised the photographer’s status as a lauded photographer. In other words, there is a possibility that the missing images were an attempt to preserve the photographer’s ego. In terms of aesthetics and photographic style, each war photographer had his own approach which was informed by his own

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<sup>73</sup> Jeff Keshen, “All the News that was Fit to Print: Ernest J. Chambers and Information Control in Canada, 1914-19” in *The Canadian Historical Review*, 73, vol. 3 (1992), 338.

<sup>74</sup> Robertson, “Canadian Photojournalists,” 41.

personal history, his experience as a photographer, and the battalion and event he was assigned to photograph.

As previously mentioned, Harry Knobel was an anomaly. He had little training to be a professional photographer or photojournalist; in fact his attestation form lists him as a mining engineer in August of 1914.<sup>75</sup> After the war, he would continue to work as a mining engineer in Port Arthur (now known as Thunder Bay).<sup>76</sup> His images did not form a significant portion of the visual record beyond 1916, likely due to the similarity between his images and those of fellow soldiers. The aesthetics of Knobel's photographs are remarkably similar to other private soldiers' photography found in scrapbooks. There is no clear artistic quality or purpose to the images, like with Castle and Rider-Rider's photographs. Instead the photographs reflect an attempt to capture the soldier's view of the war. This reflection of a soldier's life was enforced by the CWRO's lack of direction with the official photographs and the types of images they wanted to have. This communication lapse between Knobel and the CWRO led to Knobel capturing what he knew best.

The photographs produced in 1916 by Knobel were more personal than those of Ivor Castle or William Rider-Rider. Knobel's shots replicate the tone and aesthetics of private soldiers' photography. Many of Knobel's images focus on the everyday mundane elements of war, like the landscape punctuated by ruined buildings, group shots of soldiers, or, in the case of the censored negatives, a soldier's vantage point of the war. Knobel's photographs also contained a free sense

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<sup>75</sup> Knobel, Personnel File, Library and Archives Canada, RG150.

<sup>76</sup> Harry Knobel obituary, *Port Arthur Chronicle*, Thunder Bay Library and Public Archives.

of expression that is absent from Castle and Rider-Rider's images. That is to say that, Knobel's photographs lack a sense of composition and explicit narrative within the images. The stories told within his shots are open to interpretation and do not tell the audience about how well the CEF did overseas during a battle, nor do the photographs form a collective sense of the war, like other art media in 1916. Instead, these first few hundred official photographs reflected a sense that Knobel wanted to capture the routine of war and what soldiers got up to behind the front lines.

O.3 "The Morning Wash, 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion" (figure 2.1) is a typical example of Knobel's photographs. At first glance, the central focus of the photograph is a tree and the side of a tent. The middle ground is made of three clusters of men occupying themselves in a relatively open field. The background is filled out with a pond or other small body of water and various trees. The middle and backgrounds of the photograph are blurred and out of focus and as a result, the foreground visually dominates the image. This focus is created through the sharpness of the tree, as well as its high contrast compared to other elements in the image. The narrative of the image is dictated by its aesthetics. Because of the dominance of the tree, the viewer automatically assumes that the narrative is focused more on the relationship between the camera and nature, rather than the other people in the middle ground. The men in the middle ground are positioned as secondary to the story and add context to the natural space. It is also unclear why those men are in that natural environment and participating in casual conversation. Adding the CWRO assigned title "The Morning Wash" complicates this narrative. The title assumes that Knobel intended to capture the men getting ready, but Knobel's composition challenges this.

The middle ground is out of focus, blurry, and over-exposed. As a result, the viewer cannot clearly make out the details of the 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion men and the intent of the photograph becomes skewed. Aesthetically, it is difficult to determine Knobel's intention in taking the photograph and that intention is further complicated through the CWRO assigned name. This creates tension between Knobel and his photographic inexperience and the perceived intention of the CWRO.



Figure 2.1 – Harry Knobel, “O.3 “The Morning Wash, 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion” Library and Archives Canada, PA-

000003

Early cameras, even the press cameras, had a set aperture and depth of field. This means that the operator was unable to stand in one spot and turn the lens to adjust how much light was let into the camera (aperture) and what was in focus (depth of field). In order to adjust these two elements with early cameras, an individual would have to step backwards or forwards until they were able to have their subject matter in focus. The press cameras of the late 1880s developed separate aperture and depth of field controls, known as the f-stop or f-number, to easily adjust these elements without having to physically move.<sup>77</sup> Moving into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and into the First World War, the technologies of all cameras developed exponentially and the f-stop on the Goerz Anchultz camera preferred by the CWRO was certainly part of this expansion. In addition to bringing an object or person into focus, the f-stop also dictated what elements of the photograph might be over or underexposed. The over or underexposed elements could be adjusted in the darkroom with burning and dodging, but the extent of control that Knobel and Rider-Rider had over the darkroom processes is unclear in the CWRO documents.

Knobel's inexperience with press cameras and the overexposure of 0.3 also obscure the details of the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which only further complicates the photographic narrative. By adjusting the contrast and highlights in Adobe Photoshop, other details appear. While these adjustments are subtle, they bring up nuances in the photograph. The more significant details in the photograph is the man wearing cavalry breeches (arrow 1 in figure 2.2) and the man with his back to

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<sup>77</sup> In 21<sup>st</sup> century lenses, the typical f-stop range is  $f/2$  to  $f/16$  and is marked on the edge of the lens. At time of writing, I have not been able to see a First World War press camera to determine if this f-stop range is similar. Nor do I have a sense of what those f-stops might be.

the camera with a black patch (arrow 2 in figure 2.2). In terms of dress, the other men in the photograph are typical examples of soldiers and their uniforms by wearing trousers with puttees.<sup>78</sup> Individual 2 with the black patch is wearing a kilt with a badger. While this detail may not be obvious or even evident, the striping, shadows, and highlights of that particular area of the photograph indicate that the soldier is wearing a kilt with a sporran indicating that he is part of a highland regiment. The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion's historical record indicates that it was formed up as a highland regiment in Calgary and Winnipeg, so it would not be unusual for many men in the unit to wear a kilt and sporran.<sup>79</sup> But yet again this larger detail about the 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion is lost in Knobel's photographic inexperience.

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<sup>78</sup> Also called leg wraps, puttees were first worn by British soldiers in India who were allegedly inspired by local styles. In the CEF, puttees were standard issue and typically made out of wool. They wrapped around the leg, from the ankle up to the knee and kept out debris. Puttees also provided ankle support for the wearer and were a cheaper alternative to tall boots.

<sup>79</sup> RG 9-III-D-1, vol. 4691, folder 5 and D. Bercuson, *Official History of the Calgary Highlanders*. The 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion is perpetuated by the Calgary Highlanders.



Figure 2.2 – 0.3 “Morning Wash” 0.3 “The Morning Wash, 10<sup>th</sup> Battalion” PA-000003, altered by

Author



Figure 2.3 – Harry Knobel, 0.48. “March Past” Library and Archives Canada, PA-00141

By O.48 "March Past," (figure 2.3) Knobel had a better grasp of how to work his camera. The foreground of O.48 is grassy, while bushes and tall trees dominate the background. The middle ground is dominated by a mounted horse troop crossing the field. Based on the spatial distance between the horses, they appear to be three distinct lines of horses, with a commanding officer leading the march. Because of the distance placed between the camera and the horsemen, the details of the specific regiment are obscured and difficult to make out. But ultimately, these details do not matter in the photograph. The narrative created in the shot is of a strong group of able-bodied men and their horses demonstrating both their physical strength through the masculine action of horse riding and the strength of the CEF's cavalry. The strength of the cavalry is enforced by the cropping of the regiment. Knobel only provides the viewer with a part of the cavalry, which makes the viewer assume that this regiment is stronger than what is indicated in the photograph. The CWRO assigned name "March Past" aligns with the photographic narrative and, unlike O.3 "The Morning Wash," Knobel's intention is clear and unambiguous. This intentionality is further enforced with the clarity of the image. All portions of the photograph are in clear focus, with few elements over-exposed. The over-exposed elements like the grass and sky were likely Knobel's fault as they were elements he had control over while he was shooting. Other over-exposed parts can be accounted for in the development and darkroom process and the later digitization of the glass plate negative. That is to say that after the glass plate negative underwent development in the darkroom and was put through the enlarger to create the photograph, the light in the enlarger might not have been tuned properly to reflect a

clear image. O.47 and O.49 do not reflect the same over-exposure, and therefore one is able to conclude that the over-exposure is the result of the development process rather than the photographic process.<sup>80</sup> This flaw in the development process is further accentuated by the ambiguity of how and who developed Knobel's glass plate negatives. It is entirely possible that if Knobel was in charge of developing his own negatives, he might not have been aware of the intricacies of development, like dodging and burning, which essentially correct overdeveloped and underdeveloped sections of a photograph. If Knobel was not in charge of his own photographic development, they may have decided that these processes took too long to be worth the effort to produce a perfectly exposed photograph. The details of dodging and burning will be discussed later in the chapter, as they are more pertinent to Ivor Castle's aesthetic style.

Moving further into Knobel's tenure as the official war photographer, there is a shift in the nature of his photographs. The majority of Knobel's photographs focus on the military's medical units, like No. 3 Field Ambulance and No. 10 Casualty Clearing Station. These photographic series provide a general overview of how the medical units were set up, but more interestingly, these are the photographs from Knobel's period that start to resemble the photographs from the later war photo exhibitions. The photographs are refined and the subject matter is clear both in terms of the photograph's narrative, the camera's focus and the CWRO titled narrative. By July 1916, it is evident that Knobel was comfortable with his camera as

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<sup>80</sup> On occasion, LAC allows researchers to handle the glass plate negatives, but due to time constraints during research trips, the availability of the special collections archivists, and the rapid onset of COVID-19, access to the original glass plate of O.48 was not possible.

there are no longer significantly over- or under-exposed elements in his photographs and all portions of his shot are in perfect focus. There is also a clear shift in Knobel's photographic aesthetics as they now started to resemble the aesthetic styles of Castle and Rider-Rider in that Knobel started to depict the war through a narrative that informs the viewer of the war in Europe. This narrative is still very personal and communicates Knobel's experience of the war as a soldier, rather than a trained photographer.

O.162 "Nurses" especially reflects this shift in Knobel's photography. The focus of O162 is the four nurses and a soldier surrounding a small table in front of a tent. The ground is made up of taller summery grass and there are tall bushes or small trees behind the tent. All of the nurses are sitting down and three of them have teacups either in hand or just in front of them. The soldier is standing and is holding some sort of pitcher or container with a handle. It is unclear in the photograph if the soldier is a lower-ranking soldier or an orderly. What is clear, is the narrative of the shot. The nurses and soldier are enjoying a tea break. From other letters of nursing sisters and letters of soldiers serving in the medical unit, a tea break for the nursing sisters and ladies of the Voluntary Aid Detachment (VAD) was not only normal, but it was expected. This photographed moment enforced societal norms. Though VADs did not hold substantive rank, women on the front were respected and treated appropriately due to their rank and gender and that they were creating their own gendered space along the front. The gendered space created in O.162 is clear in the tent behind the group, as well as in the items on the table.



Figure 2.4 – Harry Knobel, O.162 “Nurses,” Library and Archives Canada, PA-000074.

In regards to the aesthetics of the photograph, Knobel has clearly refined his skill. The entirety of the shot is in clear focus, down to the details of the faces of the individuals. Many of Knobel’s earlier portrait photographs were overexposed and obscured the facial features of the people he was capturing. O.162, on the other hand, is a dramatic change. The aperture and exposure have been perfectly refined so that the viewer is able to discern the features of the people in the photograph and identify them. There is also a better sense of composition in the image. The viewer’s eye is drawn to the white-toned container in the soldier’s hand due to its strong contrast to the darker tones in his uniform. The eye is then drawn to the table and

the elements on it, before shifting to the faces of the women seated in a line, going counter-clockwise until the viewer's eye reaches the woman seated on the grass. This visual effect enforces the CWRO titular narrative as well as Knobel's intentions in shooting this moment. The photograph also enforces Knobel's experience of the war in a different way than before. In the last few months of his tenure as an official war photographer, Knobel's photographs fluctuate wildly between group portrait shots like O.162, ruined landscapes that are reminiscent of soldiers' photography, and CWRO-censored images.

Ivor Castle took over from Knobel in mid-1917.<sup>81</sup> This transition resulted in a dramatically different photographic narrative in the CWRO and the official war photographs. The narrative shifted from Knobel's personal photographs to photos that were well composed and told a comprehensive story about the CEF in every shot. This shift in narrative was due to Castle's aesthetic style and his expertise as a trained photographer. Beaverbrook noted in his correspondences that Castle was, "one of the greatest press photographers of our time," indicating that Castle's skill was a serious consideration upon his appointment to Official War Photographer.<sup>82</sup> Castle's skill is synonymous with photographic techniques in the late nineteenth century and the pictorialist movement, the use of darkroom techniques to create a narrative within a single produced image. This movement attempted to push photography beyond representation or replication of a moment into an artistic realm through the photographer's ability to tell a comprehensive story and by the

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<sup>81</sup> William Ivor Castle, Personnel File, Library and Archives Canada, RG150, accessed August 24, 2019. Canadian War Records Office, letters, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9-III-B-1, vol. 974, file 138.9.

<sup>82</sup> Beaverbrook letters, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9 -III-A-1, vol. 254, file 10-B-1.

First World War, this technique evolved and focused on the composition of the photograph. During Castle's tenure as official photographer, it is evident that his photographic style was highly influenced by the pictorialist movement and that the movement allowed Castle's photographs to gain popularity.

This shift in aesthetics in the CWRO is most evident in Figure 2.5 - O.977 "Mud bespattered Canadian Heroes Returning from trenches." Like the title suggests, the left side of the photograph depicts men walking back from the front lines, while the far-right side is taken up with men on horseback going towards the front lines. The striking feature of O.977 is the soldier leading the others who makes eye contact with the viewer.<sup>83</sup> This eye contact brings the viewer's eye into the photograph and forces the viewer to consider the faces of the other soldiers behind him and moves the viewer's eye over to the vanishing point of the photograph and then over to the horses. By using a vanishing point, Castle employs a Renaissance technique called linear perspective, which is where an artist is able to represent space within the painting/frame. In the photograph, linear perspective creates visual interest and forces the viewer's eye to move and creates a comprehensive visual narrative. The linear perspective is also exaggerated through the angles in which Castle shot. In all of his war photos, Castle shot at a 45-degree angle to his subject.<sup>84</sup> This 45-degree angle exaggerates the use of linear perspective and enforces the artistic, photorealist

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<sup>83</sup> Through the process of research during for this thesis, I have been able to help identify the soldier as Alphonse Racicot. Racicot was a Sergeant in 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Library and Archives Canada and the Canadian War Museum have updated their photographic records to include his name.

<sup>84</sup> Carla-Jean Stokes, "Beyond 'The Taking of Vimy Ridge'" *JMSS*, 186.

movement Castle was party to. By exaggerating linear perspective, Castle further emphasized long-established art history techniques help enhance his storytelling.



Figure 2.5 – William Ivor Castle, 0.997 “Mud bespattered Canadian Heroes Returning from trenches,”

Library and Archives Canada, PA- 000832.

Another defining aesthetic feature to Castle’s photographs is his manipulation of the photograph. In the CWRO records, and in early Canadian war photo histories, William Rider-Rider noted that Castle often liked to pose soldiers so he could get the shot he wanted. Rider-Rider noted that it was particularly difficult

for him to get authentic photographs of the war because soldiers were used to posing for the photograph, or being told how they ought to behave in order for the official war photographer to capture an image.<sup>85</sup> For historians and others interested in the visual narrative of an image, this manipulation challenges what a “real” photograph of the war could be. It was not a simple mechanical manipulation, as Charles Baudelaire suggested in “On Photography.”<sup>86</sup> For folks in the early twentieth century, there was no expectation that the photographs represented the “true” or “real” state of the war. They were vignettes or narratives that represented what was going on overseas. Adults recognized that these photographs, like the mail from their son, brother, father, or husband overseas, was censored and showed them a portion of the war that was deemed appropriate. Yet, there was also an understanding that the camera represented truth because people could pay for portrait photographs and tintypes at carnivals and world fairs in the nineteenth century. These inexpensive photographs captured the individual and communicated their likeness back to them, thus asserting that a photograph produced a truthful image. This ease and affordability of photographs allowed Victorians to understand that the camera could record a moment in time and therefore tell a potential truth about a specific moment.<sup>87</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Rider-Rider CWRO correspondence, Library and Archives Canada, RG 9-III-C-3, vol. 4063, folder 3, file 6.

<sup>86</sup> Charles Baudelaire, “On Photography” in *The Mirror of Art*, trad. Jonathan Mayne (London: Phaidon Press, 1955).

<sup>87</sup> John Tagg, “Evidence, Truth and Order: Photographic Records and the Growth of the State,” in *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993.), 257.

The official war photographs also reflected Edwardian and late Victorian sensibilities and culture. The photographs acted as propaganda for the Canadian Expeditionary Force and therefore had to reflect what the public expected to see, as well as enforce a victorious narrative since they were filtered through the CWRO. The narrative presented by O.997 is evident in the mud-covered soldiers passing by the camera. The number of soldiers and their movement away from the front lines and a rest area indicates that the battle was successful. The horses on the right-hand side of the image are in sharp focus with little or no blurring, indicating that the officers on horseback are not in a rush to get to the front. The title of the photograph, “Mud bespattered Canadian Heroes Returning from Trenches,” further enforces the narrative of the photograph. The war photo ledger indicates that this photograph was taken in November 1916 at the Battle of the Somme.<sup>88</sup> But an overview of the CEF’s action report indicates this photograph was likely taken around the same time as the Battle of Regina Trench, which occurred in November 1916.<sup>89</sup> The soldier looking direct at the camera, identified as Alphonse Racicot, not only challenges the narrative of the photograph but the time when the photograph was taken.<sup>90</sup> According to Racicot’s file, he was declared illegally absent from his battalion since

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<sup>88</sup> Catalogue of War Photos, Library and Archives Canada, RG24, vol. 22019.

<sup>89</sup> War Diaries, 23rd Reserve Battalion, Library and Archives Canada, RG9 III-D-3, vol. 4952, file no. 480. Accessed April 4, 2020.

<sup>90</sup> In May 2019, while conducting research on this photograph at Library and Archives Canada, Racicot was identified by his grand nephew. In the days following, the grand nephew produced a family scrapbook with a reproduction of this photograph with Racicot circled with the caption “me.” This scrapbook remains in the family’s possession.

It should be noted that there is a discrepancy between Racicot’s rank in 1916 and the rank depicted in the photograph. In November 1916, Racicot was a private and was not appointed a sergeant until August 10, 1917. This discrepancy might be attributed to Castle’s narrative-making through staged photographs.

July 7, 1916 and was struck off strength from August 21, 1916.<sup>91</sup> Being struck off strength means that he was not posted to the front, and therefore could not have been involved in the fighting. However, because he was given detention by the District Court Marital, it is possible that part of his detention involved labour or other work in the area behind the front lines, where Castle was assigned to take photographs. None of the war photographers were allowed on the front lines as they were likely to interfere with soldiers and the battle since their equipment was bulky and hard to carry around and move easily. The photographers were also a possible threat since photographers could only shoot in good weather and light conditions, the gleam of their camera lens was reflected across No Man's Land and would have made the photographers a target for German snipers. When combined with Racicot's service record indicates that it was entirely possible for Castle to have taken O.997 from behind the lines in October 1916.

It is less likely that O.997 was taken before October 1916 due to three visual cues on the photograph. The first visual cue is the presence of the tree in the background, which is just to the left of centre in the background. The tree is missing its leaves, which indicates that the leaves on the tree have fallen off due to weather. The second visual cue is the foreground. The mud and other tracks look stiff and Racicot's boot does not sink into the mud beneath his feet. The ground is cold enough that there is little to no give in the mud and is an indicator of mid to late fall in Northern France. The other clue that the left side of the photograph was taken in October is the great coats on the soldiers. First World War great coats were made up

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<sup>91</sup> Alphonse Racicot, Personnel file, LAC, RG150, p. 25.

of heavy felted wool and were designed to sit over a soldiers' regular uniform to keep them warm in the winter months. The last inaccuracy in the photograph is the horse's rear end and how it is malformed.

These visual inaccuracies are evidence of Castle's pictorialist training. The early pictorialist movement encouraged photographers to blend and merge multiple photographs to create a composite image that tells a narrative. O.997 is one of many Castle photographs that clearly demonstrate his use of photographic manipulation to tell a specific narrative. As discussed previously, the right side of the photograph depicts officers on horseback moving away from the camera, and presumably towards the trenches. But the shadows in the right side of the photograph do not follow the same rules as the left-hand side. The shadows on the right fall to the left of the objects, whereas on the left side, the shadows fall to the immediate back of the object. This shadow is emphasized with the Castle's shadow in the front middle of the photograph. The other obvious peculiarity with this photograph is the missing horse butt immediately above Castle's shadow. The proportions of the horse's rear end are wrong, with the right side appearing to be better formed than the other and much darker than the left side. The left side of the horse is greyed and appears to be cut off. This shadow effect on the horse's butt is an indicator of dodging and burning, which is darkroom process that allows a photographer to adjust an image.<sup>92</sup> After a photo negative is developed and "fixed" with chemicals, the photographer can slide the negative into an enlarger. The enlarger allows light to pass through the glass plate and onto light-sensitive paper to produce a positive so the photographer can

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<sup>92</sup> Part of the photographic series used to stitch O.997 together can be found in figure 3.2 on page 89.

view the final result. Sometime in this process areas of a negative can be too dark and the photographer can dodge the image by waving a hand or a paddle over the area to prevent it from getting too dark. This forced other parts of the photograph to burn into the paper and become darker. This process was perfected and brought further into photography by the pictorialists who used dodging and burning to compile multiple negatives onto one shot.<sup>93</sup> In 1897, Castle used dodging and burning to fuse the left and right sides of the image together. This manipulation is evident in the awkwardness of the horse's rear end since Castle likely used his cupped hand to fuse the photograph at that point. This peculiarity is further emphasized by the photographer's shadow in the foreground, which directs the viewer's eye upwards into this join in the photograph. If it was not for these two points, Castle's photomanipulation would not have been as evident.

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<sup>93</sup> The most obvious example of pictorialist photography is Oscar Gustave Reijlander's *The Two Ways of Life* (1857, carbon print at the MET Museum), which is a large format photograph that is comprised of over 30 negatives composited into a single frame.



Figure 2.6 – O.1162 “29th Infantry Battalion advancing over “No Man’s Land” through the German barbed wire and heavy fire during the battle of Vimy Ridge” better known as “The Taking of Vimy Ridge, Library and Archives Canada, PA- 001020

In her article “Beyond ‘The Taking of Vimy Ridge: The War Photographs of William Ivor Castle,” Carla-Jean Stokes examines O.1162 “The Taking of Vimy Ridge” and details the specifics of Castle’s photo manipulation. As part of this discussion, she argues that O.1162 (figure 2.6) was a representation of what the battle of Vimy Ridge was supposed to look like and what the photograph was of.<sup>94</sup> “The Taking of

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<sup>94</sup> Stokes, “Beyond ‘The Taking of Vimy Ridge,’” *JMSS*, vol 18, no 2 (2017).

Vimy Ridge” is an excellent example of Castle’s pictorialist training and visual storytelling. The central focus of the photograph is comprised of soldiers walking in the middle ground with the intermittent dark clouds in the background creating an atmosphere of battle. In this photograph, Castle’s photo manipulations skills are concealed and less evident upon first glance for they are hidden in the various set of soldiers in the image. There are only two indicators of photomanipulation in O.1162, with the first being the lack of contrast in the entire photograph. All the figures and details are washed out, and replicate some of Knobel’s early photographic techniques, but unlike Knobel, this overexposure is the result of perfecting a single narrative, rather unrefined skill. Castle was able to produce images with high contrast, and in the case of O.1162, the overexposure denotes a high level of skill. In later reproductions of O.1162, the contrast is improved, and the viewer can make out more of the details of the photograph (figure 2.7). The second indicator of Castle’s darkroom manipulation is similarities between the soldiers along the field. The cluster of soldiers in the far left-hand side of the photograph appear to be a replication of soldiers in the middle ground; more specifically, the five men in the far left-hand side of the photograph are the same five men in the middle righthand of the photograph. The points of the image are identical, and a comparison of the key points of the two groups of men prove that they are the same individuals (arrows added to 2.7 emphasize the similarities).



Figure 2.7 – O.1162 “29th Infantry Battalion advancing over “No Man’s Land” through the German barbed wire and heavy fire during the battle of Vimy Ridge” better known as “The Taking of Vimy Ridge, Library and Archives Canada, PA- 001086. Altered from the original by author.

The CWRO’s photographic shift, under Castle’s tenure as war photographer, indicates that Beaverbrook and his staff were more concerned with promoting an idealistic representation of the Western Front and the Canadian Expeditionary Force, rather than the supposed goal of documenting the war. The aesthetics of the war photographs shifted out of necessity. By the time Castle was appointed war photographer, the war had gone on for over two years and there was a necessity on the part of the CWRO to produce photographs that could support propagandist

narratives formed by the CWRO through works like *Canadians in Khaki*, *Canadians in Flanders*, and propaganda posters. Castle's background as a press photographer allowed the CWRO to capitalize on visually stunning images that also told appropriate narratives to families at home. Castle's training in pictorialist photography was able to create and maintain a sense of morale through the victory narratives found in O.997 and O.1162. By mid-1917 there was a third shift in the aesthetics in the official photographers when William Rider-Rider was hired first as assistant to Castle and later as the official war photographer.

The shift in aesthetics in the Canadian official war photographs was gradual and took place over a series of weeks, rather than all at once, like with Castle's takeover from Knobel. At first, the shift in war photographs is indiscernible, as many of the official photographs have a similar forty-five-degree slant to them, creating Castle's dynamism. There is still a strong narrative sense within the photographs, perhaps even more so with Rider-Rider's tenure as an official war photographer, but the aesthetics and techniques employed in the official war photographs have clearly shifted by September 1917. At this point, the records at Library and Archives Canada indicate that Rider-Rider had completely taken over as war photographer as his name is attached to all the photographic records from this point onwards. For the majority of the war photographs' history, they would be completely attributed to Rider-Rider in the post-war period. It was only recently that the historiography has shifted to recognize all three photographers occurred. This recent recognition leaves some questions as to when Rider-Rider started as Castle's assistant and when he became the official war photographer, as this is not clarified in Personnel records or

CWRO files. It is certain that by October 1917, Rider-Rider was the sole war photographer as the war photographs had shifted from a set narrative to a more photojournalistic style. This is to say that the photographs that were taken in the late war period, which comprise almost half the entire collection, resemble photographs taken by American photographers in the early war period. This last half of the war photos are not manipulated like Castle's were to tell a single narrative. Instead, the photographs document moments of the battle in strikingly poignant ways.

Rider-Rider made a conscious effort to avoid posing and dictating how soldiers moved during a battle. He aimed to capture an authentic post-action photograph rather than a photograph that was staged to connote action like Castle. Rider-Rider's photographs explicitly depict the aftermath of the battle and how soldiers reacted or coped with their situation. Rider-Rider also explicitly worked to avoid having soldiers pose for him like Castle did. In an interview conducted in 1973, Rider-Rider noted how difficult it was for him to photograph soldiers because they were accustomed to Castle's instructions on how to pose and act.<sup>95</sup> This inability to create an "authentic" photograph of the late war influenced the ways in which Rider-Rider approached his subject. In his 1917 photographs, Rider-Rider consciously tried to capture soldiers when they did not notice him, so many of the soldiers have their heads down or are not actively aware of Rider-Rider. It was difficult to miss Rider-Rider's presence because of the bulkiness of the camera and its associated equipment, but the appearance and perception of the 1917 subject-

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<sup>95</sup> Rider-Rider Interview, Library and Archives Canada.

based photographs allude to Rider-Rider's conscious effort to differentiate his aesthetic style from Castle's.

Rider-Rider also appears to have made a conscious effort to avoid manipulations like Castle's. Instead of using photographic manipulation to produce a narrative story within the photograph, Rider-Rider used photo manipulation to further a sentiment or explain a feeling within a photographic series. Rider-Rider's manipulations took on an implied narrative rather than an explicit story. O.2264 entitled "Passchendaele, now a Field of Mud" (figure 2.8) is an example of Rider-Rider's use of photo manipulation to create a tone that alludes to a story narrative, rather than explicitly creating a narrative. The photograph captures a sense of enormity and desolation. There is a visual dynamism to the muddy foreground because all shapes are not uniform and the viewer can almost make out the footprints in the mud. This foreground is punctuated by the shell holes that have filled with water. The middle ground is dominated by the remnants of trees that jut up from the desolate landscape that passes diagonally along the photograph. These trees become the focal point of the photograph and the viewer's eyes almost pass over the lone soldier standing in the middle of the photograph. This soldier blends into the trees, almost becoming one of them. This lone soldier, visually lost amongst the trees, becomes the focal point of the photograph and Rider-Rider's expressiveness. The soldier, by blending in and almost getting lost into the trees, captures the vastness of the destruction and the enormity of it all. This vastness is emphasized by Rider-Rider's ability to manipulate his photographs to create a long panoramic shot. O.2264 was comprised of four different shots that were stitched

together to create the panoramic. The stitching work is seamless but provides the viewer with the aforementioned sense of vastness. Yet, there is something in the tone of the photograph that enforces the spirit of the Canadians in the latter half of the First World War. Employing the lens of the CWRO and its ability to use war photographs as promotional material or propaganda, O.2264 can be interpreted differently.



Figure 2.8 – William Rider-Rider, O.2246 “Passchendaele, now a field of mud. November, 1917,”

Library and Archives Canada, PA- 040139.

O.2264 was taken after the battle of Passchendaele when the CEF was ordered to recapture the town of Passchendaele. It was a four-part set-piece attack designed by General Arthur Currie to recapture the town in two weeks. The battle attack was uphill and was done through the muck and mire of the early fall weather in Belgium and over 4 000 Canadian soldiers died, with another 12,000 wounded.<sup>96</sup> While O.2204 speaks to this narrative, it also says something about the resiliency

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<sup>96</sup> Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Penguin, 2008), p. 340, and 352.

and ability of the Canadian Corps. By December 1917, the CEF was nicknamed the shock troops. They were often called in to help the allied forces when the battle had gotten rough and the tactics employed by the Generals and executed by the CEF were able to shock the Germans. This shock troop nomenclature affirmed the sense of victory produced at Vimy Ridge. The Canadians, despite all odds, were able to capture a difficult position. O.2204 helped illustrate and enforce this emerging shock troop narrative because of the lone soldier in the centre of the picture. The lone soldier embodied the resiliency of the CEF, as he stands alone among the trees taking a moment in the aftermath of the battle. By producing an image like O.2204, Rider-Rider, and the CWRO as a whole was able to enforce a narrative that supported the CEF's skill and abilities and justified the Canadian's presence in 1918, while also acknowledging the loss and impact of war on the landscape, and people. Panoramic images like O.2204 became increasingly popular in 1918 and 1919 with various charity photo exhibitions, which are discussed in Chapter 3.

One of the last photographs of the war, O. 3656 "42nd Battalion resting in the Grand Place, Mons, on the morning of the 11th November, 1918" (figure 2.9) demonstrates Rider-Rider's spontaneous photographic style, as well as the aesthetic difference between both Castle and Knobel's war photographs. The central focus of O. 3656 is a group of soldiers in the cobbled market square. Most of the people captured in the image are standing, but there is a lump of gear just off centre in the photo. At first glance, this pile of gear appears to be discarded of rucksacks and helmets, but upon further inspection, the pile is comprised of soldiers who are taking a moment to rest. This is clearly illustrated with the soldier in the lower

centre of the image with his eyes closed with his head on a bag. While the subject matter is different from his 1917 photographs, O.3656 still contains a sense of atmosphere and mood. In this case, the atmosphere is created by the chaos of the photograph. Everyone in the photograph is facing a different direction and many of the people are blurry, creating a sense of spontaneity in the photo. Knobel's photographs were also blurry, but his photographs were blurry overall indicating a lack of skill, rather than a command of photographic technologies. O.3656 is in sharp relief, with contrasting tones and clear lines. The depth of field across the entire photograph is consistent and allows the viewer to see small details like how the women pinned their hair, or the bricks on the building towards the top of the photograph. Photographs like O.48 do not have the same level of detail. The horsemen in the first row are barely discernable and the entire background blurred, thus indicating a knowledge gap in how to adjust the aperture to increase the depth of field, providing clear lines. Compared to Castle's photographs, O.3656 lacks a larger compositional narrative because it is not carefully constructed with all of the pieces of the narrative in sharp focus, thus adding to the chaotic feeling of the image. But as stated before with O.2204, Rider-Rider preferred to capture a sentiment that conveyed a narrative, rather than construct an explicit narrative within the frame. O.3656 is a continuation of this aesthetic style, and with the inclusion of individuals, Rider-Rider is able to push that narrative via sentiment style into its stylistic conclusion.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> By this point in the war, Rider-Rider had taken group photographs of soldiers, many of them had that spontaneous sentiment in them. When understood as a set of photographs, O.3656 is the reasonable aesthetic conclusion to Rider-Rider's wartime photographic style.



Figure 2.9 – William Rider-Rider, 0.3656 “42nd Battalion resting in the Grand Place, Mons, on the morning of the 11th November, 1918,” Library and Archives Canada, PA- 003571.

In the twentieth century, Rider-Rider was credited with taking all of the Canadian war photographs, an understandable conclusion when examining the body of war photography as a whole.<sup>98</sup> Aesthetically, 0.3656 might be considered a progression from 0.3 and 0.48, which were discussed earlier in this chapter. All three sets of photographs are wider group shots, with a similar approach to

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<sup>98</sup> Peter Robertson, “Introduction” in *Restless Verity* (Toronto; University of Toronto Press, 1974) and Joerg *Cameras at War: A History of Photography from 1848 to Present* (Chartwell Books, 1987), p.20

capturing the war. They attempted to capture groups of people caught up in the middle of the war. When considering Knobel's progression in photographic style between 0.3, 0.48 and 0.162, it was a reasonable conclusion to assume that the first few hundred war photographs and the latter half of the catalogue of war photos were produced by the same person. Yet, there is something aesthetically different in Rider-Rider's treatment of people that differentiates his work from that of Knobel. Rider-Rider's style is defined by his sense of spontaneity, which is punctuated by the blurriness of particular parts of the photograph. This style alludes to early twentieth century sports photographers and their skill in capturing animals and cars in motion.<sup>99</sup> This blurred technique took a great deal of skill to execute well. In deliberately blurring portions of 0.3565, Rider-Rider is able to capture the mood and atmosphere of the square. The context of the photograph and its title explains the details of the crowded square and informs the viewer of the atmosphere. "42<sup>nd</sup> Battalion resting in the Grand Place at Mons, on the morning of November 11, 1918" marked the start of armistice and the end of the war, and the captured sentiment of those involved. There is some sense of celebration with people milling about the square and the blurriness of some of the individuals, but the tone of the photograph is dominated by the soldiers just off centre, who have laid down on the ground, presumably in a state of exhaustion, and to take a nap.

In addition to his ability to capture the mood and public opinion of the war, Rider-Rider also deviated from the typical narrative of the war by capturing the experiences of the Black Reconstruction Battalion, the Chinese Labour Corps, and

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<sup>99</sup> For more on these techniques see *A History of Photography From 1839 to Present* (Tashen, 2019).

well-known Indigenous soldiers, like Tommy Longboat. Of the 4,708 photographs of the war, Rider-Rider took thirty photographs of marginalized soldiers. This small set of photographs offers insights into the lives of marginalized soldiers and their experiences of the war.

O.1496, "Pte. [Cogwagee] Tom Longboat the Indian long distance runner buying a paper from a little French newspaper boy. June, 1917" demonstrates the ways in which Indigenous soldiers were both part of the CEF and separate from it. The circumstance surrounding Indigenous enlistment in both the First and Second World War varied as did their experiences.<sup>100</sup> While Cogwagee Thomas Longboat's experience is only briefly captured in O.1496, it is able to communicate the ways in which soldiers interacted with each other and with civilians on the Western Front and provides historians with a visual understanding of commodity exchange in the First World War. Following Jennifer Wellington's argument that the photographs were used as recruitment tools, O.1496 emphasizes the successes of Indigenous peoples in the CEF and their ability to "improve" and integrate themselves into settler society. By photographing an acclaimed runner, Rider-Rider used his image to promote the successes of marginalized peoples. But it should be noted that this image has only gained popularity in the twenty-first century as a result of colourization of First World War photographs. The images of racialized peoples were not popular during the war, or in the post-war period.

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<sup>100</sup> For more information on Indigenous enlistment see Yale D. Belanger and Billy Wadsworth "It's My Duty... To Be a Warrior of the People": Kainai Perceptions of and Participation in the Canadian and American Forces" in *Prairie Forum*, 33, no. 2 (2008): 297-322; Matthias Joost, "Racism and Enlistment: The Second World War Policies of the Royal Canadian Air Force." *Canadian Military History*, 21 no. 1 (2015); Steve Marti, "Embattled Communities: Voluntary Action and Identity in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, 1914-1918" (PhD. Diss., University of Western Ontario, 2015).

Photograph O.2450 “Chinese Labour Battalions in France celebrating the Chinese New Year on 11th February, 1918” (figure 2.10) demonstrates the ways in which Chinese soldiers adapted their religious practices in wartime and provide brief insight into the experiences of marginalized groups during the First World War. Both of these photographs also point to the commodification and spectacle of racialized bodies. In capturing images of the Chinese Labour Battalion praying during Lunar New Year, Rider-Rider takes part in “othering” reducing these individuals to spectacle by emphasizing the difference between the Chinese labourers and the predominately White Anglo-Saxon men that participated in the war. O.2450 also emphasizes the importance of the photograph as a fragment of the past. O.2450 indicates the importance of the Lunar New Year because of the space and time dedicated to the event by those who celebrate it. In order to fully understand the context of this photograph, more studies into the Chinese labour corps and their role in the CEF is necessary.



Figure 2.10 – William Rider-Rider, O.2450 “Chinese Labour Battalions in France Celebrating the Chinese New Year,” Library and Archives Canada, PA- 002421.

Lord Beaverbrook’s shift to producing an official photographic record was dictated by exterior influences like the pressures of American photojournalism, the implementation of Routine Order 186 and its censorship of the visual record, and the slow process of painting and other high arts. In attempting to capture a photographic record of the war, the CWRO was constrained by its photographers. Ultimately while the photographic record was coopted by the CWRO as a propaganda tool, the photographs produced by the Harry Knobel, William Ivor

Castle, and William Rider-Rider depict their own personal experiences of the war that were then transformed into a grander narrative through their use as propaganda. Knobel's photographs reflected a personal narrative influenced by his experiences serving at the Second Battle of Ypres as well as his slow adaptation to new photographic technologies. As part of this, many of Knobel's photographs were censored due to their contents as he lacked a sense of what was appropriate for inclusion into a larger narrative. William Ivor Castle's photographs shifted the CWRO photographic record and denoted the start of the professionalization of the record. His photographs were technically excellent. Marked by his forty-five-degree angles, and use of darkroom manipulation, Castle was able to produce a photographic narrative that suited the CRWO's intentions. William Rider-Rider's photographs were different from both Knobel and Castle. His aesthetic style was closer to Knobel's since he captured the spontaneous energy of the war, while also reflecting public opinion about the battles and circumstances the CEF found themselves in. His visual record included the experiences of marginalized soldiers, which despite their exclusion from the post-war narrative, indicated a sense that all soldiers experiences, regardless of rank or race, shared moments that were not dissimilar from each other.

### **Chapter Three – Capturing Art: Popularizing War Photography**

Starting in 1917, the CWRO started circulating the official photographs through books, newspapers, and eventually exhibitions. Through these popular media, the CWRO was able to perpetuate a carefully constructed photographic narrative of the war, and when combined with the Canadian War Memorial Fund (CWMF), which was the charitable arm of the CWRO, shaped the entire visual record of the war. This chapter argues that the places where the photographs appeared along with their frequency allowed a handful of photographs to dominate the visual record of the First World War. In conjunction with this, their rise as an artistic medium helped perpetuate the set narrative of the war. As mentioned in the previous chapter, William Rider-Rider and William Ivor Castle were two professional press photographers hired by Lord Beaverbrook to document the Canadian wartime experience. Their experience and aesthetics helped professionalize wartime photography through the CWRO's commission of their work, but also through the ways in which the CWRO capitalized and commodified their works. This commodification process, along with the censorship of private photographs, led to the official photographs dominating the visual record of the First World War. As seen in the first chapter, the private photographic record of the war was often woven into the official record of the war, with soldiers purchasing copies of official photographs and coopting those images to demonstrate and exemplify their life on the western front. This integration of the official photos into private memory enforced Rider-Rider and Ivor Castle's ability to capture the war as soldiers

experienced it. But this integration of the photographs into the private photographic record of the war started long before those photographic albums were compiled in the post-war period.

In 1916, the CWRO started producing its own cultural content, including books, such as Beaverbrook's *Canadians in Flanders*, and magazines such as *The Canadian War Pictorial* and *Canada in Khaki*, as well as trench newspapers like *In and Out*. The photographs contained in these written documents were the photographs produced by Castle and Rider-Rider and were chosen by the CWRO based on the availability of the photographs and their publication date. It should be noted that these photographs had their assigned titles changed to fit into the magazine and book formats; their O numbers were removed, and they were not directly attributed to any of the three official photographers. These processes eliminated the histories of the war photographers and streamlined the narrative into one of wartime photographic progression produced by an individual. Early histories of Canadian war photography assert this idea by attributing all the CWRO photographs to William Rider-Rider. It was not until the 1970s with Rider-Rider's interview with Library and Archives Canada and journal articles like Peter Robertson's that the production of the official photographic narrative built by the CWRO was attributed to multiple photographers. Even now, LAC's Special Collections and the Canadian War Museum's Research Centre have gaps in their metadata and perpetuate this single photographer narrative that was started during the war. But the single photographer to which the photographs are attributed shifts and changes over the course of the war.

The official photographs included in the *Canadian War Pictorial*, *Canadians in Khaki*, and *In and Out* follow a specific narrative that intersects with the aesthetics of the war photographers. While there is no stated date on the cover of *The Canadian War Pictorial*, the images contained in it are of a personal nature. They reflect the everyday goings-on on the front and provide insight into the lives of soldiers overseas. Printed in 1917, *Canadians in Khaki* integrated drawings, paintings, and photographs into the written record of the war. The magazine is a larger tome with the first issue containing 170 numbered pages, twenty pages of adverts, and over twenty-four coloured image plates scattered throughout the publication. The coloured plates contain drawings and other visual allegories of Canada's wartime efforts, but the vast majority of the plates show official war photographs. These photographs range from images of soldiers returning from battle to line up of German prisoners of war to photographs of war machinery. But no attribution is given to the photographs beyond the acknowledgement of "Canadian Official Photograph" in the right-hand corner below the photograph. The written content of the magazine is often unrelated to the image plates placed around them. The written works are personal essays such as Captain Carleton McNaught's "Private Brown, Hero," which outlines how a soldier, George Adolphus Brown, came to earn a Distinguished Conduct Medal in battle.<sup>101</sup> But the photographs placed around the essay depict a biplane that has landed on a trench and the examination of German machine guns (see figure 3.1). McNaughton's story does not mention either of these

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<sup>101</sup> Captain Carleton McNaught, "Private Brown, Hero" in *Canadians in Khaki*, Issue 1, 1917. Part of the Ley and Lois Smith Research Collection.

pieces of technology as the central focus of the essay. Instead, the two narratives are unable to have a dialogue with each other. They do not support each other, forcing the reader to examine the photo plates as a series of pretty pictures. When read in this manner, the photographs support Allan Sekula's argument that the photographic archive, and the curated photo books made from them, affirm a progressive narrative of truth and reality, operating as spectacle, rather than a way to understand the constructed past.<sup>102</sup> The collection of photographs in the first issue of *Canada in Khaki* enforce this since their arrangement forces the reader to look at the pictures as separate from the essays and poems in the volume. The photographs with their emphasis on war technology and the implied Canadian superiority over the Germans (demonstrated by the photographs of German prisoners of war and abundance of Canadian soldiers returning from the front) present a progressive narrative. It is through the advances of technology that the CEF was able to succeed overseas. The written narrative emphasises the personal bravery of individual soldiers and the more joyful experiences overseas, creating a different narrative of the war that reflects the subversive nature of post-war memory. Yet despite the clash of these two narratives, the Canadian War Memorials Fund (CWMF) was able to combine the them into a single narrative of the war.

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<sup>102</sup> Allan Sekula, "Reading an Archive: Photography Between Labour and Archive" in *The Photographic Reader*, ed. Liz Wells (Routledge: New York): 447-448.



AN AEROPLANE LANDS ON THE TOP OF A TRENCH



EXAMINING A WRECKED GERMAN FIELD GUN

*Canadian Official Photographs*

Figure 3.1 – Digital scan of *Canada in Khaki*, volume 1. Original copy is part of the Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario.

Despite the detachment of the photographs from the personal essays and poems, the CWMF used the photographs to guide the reader's imagination. If the ink stamped address on the inside cover of the first issue of *Canada in Khaki* is correct, then the magazine circulated in a private home in London, Ontario and likely served as a source of information about the war and functioned much like the twenty-first-century coffee table book.<sup>103</sup> The information contained in *Canada in Khaki* was primarily used to demonstrate knowledge of the war overseas.

The photographs in the magazine worked to supplement the written narratives that were published alongside it and illustrate the conditions in which soldiers lived. Read in this manner, the photographic and written narratives are not disjointed; instead, they work with each other to force the reader to use the imagination to fill the space between the two narratives. The poems and personal essays are short and intended to be read quickly, while the white glossier photographic plates are identifiable from the rest of the magazine, allowing the reader to flip quickly between them. The carefully selected photographs can be read as a set of images that supplement individual stories, as opposed to photographs read as interruptions in the written narrative. This process forces the reader to use their imagination to carry the story from one set of images to the other, thus creating a cohesive whole rather than two detached narratives that cannot or do not speak to each other.

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<sup>103</sup> The address stamp references a private home in London, Ontario, so in the interest of keeping privacy of any current or future occupants, the address will be kept confidential.

The carefully curated photographs contained in *Canadians in Khaki* must then be able to tell a story with imaginative work from the reader, creating a visually literate reader. It is this curation process that narrowed the photographic narrative of the war and started the process of reducing the 4,705 photographs to a mere few dozen “iconic” photos since the CWMF needed to pick photographs that effectively communicated a general sense of the war to the viewer. It is at this point that the aesthetics of the official war photographers become an essential part of the communication process. Knobel’s photographs were too personal and therefore too ambiguous to impart a concrete story to the general public. Castle’s photographic manipulation, on the other hand, was able not only to build a narrative within the frame, but the series of photographs he took to build his manipulated composites. The series of photographs he took in preparation to create O.997 are featured in the middle of the magazine (see figure 3.2). While these photographs are not the manipulated image, they are able to tell the aftermath of McNaught’s heroic Private Brown as they represent soldiers coming back from a hard-won battle. The caption to the photographs clarifies this narrative and start to show the reader how to become visually literate, removing the ambiguity and allowing the reader to use their imagination to fill the narrative space between the written and visual narratives.



CANADIAN TROOPS RETURNING FROM THE TRENCHES

On the way they pass pack mules loaded with ammunition going up to the front

*Canadian Official Photographs*

Figure 3.2 - Digital scan of *Canada in Khaki*, volume 2. Original copy is part of the Ley and Lois Smith War, Memory and Popular Culture Research Collection at the University of Western Ontario.

Trench newspapers such as the Canadian Field Ambulance's *In and Out*, used photographs in a different way. They did not need to produce a narrative for the home front. Instead, trench newspapers were written for soldiers by soldiers. Their written contents did not feed into a patriotic and personal narrative that supported the war, like *Canadians in Khaki* did. Instead these newspapers are full of insider jokes like "A Headline in the *Canadian Record* of January 20<sup>th</sup>. 'Worst Jam in 15 years.' Correspondent wished to know if the Food Controller had been in France lately."<sup>104</sup> The official photographs contained in the first issue of *In and Out* reflected this emic approach. In lieu of the technology of war or the men returning from the lines, *In and Out's* photographs are devoid of pretence and reflect familiar realities. One particular photograph entitled "'Kulture' exemplified in the suburbs of Lens" depicts two soldiers walking down a road, where the majority of the buildings have been reduced to ruin. The inside joke noted that Germany, as a result of Prussian corruption, had embraced a new culture of brutalism and violence and had thus affected the cultural heritage of France. The narrative of the official photographs was repurposed to accentuate trench humour and jokes among the soldiers. The images were designed to supplement the humour found in the trench newspapers and provide relief rather than bridge two different narratives.

Unlike the other CWRO-sanctioned works, *The Canadian War Pictorial* was the first magazine to directly acknowledge the official war photographer and give him an identity. *Canadians in Khaki* gave an unnamed photographer space to discuss the process of taking war photos but left Castle's identity ambiguous. The preface to

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<sup>104</sup> Unknown, *In and Out*, Trench Newspaper, p.11, Ley and Lois Research Collection.

*The Canadian War Pictorial's* first issue explicitly credits the photographer: "the task of making a pictorial record of the war rests now in the hands of a very limited number of Official Photographers...This officer was a member of the First Canadian Division long before he became the authorized photographer of the Corps. He joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force at Valcartier... in August 1915."<sup>105</sup> While the photographer is left unnamed, the details of his service reference Harry Knobel and his experiences prior to his appointment as a war photographer. This is the first and only time a photographer is referenced, as the other three issues of the magazine are devoid of similar references. In addition, there are oddities among the photographs contained in the first issue. The vast majority of the photographs are more in line with the aesthetics of William Ivor Castle, rather than Knobel. Knobel's hallmarks align with private photographs of war, since they are often overexposed, a little blurred, and generally they look like the travel photographs found in private photograph albums. The photographs contained in *The Canadian War Pictorial's* first issue have a clear sense of the photographer's intention and are taken in forty-five-degree angles from the subjects. This latter point of the angle makes the photograph visually dynamic and was a hallmark of William Ivor Castle's photographic style.<sup>106</sup> The next two issues of *The Canadian War Pictorial* are more explicitly dominated by Castle's photographs, this time focusing on his photographic series of the Somme, a handful of which would later be turned into the composite photograph O. 874 "Over the Top." By 1917, and into the post-war period, "Over the Top" represented and

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<sup>105</sup> Preface in *The Canadian War Pictorial*, Ley and Lois Smith Research Collection, p. 1.

<sup>106</sup> For more information about this see Carla-Jean Stokes, "Contextualizing the AGO," M.A. Diss., Ryerson University, 2015.

replicated the experience of the soldier because it told the visual experience of getting out of the trenches, despite Castle's addition of explosions and manipulation. By including Castle's photographs in the magazine, while also asserting the personal narrative of Knobel, the CWRO gives credibility to Castle's photographs and appropriated Knobel's experiences. The reproductions contained in the pages of *The Canadian War Pictorial* reflect the soldiers' experience of the war because Castle's technical skill was able to achieve what Knobel's could not. By appropriating Knobel's personal war history, the CWRO gave credibility to the unnamed photographer by implying that he was capturing a universal experience of war through the soldier's rise from Valcartier at the start of the war, to his commission and appointment as Official Photographer.

*The Canadian War Pictorial* was one of the first instances of the CWRO moving to commodify the official photographs. At the bottom of the opening page of the first issue, a small section indicates that the photographs are available as reproductions, "2 [shillings] each- 1 [shilling] each to members of the Canadian Expeditionary Force."<sup>107</sup> These cheap photographic reproductions allowed soldiers to integrate the photographs they had seen in the magazines into their own personal photographic albums, thus co-opting the official visual record as their own. An example of the co-option is found in Lt. Col. Ernest Selby's album where he includes O.421 "Operating Room. No. 1 Casualty Clearing Station. July, 1916," changing the photograph's title to "small operating room" (see figure 3.3). By altering the title, even slightly, Selby implies that the operating room in the photograph might have

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<sup>107</sup> Preface, *The Canadian War Pictorial*, Ley and Lois Smith Research Collection.

been his, or at the very least reminiscent of an operating room he worked in, thus taking Henry Knobel's official photograph and integrating the visual record into his own. This is a common practice in compiled albums, with all of the larger albums containing re-productions with new titles or surrounded by other smaller private photographs.



Ernest Selby, 8th Canadian Field Ambulance Photograph Album, c.1919, University of Calgary Military Archives.

*The Canadian War Pictorial* built on *Canadians in Khaki's* intent of developing a visually literate consumer base through the commodification of official photographs. Through their purchasing power, soldiers and civilians were able to assemble and construct the photographic narrative for their own storytelling purposes, which

resulted in Ivor Castle's rise in popularity and his photographs coming to dominate the private photographic record of the war. Rider-Rider's photographs were absent from the narrative-making in books and magazines as he was appointed official war photographer in late 1917. This timeline meant that the photographs explicitly attributed to Rider-Rider in the Library and Archives collection were largely exempted from being coopted into private photo albums. His photographs were circulated in the last issue of *The Canadian War Pictorial*, but not in large enough numbers that his photographic aesthetic was able to influence and pervade the photographic record embodied in magazines, books, and trench newspapers.

The biggest event that promoted the official Canadian war photographs and exacerbated the commodification of the photographs was the creation of the CWMF's "Official War Photographs Exhibition." This exhibition in 1917 was later reproduced in Glasgow, Brighton, and the United States of America and featured 158 photographs.<sup>108</sup> By the time of the second exhibition in 1918 and its shift to the United States, the photographic record contained 188 separate photographs. The purpose of these exhibitions from 1917 into 1920 was to raise money for the Canadian War Memorials Fund. Like the prints in *The Canadian War Pictorial* and the development of *Canadians in Khaki*, the photographs were circulated so Lord Beaverbrook was able to generate funds to commission new war artists, rent studio spaces, and cover other associated expenses that were tied to building the painterly record of the First World War. Beaverbrook, along with many other upper-class

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<sup>108</sup> Catalogue of the Canadian Official War Photographs Exhibition for the Benefit of the Canadian War Memorials Fund, Ley and Lois Smith Collection in Memory and Popular Culture at the University of Western Ontario.

individuals, did not think that photographs alone produced a sufficient visual record of the war. In the previous chapter, it was mentioned that Beaverbrook was impatient with the length of time it took to produce a large-scale work, like Richard Jack's *The Second Battle of Ypres, 22<sup>nd</sup> April to 25 May, 1915*, which measures 371.5cm (146 in) tall and 589.0 cm (231 and 3/4<sup>th</sup> in) wide and took about a year and a half to complete.<sup>109</sup> The shift to the official photographs allowed painters like Jack and Arthur Lismer to fill in the visual record of the war, but not before the CWMF unintentionally raised the official photographs into the space of high art and allowed the photographs to dominate the visual record of the First World War, by enlarging the photographs to grand scale, thus asserting the space of the photograph as equal to the painted canvas.

In order to understand how the official photographs came to dominate the photographic record, the Canadian First World War paintings must be given attention. In *Art at the Service of War: Canada, Art and the Great War*, Laura Brandon discussed the development of the Canadian War Memorials Fund and its main tenets: to create a record of the war both overseas and at home in painting and sculpture, to create a sense of patriotism, and to be a form of wartime propaganda. As part of her book, Brandon also argues that these commissioned works started the basis for the National Gallery of Canada in 1934.<sup>110</sup> Sarah Leslie's PhD dissertation "The Photography of the Canadian War Records Office: Art's Cash Cow or Art Itself" argues that the CWMF photographic exhibitions generated funds to allow the

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<sup>109</sup> Canadian War Museum, *Collection Holdings- Art*, (Canadian War Museum, n.d.).

<sup>110</sup> Laura Brandon, "Introduction" in *Art at the Service of War* 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1.

organization to self-perpetuate a painterly narrative of the war.<sup>111</sup> But she fails to discuss the successes of Ivor Castle and Rider-Rider and how their photographs were able to come into their own as part of the new visual medium. No scholar has addressed the war photographs as their own artistic medium and how these photographs fit into larger artistic trends of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

The paintings and sculptures themselves are very similar to the subject matter of the official photographs. Fredrick Varley's *The Sunken Road* (figure 3.3), depicts bodies of dead Germans and the aftermath of a battle, much like Rider-Rider's O.3320 "Fate of German Machine Gunner in Canal du Nord. Advance East of Arras. October, 1918" (figure 3.4) which has a similar tone to Varley's. The true differences in the CWRO's photographic record and the CWMF's high art resides in the home front and airborne narratives of the latter. The CWRO's photographic record is devoid of women's work in munition factories.

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<sup>111</sup> Sarah Leslie, "The Photography of the Canadian War Records Office: Art's Cash Cow or Art Itself," (PhD. Diss., Dalhousie University, 2007), 43.



Figure 3.4 – Fredrick Varley, “The Sunken Road,” Canadian War Museum,  
19710261-0771.



Figure 3.5 – William Rider-Rider, O.3320 “Fate of German Machine Gunner in Canal du Nord. Advance East of Arras. October, 1918,” Library and Archives Canada, PA- 003202.

The first photographic exhibition of the Canadian war photos was shaped by Castle and Rider-Rider’s photographs and their aesthetic sensibilities. Castle’s photographs were an obvious choice for the exhibition since they were already widely circulated, and the public was familiar with his constructed narratives. By including his photographs in *Canadians in Khaki*, civilians and soldiers alike were shown how to read a visual narrative. Rider-Rider’s photographs were new introductions into this new visually literate audience. His ability to capture public

opinion and the sentiment of the war, alongside the new literacy, allowed the public to engage with his photographs. This visual literacy and the frequency in which soldiers visited and attested to the excellence of the photographic exhibitions helped its popularity. The photographs selected for the first exhibition of photographs not only enhanced the narratives found in *Canadians in Khaki* and *The Canadian War Pictorial* but shaped and formed the mythologies of noted Canadian battles during the First World War. One of these battle narratives was Canada's "moment of nationhood;" the Battle of Vimy Ridge. But beyond this, the inclusion of the photographs into the traditional art space, their enlargement to such a grand scale denoted a new trend in photographic history. Photographs were no longer the starting point for art or a representation of the truth, but rather they were art themselves.

The choice of Grafton Galleries as the site of the first Canadian War Photos exhibition was due to its notoriety. Roger Fry, the art critic and gallery manager, was well known for his innovative art exhibitions and the crowds that were drawn to his space. In the years before the war, the Grafton Galleries had started to emerge as a new modern art gallery in London focused on bringing in works from continental Europe into Britain, but it was best known for an exhibition of Impressionist and Post-Impressionist works, including Paul Cézanne, Vincent Van Gogh, and Henri Matisse.<sup>112</sup> Fry's critiques of these works coined the term Post-Impressionist, and the resulting buzz from this exhibition fostered a great interest in London's modern art scene. The gallery space itself was designed to support large-scale exhibitions,

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<sup>112</sup> Arnason and Mansfield, *History of Modern Art*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Pearson: Boston, 2013).

for it was grand, offering large rooms and space where the art, artists, and public could intermingle. And like contemporary art galleries, the space was open to the general public for viewing and many of the works on display were put up for sale. This first exhibition did not charge admission fees; instead, money for the CWMF was raised from the purchase of the exhibition catalogue and photo reproductions. The cost of the catalogue was six pence, an affordable price for non-commissioned officers, officers, and upper-middle to upper-class people. This catalogue not only helped guide visitors through the exhibition space but provided patrons with the cost of purchasing a reproduction. The catalogue's front page listed the cost of the reproductions, ranging from the print itself at £5, to £258, which included a frame, backing board, and glass.<sup>113</sup> The cost of these reproductions was large, even for a Lieutenant's weekly wage of \$18.20, which was roughly about £36.40.<sup>114</sup>

The Grafton Galleries exhibition of 1917 coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of the "creation" of the Dominion of Canada. The narratives surrounding Vimy Ridge built in this first exhibition started the mythologizing process of the battle. O.1162 "The Taking of Vimy Ridge" (figure 3.3) is a composite photograph produced by Castle, but other images of the battle were found in the gallery space. In the exhibition catalogue, the photograph was not titled "The Taking of Vimy Ridge,"

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<sup>113</sup> Catalogue of the Canadian Official War Photographs Exhibition for the Benefit of the Canadian War Memorials Fund, Ley and Lois Smith Collection in Memory and Popular Culture at the University of Western Ontario.

<sup>114</sup> Dr Will Pratt at the University of Alberta very kindly sent me his chart breakdown of wages in the First World War based on Census Canada records, which helped me understand the exchange rate during the First World War.

but “116 No Man’s Land.”<sup>115</sup> While devoid of its reference to the battle, the narrative of Vimy was explicitly noted in the introduction of the catalogue to “avoid tedious reiteration this fact is disposed of now, rather than weary the visitor with constant reminders in the Catalogue as he makes his way through...the most complete set of photographs taken of any battle.”<sup>116</sup> Photographs of the interior from this first exhibition help understand the space that “No Man’s Land” took up in the exhibition space.<sup>117</sup> The photograph was enlarged to a life-sized scale, being taller than the men used to move the image into the gallery space, and the photograph dominated an entire wall in the exhibition. Other photographs from the Battle of Vimy Ridge were placed around the room, but the focal point was clearly Castle’s manipulated photograph. It was the largest reproduction in the entire exhibition. The dominance of the Vimy photographs in this first photographic exhibition implied that the battle was not only important as a result of the victory achieved, but the exhibitions’ ties to the fiftieth Dominion Day signified the importance of the battle in Canadian nationhood. Together these two events were part of the start of “Vimyism” and the mythologizing process of the battle.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Catalogue of the Canadian Official War Photographs Exhibition for the Benefit of the Canadian War Memorials Fund, Ley and Lois Smith Collection in Memory and Popular Culture at the University of Western Ontario.

<sup>116</sup> Catalogue of the Canadian Official War Photographs Exhibition for the Benefit of the Canadian War Memorials Fund, Ley and Lois Smith Collection in Memory and Popular Culture at the University of Western Ontario.

<sup>117</sup> Access to copies of these photographs for inclusion into this thesis were prohibited by the closure of the Canadian War Museum Research Collection and the Art Gallery of Ontario Archives due to COVID-19.

<sup>118</sup> See Tim Cook, *Vimy: The Battle and the Legend* (Penguin: Toronto, 2018) for more on this process.



Figure 3.6 – Attributed to William Ivor Castle, “Canadians occupying old German third line trenches, Battle of Vimy Ridge,” Library and Archives Canada, PA- 004875.

Rider-Rider’s photographs were not included in the photographic exhibitions until their second iteration in Spring 1918. By this point, Rider-Rider was the sole war photographer (he had assisted Castle starting in mid-1917). The second exhibition included the Vimy photographs, as well as Rider-Rider’s panoramic photos of Passchendaele and photographs from the Battle of Hill 70. Rider-Rider’s photographs took up considerable space in the exhibition, replacing some of Castle’s earlier war photographs with his photographs of Hill 70 and Courcellette. Once the

exhibition transferred to the United States and the *Canadian Victory Souvenir* was published alongside the exhibition, Rider-Rider's photographs surged in popularity as the majority of the photographs contained in the souvenir books were those taken by Rider-Rider in the last year or so of the war. The other factor that led to Rider-Rider's photographic dominance in the public sphere was the number of war photographs he took during his time as an official war photographer. Of the 4,705 photographs, at least 2,000 of them have been attributed to Rider-Rider by Library and Archives Canada. His open discussion about his time as war photographer also contributed to this as he loved to discuss how he was able to take the photographs of the war.<sup>119</sup>

The CWMF used the funds generated from catalogue sales and reproductions to hire artists such as A.Y. Jackson, Arthur Lismer, and Mabel May, as well as cover the studio and supply costs for those artists. By providing compensation, the CWMF started recognizing Canadian artists and implicitly started to develop the genre of Canadian painting. The specific commission of war-based art also legitimized war art as a genre, continuing precedence set by Francisco Goya's "The Third of May, 1808." This was a new direction in the field of art history where the vast majority of the military works were focused on key figures, like David's "Napoleon Crossing the Alps," or Benjamin West's "The Death of General Wolfe." The war paintings that came out of the First World War no longer only focused on the heroism or deaths of Officers, but on the universal experience of the war. Cyril Henry Barraud's "The

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<sup>119</sup> William Rider-Rider, interview by Peter Robertson, Library and Archives Canada, 1971, RG1189-33-5E.

Stretcher Bearer Party” represented the anonymity of field medics and the walking wounded. The paintings became a means through which Canada could represent its culture on the world stage since they were later shown with the war photographs for the United States exhibitions.

The use of the photographs to generate funds for the CWMF also legitimized the photographs as art. By ascribing a monetary value to the pieces and placing them in ornate wooden frames, the CWMF indicated that these mechanized representations of the war held greater meaning. They were not simply shades of silver nitrate on light-sensitive paper. Instead, the photographs were given space in artistic tradition through their inclusion in the gallery space. This inclusion in the Grafton Galleries was also part of a larger photographic trend in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Starting in 1858, Henry Peach Robinson developed a technique that allowed him to build five different exposures on to a single print to create a narrative.<sup>120</sup> Over the next fifty years, this style, termed pictorialism, gained popularity and served to elevate photography into the artistic realm. All of the photographs in this new genre were allegories and were meant to tell visual stories like paintings did. By 1913 or so, the pictorialist movement had started to die off, but Castle’s darkroom manipulation, which was a continuation of this pictorialist movement, were able to elevate the war photographs into high art. The photographs in the gallery were not mechanized representations of the war, but a new mode of storytelling that used allegory to communicate a narrative. By displaying wartime pictorialist images, enlarging them to a grand scale and displaying them in a well-

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<sup>120</sup> Arnason and Mansfield, *History of Modern Art*, 7<sup>th</sup> ed. (Pearson: Boston, 2013).

known art space, the CWMF implied that the war photographs were valuable as art pieces.

The commodification of the art via sales of enlargements also added to this movement of official photographs as art. By making the pieces available for sale, the CWMF implied that the photographs were as valuable as art. The reproduction of paintings, drawings, and sculpture was common during the nineteenth century and grew even more prominent in the twentieth century. In Victorian and Edwardian culture, these reproductions became status symbols. The high cost of the reproductions, especially in an already framed state, implied that these pictures were intended to be displayed in a public-facing portion of the home. Like modern-day coffee table books, the framed photograph evolved into a talking point. Its ownership indicated the visitation to one of the many exhibitions of Canadian war photographs, as well as some sense of ownership of a wartime narrative. As demonstrated in the first chapter, the official war photographs were coopted into telling private memories of the war as a result of their inclusion in photograph albums. The framed war photographs in a home acted in a similar manner. But instead of being a piece of the war tucked away in a book, the experience of war was put on display. The framed photograph was a source of pride and accomplishment in upper-class Edwardian homes and so their narrative was further coopted and perpetuated.

But the element that really helped solidify the official war photographs in post-war memory was their ability to tell the experiences of soldiers. The dominance of 200 or so war photographs in albums asserts not only that they were of value to

those who participated but were able to visually communicate the personal histories of the individuals who served. Despite the censorship of private photographs on the front lines, the official war photographs told a narrative that resonated. Selby's inclusion of the medical photographs taken in the late war period demonstrates routines in his daily life of medical ward rounds, the loading and unloading of injured soldiers, and elements of their care. These are not images found in paintings or sculpture commissioned by the CWMF. When they were included, like in Gerald Edward Moira's "No. 3 Canadian Stationary Hospital at Doullens," the visual narrative is dominated by the gentler side of the war, personified by the Nursing Sister in the centre of the painting and the minor injuries of uniformed men along the edges of the work. It could be argued that the photographs were closer to reality because of the mechanized nature of the craft and their quick turnover (photographs were almost instantaneous, and paintings and sculpture took months, if not years to produce). Additionally, photographic exhibitions in London were widely accessible to civilians and soldiers, regardless of class or economic circumstances. The war paintings were not, since they were held at the Art Gallery of Ontario for a few months following the war and then transferred to Ottawa and held in storage until the 1930s.<sup>121</sup> Because the photographic exhibitions were accessible, soldiers like William Antliff were able to see them and write home about the photographs. In one of his many letters home, Antliff noted his impressions of the combined war painting and photograph exhibition, stating that the paintings "captured the war in colour

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<sup>121</sup> Maria Tippet, *Art at the Service of War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013) 17. Wellington, Jennifer, *Exhibiting War*, p. 86

and how the officer's assumed we were fighting off the bosch."<sup>122</sup> Antliff implied that his wartime experience was better reflected in the photographs, likely for the same reasons that Selby included the photos into his private album. The photographs reflected a true sense of the war, despite their manipulation, because the narratives contained in them were closer to their wartime experiences and did not attempt to produce an overly explicit grand narrative, as the paintings tried to do.

The official war photographs were able to dominate the visual record of the First World War because of their circulation in books, magazines, and art spaces, as well as their ability to represent soldiers' experiences on the Western Front. The quick nature of photography and its ease of reproduction allowed William Ivor Castle and William Rider-Rider's images to be included alongside written accounts of the war. These narratives included in *Canadians in Khaki* enforced a positivist view of the war and the ability to win the war through the use of technology. Their overarching narrative supplements soldiers' text-based stories and demonstrated a move to visual literacy during the war. The inclusion of the war photographs in trench newspapers differs, opting to reflect the experiences of soldiers in the war, rather than assert a victorious narrative. This interplay of victory and personal narratives continues into the Canadian war photograph exhibitions starting in 1917. These exhibitions split the narrative, showing the victorious efforts of the Canadian Expeditionary Force through the capture of Vimy Ridge, Hill 70, and other significant battles, while also communicating a set of events that in the eyes of soldiers were better able to capture the fighting in France and Belgium. The other factor that led to

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<sup>122</sup> William Antliff to his mother, July 1918, Antliff fonds, Canadian War Museum Archives

their dominance of the official photographs was their artistic qualities. By placing the photographs into a series of exhibitions and enlarging them to a grand scale, the Canadian War Memorials Fund was able to elevate the photographs into art. Their grand scale and placement into ornate frames built the illusion that the photographs were comparable to high art in their ability to tell viewers about the war.

## Conclusion

First World War photography has largely been understood as a product of war that was devised by official bodies to tell an overarching nationalistic narrative or demonstrate the beginnings of photojournalism in the twentieth century. Little consideration has been given to private photographic albums, portrait photographs, or how the official photographs have been coopted into the private record. Their aesthetics and narratives have not been examined, and First World War photography as a whole has been utilised as a tool for promotion and visual enhancement t as book covers, museum exhibition backdrops, or as things to be coopted for social media posts. This subversive nature of photography has let the circumstances in which they were produced go unexamined, thus perpetuating a set narrative of the war through the official photographs and ignoring other photographs produced during the war. Through understanding official and private war photography as cultural products, this thesis asserts that the space given to the official photographs was the result of reading the propaganda narrative for its face value rather than as a cultural product that communicates the varied wartime experiences of soldiers in France and Belgium.

By re-examining First World War photography as cultural products, their value is re-framed in terms of its value as historic objects. This status asserts the value of the official war photographs not only as propaganda created by the Canadian War Records Office as Jeff Keshen, Laura Brandon, Tim Cook, and Jane Carmichael have implied in their works, but as objects whose meaning, and value

shift and change based on their contexts.<sup>123</sup> The war photographs are understood as products of Harry Knobel, William Ivor Castle, and William Rider-Rider's experience as war photographers indicating that the visual record of the war was first filtered, changed and manipulated by the photographer's aesthetics and abilities before the visuals were subjected to the propagandistic lens of the CWRO. This process set precedence for recording, capturing, and documenting war and violence in the twentieth century, which Sarah Klotz notes in "Armed with Cameras: The Canadian Army Film Unit During the Second World War."<sup>124</sup> Additionally, by understanding the aesthetics of the official photographers, this thesis sets the groundwork for further study into the contexts of modern memory and photography. Since the official photographs were filtered, changed, and manipulated to suit the whims of the Canadian War Records Office, how have commemorative practices by museums, archives, and more recently, social media, further filtered the photographs to tell other truths about the First World War? This question of filtered truths is especially relevant given the rising public interest in colorized photography and the release of Peter Jackson's *They Shall Not Grow Old* in the early research stages of this thesis.

Understanding First World War photography as a cultural object with multiple meanings rather than as only an extension of the CWRO's propagandist arm transforms the photographs into things that provide insight into what was going on overseas but also examples of individual experiences. The influence of propaganda

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<sup>123</sup> Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship In Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996); Laura Brandon, "Words and Pictures," in *Journal of Canadian Art History* vol. 31, no 2, (2010): 110-126; Tim Cook, *Secret History of Soldiers*, (Toronto: Penguin, 2018); Jane Carmichael *First World War Photographers*, (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>124</sup> Sarah Klotz, "Armed with Cameras: The Canadian Army Film Unit During the Second World War." (MA Diss. University of Ottawa, 2004), 3.

on these photographs and how the photographs were manipulated is important to understand and should not be rejected as one possible conclusion. Instead, the photographs can be read in a multitude of ways. On one hand, they are products of the CWRO, but they are also products of someone's personal experience of the war. They are snapshots of moments that were deemed important and significant enough to capture in shades of silver nitrate. By studying the official photographs in such a manner, the visual record of the war is elevated to art-object and is expanded to include the so-called amateur photographs and portrait photographs produced in the same time period. By examining war photography as a cultural product, these two disparate sets of war photography can be understood as part of a broader cultural shift to document the war.

As a consequence, private photographs are no longer seen as case studies that demonstrate the power and abilities of the censor.<sup>125</sup> Examining private war photography as art-object provides new ways in which those photographs can be re-interpreted. This thesis asserts that interpreting private war photographs as art-objects tells us more about the experience of war through cultural phenomenon, thereby perpetuating private memory. It reframes the photographs as a valuable source of information and asserts that these photographs are worthy of further study because of their nature as cultural objects. They are able to visually represent a moment in the past and are part of an individual's experience. As a result, photographs can inform us more about the First World War and the individual

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<sup>125</sup> Andrew Rodger, "Amateur Photography by Soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force" in *Archivaria* vol.26 (Summer 1988).

experiences of grief and loss, adventure, and leisure activities. But even then, this thesis does not take the women's experience of war and the experiences of the home front into account. Out of necessity, this thesis has focused on the soldiers' experience of war in order to illustrate how the private and official records were constructed. Given the variety of albums, scrapbooks, and unattributed albums found in museums and archives across the country, more work ought to be done to understand how the female and home-based experiences of the war were captured and how these visual narratives can provide further insight into those histories.

This thesis provides a starting point into the inquiry of First World War photography and the ways in which the photographic record of the war was manipulated, filtered, and changed both during and in the years immediately following the war. It addresses how violence has been connoted in private and official photographs through visuals of destruction or ruin and spaces of mourning in the photographs of crosses and soldiers' portraits. But it also demonstrates moments of normality that are often exempted from First World War histories. These snapshots of personal moments note that the war was something that was happening at the same time as other moments of importance. The pervasiveness of the official photographs into daily life, through magazines, photo exhibitions, private albums, and scrapbooks and other wartime ephemera, note that the war was another event worth capturing and remembering. Photographs were not a by-product of the CWRO recording the war, but rather part of a larger cultural shift that incorporated cameras and its associated objects into an individual's personal experiences.

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