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With Friends, Family, and Conviction: Combat Motivation in British and Canadian Soldiers Fighting the First World War

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The University of Colorado at Boulder

With Friends, Family and Conviction

Combat Motivation in British and Canadian Soldiers Fighting the First World War

A Thesis Submitted in Candidacy

for Graduation with Honors in History

By

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Introduction

In June of 1916, the 24 year-old Rob Roy McGregor had just graduated from McMaster University in Ontario, Canada, with a bachelor's degree in Special Science. McGregor's college class had been allowed to graduate three months early so that they could join the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) and make sail for Europe. Two years into the war on June 17 1916, after little training in Canada, Rob Roy McGregor went by train from Ottawa to Halifax, where he and his fellow volunteers boarded the *Missanabie*, a converted cruise liner, bound for Shornecliffe, England. McGregor wrote his mother frequently while in Europe, and in these letters are sometimes subtle, sometimes outright commentaries on McGregor's motivations for serving as a volunteer in a war that had already claimed the lives of thousands of young men. Upon his arrival, McGregor would stay in England until Christmastime, at which point he was sent to France, where he endured, with millions of others, the boredom and horrors of the Great War.¹

Just two years earlier in Serbia, a nineteen year old nationalist named Gravilo Princep had assassinated the heir apparent to the Austro-Hungarian throne, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand. The assassination sent Europe into a downward spiral headed for all-out war which would engulf the continent, and the world at large. The war would see millions of men mobilized and deployed in the four years of fighting ahead, and millions of them would become casualties in the new, industrialized warfare characterized by such industrial products as machine guns, flamethrowers, tanks and chemical gasses that produced the stalemate of the Western Front, which would plague generals and strategists in the ensuing years. It is difficult to ascertain what

¹ JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/>

made men enlist early in the war, and even more difficult to discern what compelled them to keep fighting after the tone of the war had been set. In countries such as France and Germany, systems of conscription were in place at the outset and service was obligatory. However, in other countries, namely, Britain and Canada, conscription was not enacted until 1916 and 1917 respectively. Millions of men, including Rob Roy McGregor met the call to service without hesitation, and remained steadfast during the war. The question then, is what motivated Canadian and British soldiers to enlist and fight before and then after conscription was established? The importance of the involvement and maintained commitment of soldiers in the Great War cannot be overstated. The short-term and long-term motivations behind their sustained combat are topics of the first importance: in a war predicated on attrition, the belligerent nations' ability to sustain motivation among their troops was of paramount importance in achieving victory. Had combat motivation among Allied troops broken during the Great War, the world as we know it would be quite different: the Allied forces would have lost the war, and the twentieth century would in turn have unfolded quite differently. Charting the evolution of combat motivation can shed light on why the war progressed as it did, and indeed, why the war progressed at all given its deadly character.

A comparative analysis of the British and Canadian experiences in the First World War helps to reveal the nature of the cultures that sent their menfolk to war. Comparing British and Canadian experiences in the war not only sheds light on the complex social divergences between the two nations, but furthermore helps to explain how combat was maintained among the two different armies. Though the differences are subtle, they mattered immensely in sustaining the will to fight: seemingly small matters, such as leave, leisure and officer-man relations prove to be of the utmost importance in understanding the Great War as these two nations experienced it.

Examining these differences further reveals the natures of the societies that went to war and the reasons for their successes. Comparative analyses on the British and Canadian experiences in the First World War allow scholars to draw important conclusions about the reasons why the Canadians and British were victorious and by extension the Allied powers. The Great War was fought by combatants from dozens of nationalities and interpreting the differences between their various experiences illuminates the Great War's history, beyond the reigning, narrow paradigms currently used to understand the conflict.

The historiography of combat motivation in the Great War can best be charted by first noting that combat motivations changed as the war progressed. First, it is helpful to look at the outset of the war, and the motivation behind the belligerent nations' reasons for entry. In 1914, there were a variety of elements which converged to motivate Canadian involvement; there is not considerable dispute over Canada's reasons for entry in the war. Canada was still a dominion of Britain, so its involvement was expected when Britain declared war; but Canada was a self-governing dominion, and the extent to which it contributed to the war effort was somewhat up to them.² Tim Cook, a prominent scholar of Canada's participation in the Great War, argues that many Canadians saw the war as a war for civilization, a war which they were obliged to fight in order to preserve civilized society and hold German *Kultur* at bay.³ Some men felt allegiance to Britain and a duty to defend her against German aggression; in fact, of the 30,617 men who formed the First Contingent of the CEF, 18,495 (a considerable majority) were born in Britain, while only 9,159 were Canadian-born.⁴ Cook further argues some men felt no real ties to Britain, but did feel the war was a just one, aimed at defending sovereign nations like Belgium from

² Tim Cook, *At The Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916, Volume One*. (Canada: Penguin, 2007.): 22.

³ Cook, 23-25

⁴ Cook, 28-29

foreign aggression, and maintaining the status quo for justice which Germany, it was believed, would throw into tumult.⁵ Terry Copp has also argued that by October of 1914, Canadian opinion of the war was deeply affected by the Belgian atrocities.⁶ Tim Cook has further argued that a considerable factor at the outset in Canada was the youthful aspirations for masculinity which drove many young men to enlist and seek bravery it was believed only the military could instill.⁷ Terry Copp has argued differently, suggesting there is no evidence that the notions of masculinity and militarism appealed to Ontario-born volunteers.⁸ Cook has also argued that other men enlisted because the Canadian economy was in decline and had been for two years prior to the outbreak of the war; this phenomenon was known as ‘hungerscription.’⁹ Furthermore, the whole western coast of Canada was rife with rumors which led some men to enlist; the rumors included the possibility of a German sea attack against Canada, fears of German-American cross-border raids and the general fear of Germany eventually bringing the war to Canada.¹⁰ More recently, scholars such as Martha Hanna have stressed the importance of combatants’ links with home in sustaining combat motivation, which in turn tended to reduce the stress on small-unit cohesion, one of the central components of combat motivation for frontline soldiers; Hanna’s research concerned a French couple, however, there are similar concerns with the connections to family in British and Canadian sources.¹¹ The opening year of the war saw many motivations inducing volunteers from the Canadian populace, and further historical scholarship is needed to

⁵ Cook, 23 and 29

⁶ Terry Copp, “The Military Effort, 1914-1918.” In *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, ed. David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 39

⁷ Cook, 27

⁸ Copp, 38

⁹ Cook, 28

¹⁰ Cook, 31

¹¹ Martha Hanna, *Your Death Would Be Mine: Paul and Marie Pireaud in the Great War* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2006)

clearly identify the reigning motivations of the time and thread them, in a cohesive manner, which satisfactorily charts the evolution of combat motivation.

In Britain, the popular support for war in late July and very early August of 1914 was low, but following Germany's ultimatum to Belgium to allow free passage for German troops on 3 August 1914, Britain began to support the war whole-heartedly.¹² Many of the same motivators found in Canada were present in Britain, albeit in different ways. As early as 1916, French psychologist Gustave Le Bon had argued that England had prevailed upon men to volunteer by appealing to their national dignity and honor.¹³ Le Bon also argued that the German atrocities in Belgium had been greatly responsible for inducing Englishmen to enlist.¹⁴ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker have argued that the German violation of Belgian neutrality to attack France had motivated some to enlist; later still, when reports of German brutality in Belgium surfaced in England, disgust and fear motivated more to enlist.¹⁵ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker have also argued that the events in Belgium also helped frame the wartime debate for Englishmen as a war defending civilization against barbarism, a war of English justice against German *Kultur*.¹⁶ Watson and Porter have argued that British national unity combined with the 'high diction' of sacrifice appealed to many Britons who enlisted.¹⁷ British society felt threatened by Germany's declarations of war, and thus many men enlisted to protect their homeland.

¹² Stephane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, *Understanding the Great War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2000), 95

¹³ Gustave Le Bon, *The Psychology of the Great War*, trans. E. Andrews (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1916), 205

¹⁴ Le Bon, 210

¹⁵ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 101

¹⁶ Audoin-Rouzeau and Becker, 102-103

¹⁷ Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter, "Bereaved and aggrieved: combat motivation and the ideology of sacrifice in the First World War," *Historical Research* 83, no. 219 (February 2010): 150-151

Wartime combat motivations continued to change and evolve from the start of the war onwards. In fact, early belief that the war would be short quickly gave way to disillusionment among soldiers, and motives that dominated at the beginning of the war began to wane, while new motivations helped to sustain combat. With the Russian Revolution, America's entrance into the war, the Battles of Passchendaele and Vimy Ridge, and the start of the Nivelle Offensive, 1917 has been seen as the most important turning point in the war to some scholars, including many Canadian scholars, where weariness and casualties pointed to the necessity of a change in methods to sustain the war effort. This view that 1917 was a singularly important turning point is not shared universally by scholars of the war. Some scholars, including Watson, stress the importance of earlier battles that prompted important changes in long-term motivation among troops. As early as 1914 after the Battle of the Marne, the war of movement had clearly ceased and trench warfare had become the reality for soldiers. With a change in the way war was fought, men in the trenches experienced newfound motivation and a loss of former motives. In 1915, Canadians played a considerable role at the Second Battle of Ypres, where Germans first deployed poison gas, and consequently the motivations behind Canadian involvement changed somewhat as they bore witness to what they perceived to be proof of German barbarity: the use of forbidden chemical weapons was a critical factor in realigning these combatants' reasons for fighting. In 1916, the Battle of Verdun, the Brusilov offensive and the Battle of the Somme all transpired, and as the various battles were fought, combat motivation among British and Canadian troops altered. Fear of German *Kultur* alone would no longer keep men in the trenches and other motivations have been identified as taking its place.

As the war transitioned from its early stage of movement into the entrenched stalemate it became, combat motivation took a strong turn. The war was no longer about grand ideas, but had

become far more visceral and mechanized, and in turn this prompted the manifestation of new reasons to fight. There has been considerable scholarship on combat motivation in the trenches, though opinions diverge as to which motivation enjoyed primacy among troops. One studied reason for continued loyalty was simply the fear of punishment for insubordination in the army, though this is not satisfactory in and of itself, as stressors of the war were such that fear of death for dereliction of duty was minimal.¹⁸ A more holistic argument supports the notion that men felt a duty, not to their army, but to the men with whom they fought, through identification of subsidiary units such as a battalion, regiment, or even a squadron¹⁹ Hatred has also been identified as a factor in sustained combat and was particularly pointed when combined with sacrificial ideology and the need for revenge.²⁰ A final and convincing study examined the role of sacrificial ideology in combat motivation; standard historiography led by A.J.P. Taylor and Bernd Ulrich on the subject suggested this broke down as a combat motivator in 1917, but Watson and Porter's research in the matter has shown this to be false, as sacrificial ideology remained prominent throughout the war.²¹ There has been considerable research into combat motivation in the trenches during the Great War, and many theories, some with great validity, others bereft of truth, have been proposed to explain combat motivation.

Although historians have offered a variety of responses to the question of what motivated British and Canadian troops to endure the horrors of combat in the Great War, none of these answers is entirely satisfactory. The lack of cohesion and contradictory nature of the proposed answers to the question of combat motivation show a void in this area of scholarship. Previous

¹⁸ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press (2008), 58-59

¹⁹ Watson, 63

²⁰ John Ballard and Aliecia McDowell, "Hate and Combat Behavior," *Armed Forces and Society* 17, no. 2 (Winter 1991): 229-241

²¹ Watson and Porter, 146-164

scholars have not satisfactorily reviewed the primary sources left behind, such as the example of Rob Roy McGregor who provided insight into the importance of connection with the home front as evidenced by his perpetual contact, as well as the importance of little things like humor, going on leave or receiving care packages from various friends and family. If one does read these sources, it becomes clear that combat motivation was composed of a myriad of factors, with varying relevance, with some sustaining throughout the whole war and others shifting at different points in the war.

Rob Roy McGregor's letters to his mother provide a great deal of information about life at the front for a Canadian in the Great War. McGregor wrote his mother frequently, in part to occupy his own free time, and in part to reassure his mother and family of his safety. McGregor was in the Engineering Corps and a great deal of his work was confined to jobs outside of combat, though he did see his share of frontline duty. As was true of all letters generated in the British and Canadian army, McGregor's letters went through the censor—though only a few passages were removed (mostly locations); the content of his letters was rarely inflammatory given that he was writing to his family, and so the censor's pen did not appear often. McGregor's letters were self-censored to the extent that he did not include much information about the carnage he undoubtedly witnessed—instead, he spent a great deal of his correspondence discussing the daily work he engaged in, life behind the lines with other soldiers and officers, and the civilians he encountered on duty and on leave. Though his letters do not explicitly discuss the gory nature of the war, they do reflect his various moods and feelings as he experienced the years abroad. For a young Canadian, the war was at once terrible and wondrous; McGregor had not been overseas before, and likely wouldn't have been able to afford such a trip during civilian life; as such, his experiences were laced with excitement at being in the midst of

the Great War of the century in the middle of an unknown continent awash with foreign culture. McGregor's letters are an invaluable source for examining the Great War from a Canadian perspective; the young man was prescient, intelligent, humorous and thoughtful in his correspondence.

R.A.L.'s letters comprise the second primary source utilized in the Canadian section of this thesis. R.A.L.'s letters were written to his wife and infant child in Canada. Though his age is not explicitly stated, it is safe to assume, given his marital status and general tone of his letters, that he was past his early twenties, and as such offered a different view of the front than McGregor did. R.A.L.'s letters were slightly blunter than McGregor's letters, which is because he addressed his wife, and not his mother. R.A.L. spent the majority of his time in France as a stretcher-bearer, a job he volunteered for; given his job at the front, he saw some of the worst sights available to a man serving in World War One. From his letters, a great deal can be learned about life in France from the perspective of a married, slightly older Canadian. From his letters, one glimpses a deeper connection to family life, a view which illustrates the recondite, sustained association between those abroad at war and those at home supporting them through correspondence. Compared to McGregor's letters, R.A.L.'s provide a point of view unique to the older men who served, with their own families back home. R.A.L.'s letters are self-censored to some extent; he did not speak at great length about the violence he witnessed, however, he does conjure up more visceral images than McGregor would have allowed himself to write to his mother about. R.A.L.'s correspondence is indispensable when attempting to fully appreciate the Canadian perspective of the Great War.

For the British section, the diary of Henry Williamson is used extensively. Williamson served from the war's outbreak to its conclusion in November of 1918. As this source is a diary,

it provides a slightly different understanding of the war than letters do; unlike letters, there is no intended audience for a diary, and therefore the entries can be taken to be more honest than correspondence would allow; furthermore, diaries were not subject to the censor's pen.

Williamson was an exceptional case in the British armed service, as he began the war at the rank of Lance-Corporal in the infantry, and ascended to the rank of Captain in the Royal Air Force.

Though not unheard of, particularly as the war progressed and officers had to be drawn from the lower-middle and working classes, Williamson's ascension was still remarkable in an army dominated by a class system. Williamson wrote in his diary frequently, and his prose were straightforward, honest and smooth. Williamson experienced the war both as a Non-Commissioned Officer and as a Commissioned Officer, an experience which provided a unique view in the contrast between the different ranks. In his years of service, Williamson was wounded several times and had multiple encounters with the enemy in combat. His diary helps to shed light on the British experience during the war, for both the low ranks and the high ranks, and as such is very useful in an analysis of the British way of warfare.

A young man, Private Jackson, used his diary and own recollections to write his memoir about eight years after combat ceased. As the source is a memoir, it is slightly distanced from the actual events, however, it is trustworthy insofar as the recollections are all drawn from his own diaries from the time. Jackson, like Williamson, served for the entirety of the war and suffered only minor wounds. His memoir provides the point of view of a Private in the British army, which treated its officers and its enlisted men quite differently. Jackson's memoir touches on a number of relevant topics, including daily life at the front, violent scenes from the war, interactions with officers as well as different forms of leisure the troops engaged in; from reliefs, to leaves, to frequent football matches to pass the time. It is incredibly useful to have a

perspective of the entire war from a man who never attained a high rank, and certainly never a commissioned one. As opposed to Williamsons' experience of upward mobility in the British army, Jackson stayed more or less static in his position. Jackson served as a signaler in the war, mostly working with telephones (with a brief sojourn in pigeon signaling), either laying wire or coordinating messages. His job kept him in the frontlines and in imminent danger for a great deal of his service. His experiences help elucidate the role of lower ranking enlisted men in the British army, and provide a good glimpse at the differences between their experiences and that of officers.

For the perspective of commissioned officers, the diaries of three brothers (all commissioned upon their enlistment) provide a great deal of insight. Lt. Jack Giffard served in the Royal Horse Artillery for only one month, from the war's beginning until grave injuries sustained in September of 1914 prevented him from active service for the remainder of the war. Lt. Giffard's time at the front was short, though his experiences were anything but dull; he commanded a great number of men, and in the retreat from Nery, where he endured his injuries, he experienced the unmediated chaos of battle. As his diary was that of an officer and therefore was not subject to confiscation, his passages were unrestrained and completely honest. After being injured and convalescing in a military hospital in France, he witnessed firsthand the hospital's takeover by German troops, though somehow he escaped becoming a prisoner. His experiences offer a quintessential view into the life of a British officer during the war.

Jack Giffard's brother, Eddie Giffard, was a Major in the Royal Field Artillery. Major Giffard served for three full years on the Western Front from November 1915 until 8 November 1918 when he regrettably succumbed to wounds inflicted by shellfire, days before the armistice (making him the third of five of the Giffard brothers to die in the war). Major Giffard's diary

entries tended to be shorter than those of his brothers (Jack and Walter), but in no way did they lack substance. His entries usually discussed the day's work and the conditions under which it was completed. Major Giffard frequently consorted with other officers and his intermingling, which he commented on extensively, helps illuminate the nature of inter-officer relations in France. Major Giffard's diaries also provide an understanding of how officer's conducted themselves in the war and what their priorities were; aside from the safety of his men, he wrote often about his experiences with other officers and the food he ate. While food may seem to be an unimportant component of life in the British army, it actually was very important to all soldiers, and officer's in particular enjoyed far greater accommodations than the regular enlisted men. Eddie Giffard's diaries offer a clear and unreserved means for comprehending officers' experiences at the front.

The final officer's diary utilized in this analysis is that of Jack and Eddie's brother, Captain Walter Giffard. Walter Giffard had his left leg amputated below the knee when he was a teenager, before the war broke out. His disability, and wooden leg, disqualified him from many jobs in the army, but after several attempts to gain commission, in December of 1917, he finally was accepted to the Royal Flying Corps as an observer in balloons. Walter Giffard served in the Great War until its cessation; however his diaries end after June 1918. Walter Giffard's service was unique in that his job was rather uncommon, and his tenacity unmatched. Giffard's diaries, which he updated regularly, provide useful information for ascertaining what the front was like for officers. He wrote often of his work, the conditions under which that work was done, and much more. His diaries have many passages concerning socializing with other officers and lower ranks, particularly officer servants. The three brother's diaries are all exceptionally helpful in analyzing the day-to-day life of officers in the British army.

Though intimately related, the Canadian and British experiences in the Great War were ultimately quite different. The Canadians who fought in World War One did not experience the war in precisely the same way the British did. Without doubt, they experienced combat and the miseries of stalemate war in ways familiar to the men of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), but the Canadians had travelled to a continent away from their homes and their loved ones, to fight a war as part of the British Empire. The British, on the other hand, were fighting a war in their own backyard, where the threat of German aggression was an imminent threat to their country and their loved ones. Though there were certainly commonalities in the experiences of the two armies, there were also considerable differences, and those differences, in turn, prompted different motivations among the men who fought.

Canadian Section

Nearly a century ago in June of 1916 a young Canadian McMaster University graduate named Rob Roy McGregor boarded the *Missanbie* and set sail from Halifax for Shorncliffe, England for basic training.²² McGregor would spend the next three years in Europe, serving primarily in France in the Engineering Corps, where he wrote his mother almost every week until his return to Canada in 1919. McGregor's letters provide a remarkable gaze into the day-to-day life of a Canadian volunteer serving overseas and the burdensome realities endured during the Great War. Scholarship on the First World War has mostly overlooked the role of British dominion nations in the conflict, and McGregor's letters offer a compelling means by which to examine this largely disregarded area of history. The single most revealing insight from this analysis is the fundamental connection between those at home and those overseas, fighting the Great War.

War was announced in Canada on 4 August 1914 and thousands of Canadians took to the streets in a celebration of military pageantry the young nation had not previously experienced.²³ Canada was still a dominion nation within the British Empire, and as such had no control over its foreign policy; in other words, when Britain was at war, Canada too was at war.²⁴ However, Canada *was* a self-governing dominion and so the Canadian government was able to choose the level of their commitment to the war effort.²⁵ This flexibility translated into varying degrees of support for the war effort from different groups within the Canadian population. English-

²² Jasmine Rae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," *Letters Home from the Great War*. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/Foreword.pdf>

²³ Tim Cook, *At The Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916, Volume One* (Toronto: Penguin Group, 2007), 21

²⁴ Cook, 22

²⁵ Cook, 22

Canadians overwhelmingly supported the British Empire and believed it was fighting a just war against German aggression.²⁶ In Quebec, the epicenter of the urbanized French-Canadian population, public opinion was severely different from that of their English-Canadian counterparts, with the populace being widely opposed to what they saw as a European conflict.²⁷ Trends in volunteer numbers all too pointedly show the glaring difference in enlistment rates.

By the end of the war, French-Canadians had enlisted at a rate of only 1.4 percent, the lowest Caucasian enlistment rate in the whole British Empire.²⁸ In the beginning of 1917, the British war office did a study which found that 37.5 percent of British-born Canadians had enlisted, whereas English-Canadians had enlisted at 6.1 percent.²⁹ It was obvious from the start that the majority of Canadian volunteers would be drawn from English-speaking communities, and that French-Canadians would not play a significant role. The reasons for English-Canadians' reliability are not so easy to discern: "No single reason for Canadians' decision to enlist stands out; what appealed to one man might have no effect on another, but all had a range of allegiances that often intersected and overlapped."³⁰ The first contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force consisted of 30,617 men, with 18,495 of those men British-born and about 9,000 Canadian-born.³¹ The first contingent was overwhelmingly British, and the reasons for this are varied.

The preponderance of British-born volunteers at the war's outset is partly attributable to Empire loyalists, but not altogether so. Also affecting the initial volunteer rates was that many of

²⁶ Terry Copp, "The Military Effort, 1914-1918." In *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, ed. David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 36

²⁷ Copp, 36

²⁸ J.L. Granatstein, "Conscription in the Great War." In *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, ed. David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 65

²⁹ Granatstein, 65

³⁰ Cook, 26

³¹ Cook, 28-29

the British-born still had family ties in England, and with the Canadian economy struggling, a chance to get a free ticket home to visit loved ones was hard to pass up.³² Furthermore, many men believed in the justness of the war effort and the threat of German *Kultur*, and these fears seemed only to be affirmed as atrocity stories from Belgium began to trickle out of Europe.³³ The Canadian west coast experienced war-scare as rumors of German invasion (from sea, or the United States) began to circulate, leaving men obliged to enlist and protect the home front.³⁴ Though it seems silly in retrospect, the tone and fear that accompanied these rumors provided a myriad of reasons to enlist in the CEF. Finally, cultural influences had instilled the sense of adventure and masculinity seemingly inherent in wars, and this encouraged many men to enlist and fulfill their yearning for a militaristic experience.³⁵

A trip to Europe to participate in the war of the century, particularly as its longevity became more and more clear, inspired many men: “This thing is so terrific, this war, that a Canadian in Canada cannot possibly grasp it.”³⁶ Many men also felt a sense of duty articulated frequently as the need to do ‘real work,’ and a duty to help the war effort in general. But one of the more overlooked reasons for volunteering was that nearly everyone else was doing it, and to sit out was foolish at best and cowardly at worst: “There is one new thing I’ve learned, and that is that it won’t be good to be a chap who stayed at home, when the boys return. This thing is just a bit too serious. We *know* what it is here.”³⁷ The stretcher bearer who made the previous remark could not possibly understand the full truth to his statement: by war’s end, Canada, a country of barely 8 million souls, would see roughly 450,000 men and women serving overseas, with

³² Cook, 81

³³ Cook, 60

³⁴ Cook, 31

³⁵ Copp, 38

³⁶ R.A.L., *Letters of a Canadian Stretcher Bearer*, ed. Anna Chapin Ray (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1918),

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³⁷ R.A.L., 101

countless more serving the war effort at home.³⁸ The reasons for enlisting were often different among Canadian volunteers, but as the war progressed the reasons for enlisting would give way to new combat motivation among troops, as is inevitable when introduced to a continent as chaotic as Europe during the Great War.

In order to examine effectively the evolution of combat motivation among Canadians, it will be useful to use the letters of Rob Roy McGregor and R.A.L, a stretcher bearer. McGregor's letters were almost all written to his mother back home in Canada, and R.A.L.'s letters addressed his wife and infant at home. Though both sets of letters cover a variety of topics, the act of writing—the epistolary effort itself—will prove to be one of the most noteworthy motivating characteristics from this study. Despite having, perhaps millions of letters in archives across the world and much investigation into the content of those letters, not much respect has been proffered or attention paid to the sheer volume; in other words, people wanted to write loved ones, and this was itself a motivating practice. Using the letters of these two men, much light can be shed on the state of life in the Great War from a Canadian perspective.

R.A.L. arrived in Shorncliffe, England as part of the Second Canadian Contingent in July of 1915. The training camps in England were notoriously boring, and for men who had come to fight, they seemed pointless—who needed to learn to salute and march when there was a war raging and able men needed to fight it? Of course in reality many of the skills acquired while training were invaluable on the Western Front, but for men who had come to Europe for combat, this seemed to be a waste of time. By the time both R.A.L and McGregor arrived there were no false illusions as to the truculent nature of the war, and yet after a few weeks of training, most men were eager to join the war despite knowledge of its true character. It was not until January

³⁸ Cook, 3

1916 that R.A.L. finished his basic training and volunteered to go to France, writing to his wife: “Tonight I get my kit—and tomorrow I begin my *real—really* work—the kind you will be proud of.”³⁹ R.A.L.’s enthusiasm for doing “real work” and his boredom with the training camps in England had inspired him to volunteer to go to France, where the trenches, the danger, and the “real work” were located. This restlessness should not be confused with any fatalistic goad, but instead ought to be attributed to R.A.L.’s need to do work that somehow mattered: no matter how seemingly insignificant his part, he needed to participate in the effort against the enemy. R.A.L. echoed this sentiment in a letter to his wife in which he marveled at the magnitude of the Great War, and the fineness of taking a role, no matter how humble.⁴⁰ Rob Roy McGregor felt quite similarly about being drafted to France in October of 1916: “As far as my personal feelings are concerned I’m very much pleased.—For one thing I get a chance to do something at last—and for another thing it shows that my work here has been at least satisfactory.”⁴¹ In fact, when R.A.L. was serving in the trenches months later in August of 1916, he recounted a rather funny story to his wife, relating the restlessness soldiers began to experience in the safety of bases far from the lines; R.A.L. told his wife of two men who were so sick of the base they ‘deserted’ to the frontlines after failing transfer to a fighting unit.⁴² Quite simply, R.A.L.’s insistence on doing ‘real work’ was hardly unique.

One persistently important matter for all troops at the front was writing letters and receiving and packages. Despite sharing the experiences of the front with all the men who were there, it was important for soldiers to share their experiences—as best as the censor would

³⁹ R.A.L., 33

⁴⁰ R.A.L., 54

⁴¹ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1916.pdf>, 88

⁴² R.A.L., 76

allow—with their families at home. R.A.L. quite poignantly explained to his wife: “It’s fine to think that although so far away and on such strange work, I have my one real pal to talk to in the same old way, the one person who will understand *thoroughly*, and, I hope, sympathize.”⁴³ But letters did not have to take a philosophical bent in order to be important, sometimes it was just as important to write of the unimportant, if only to break the monotony that often punctuated the front lines: “Why not newsless letters? My own opinion is that we have them. The army encourages them. The censor insists on them. Therefore the soldier writes them. I think the primary object must be to promote the exercise of the grey matter.”⁴⁴ Soldiers often waited only for letters and more news in between their work; as R.A.L. explained in a letter to his wife, the most important thing every day was the letters, and then the rations, and finally the day’s job.⁴⁵ Furthermore, letters could serve as more than a way to pass the time, and could actually be helpful in reassuring those at home. Rob Roy McGregor’s correspondence with his mother offers a fine example of this; after all, it seemed to be the son’s duty to keep his mother assured of his safety.

In the same letter in which he broke the news he had been drafted to the front, McGregor attempted to lessen the inevitable anxiety of his mother by explaining (in half-truths) that she need not worry because he would be far behind the lines laying cable, and that he would not be in any real danger.⁴⁶ McGregor continued this practice of pacifying his mother at home throughout his time in Europe: in one letter from January of 1917, he told his mother that all at

⁴³ R.A.L., 46

⁴⁴ Jasmine Rae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” *Letters Home from the Great War*. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 61

⁴⁵ R.A.L., 101

⁴⁶ Jasmine Rae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” *Letters Home from the Great War*. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1916.pdf>, 89

the front agreed those at home had it worse, for they had to wait and hope while the soldiers went on soldiering and knowing that things were not as bad as news back home would portray it to be.⁴⁷ R.A.L. also attempted to keep his wife calm through his letters, telling her to be brave for her own health and the health of their newborn daughter as he was always worried how they were keeping up.⁴⁸ Although R.A.L. was a little more candid about his circumstances than McGregor, quite probably because he was addressing his wife and not his mother, his efforts help exhibit a mutual feeling shared by those at the front, namely, how greatly they worried about those at home. McGregor, two years into his service overseas, quite pointedly made clear his feelings, or at least his feelings as he needed his mother to see them:

Really, Mother, after all there is no bravery in France to match the bravery in Canada where Mothers just sit and wait—and write the cheerfulest letters imaginable. There should be a ‘Mother’s Cross’ struck, equal in value to the ‘Victoria Cross’ & marked—‘For Valiant Service’—& my mother & my father should have one—⁴⁹

It may seem odd at first glance, that in the midst of one of the deadliest war’s to date, that people would be preoccupied with their family; but in reality family was ultimately why most men served, and refuge in the family, be it by letters or parcels, was commonplace and necessary in contrast to the daily grind of military life.

Calming loved ones was not the only use of the mail; it served increasingly more dear functions to soldiers in France as the war dragged on. One great use soldiers took in the mail system was the delivery of parcels from home. These parcels most commonly held food which supplemented the meager rations during the war: parcels could also carry supplies not regularly

⁴⁷ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>, 7-8

⁴⁸ R.A.L., 92

⁴⁹ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 78-79

issued during the war, be they clothing, books, or photographs. Care packages offered families at home a way of concretely helping their loved ones overseas. At a forward position and answering his wife's letter, R.A.L. wrote: "I cannot impress on you to forcibly the importance of parcels, regularly and often."⁵⁰ Food deliveries were rarely punctual at the front, and when the food did arrive, it often was barely enough to subsist on. The delivered parcels containing food may not always have made the trip wholly fresh, but the food was valued regardless. When a Canadian soldier did receive food, he was sure to share it with his comrades, and expect reciprocation when other Canadians received the like.⁵¹

But of course, food was not the only valued parcel. Soldiers at the front, particularly lower ranking ones, received most information about the war by rumor, and those who were interested in such things relied greatly on news from home, where the censors' power was considerably less formidable and information not as easily controlled by the military. McGregor rather frequently requested newspapers throughout his time in the war and made clear in his letters how popular they were: "Bob sent me (via Bess's hand) about a dozen copies of Life, & since receiving them last night I have been more in demand than if I had had a hamper of eats."⁵² Soldiers relied on parcels not just for extra food or a little news, but they needed them as reminders of their connection and support at home; parcels offered a constant reminder as to why they were there fighting, and who they were aiming to protect.

The mail system allowed for near constant contact (albeit usually with a month or two's delay), and offered a means, for those who could afford it, to make life during the war as

⁵⁰ R.A.L., 90

⁵¹ R.A.L., 90

⁵² JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>,

comfortable as possible. McGregor constantly took advantage of the parcel system, and benefited greatly from it; he often peppered humor in his letters to break the dull and monotonous days: “The helmet is a little hard on the cranium & I would like a woolen covering to protect the small amount of brain I have left.”⁵³ Another important item to be received was photographs; roughly a year since she had seen her son, McGregor’s mother sent him a photograph of herself in June of 1917 which Rob Roy treasured deeply, and which prompted him to request a copy of any photographs taken in the future.⁵⁴ In an age without a proliferation of telephones and limited means of communication, a photograph was a valuable thing, particularly when one was away from home for so long. But it was not only pictures of mothers that made their way to the front, and to be sure, mothers may not have been the most sought after photograph by all of the young men in the service. In a letter to his sister, who was a nurse serving in France, and who had just sent him two photographs, McGregor explained thus:

It seems a bit funny until you get used to it but when a fellow gets any pictures all his friends feel that it is their duty to inspect them & pass judgment. Girls being so seldom met with, they are of course the most desirable to get pictures of, & of girls the pick is nurses. Consequently when I flashed out a picture of two nurses with a ‘solo’ of one in particular I was ‘the cynosure of all eyes’.⁵⁵

Boys being Boys, even those tempered by the fires of war, a photograph of a woman was a particular treasure. Since it was only on leave (or worse, at hospital), that one could reasonably expect to meet a woman, it was always a plus to have some pictures. Though he did not get a

⁵³ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>, 31

⁵⁴ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>, 77

⁵⁵ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 65-66

chance to visit his sister in France, McGregor did go on leave several times, and among his escapades he was fortunate enough to meet several women along the way.

Soldiers had very little to look forward to during the war, and understandably so, though most soldiers were ever-excited about the prospect of going on leave. For young Canadian troops in particular, many of whom in civilian life would never have the funds for such extravagant overseas trips, going on leave was a genuinely exhilarating prospect. By virtue of the war, Farmhands and city boys from Canada were put in an exciting situation, with all the grandeur of Europe at their feet when leave came. McGregor's first leave came in September of 1916 while he was still stationed in Shornecliffe, England, and he spent his leave in London and Scotland. The mere fact that the longest of McGregor's letters home were the one's describing his experience on leave evidences the enthusiasm he experienced, writing 27 pages in three letters about his first leave, and 28 pages in one letter about his leave in Paris. On his first leave, he set off for London where he spend a 'riotous' evening before embarking by train to Edinburgh, where he toured castles and received a national history from local children.⁵⁶ McGregor would find that while Scotland (his ancestral homeland) was new to him, Canadian's were also new to most Scots: "From Edinburgh north a Canadian is an object of curiosity, so we had to submit to many a gaze & many an inquiry about who we were & whither bound."⁵⁷ The ever-humorous individual, he even went so far as to announce that Rob Roy McGregor had returned to his own

⁵⁶ JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1916.pdf>, 61-61

⁵⁷ JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1916.pdf>, 65

country when he arrived in Scotland.⁵⁸ He ended his first leave in the town of Killin, where he reported being treated kindly by the locals who sheltered him and cooked him meals, an experience which made him feel so at home he wrote his mother that it was as if he was back in Ottawa.⁵⁹ It was while in Killin that McGregor developed a friendship with the two daughters of a local; despite the short time there, the ladies obviously made an impression on the young man as, for Christmas of 1916, he mailed them fine French cloths.⁶⁰ Indeed, he would visit them in 1918 one last time before leaving Europe, where he again lauded their graciousness in a letter to his mother.⁶¹

Rob Roy McGregor was percipient for a young man, particularly one in the throes of war. He wanted to soak up as much culture as he could, while he still could. He asked his mother for money in order that he could best take advantage of his time in Europe: "I hope you don't think I'm extravagant, Mother, but it seems a shame to miss seeing these places just for lack of a little more money.—It's the chance of a lifetime."⁶² The young man's letters describing his Paris trip are just as interesting, and he again spent time visiting many historic landmarks and eating local cuisine. He summed up his experience in Paris as such: "I have had the most wonderful time of my life, I truly believe, the last week. I have learned more, seen more,—& eaten more—than I

⁵⁸ JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1916.pdf>, 65

⁵⁹ JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1916.pdf>, 78

⁶⁰ JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1916.pdf>, 144

⁶¹ JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 158

⁶² JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>,

thought possible in such a short time.—The time has been a real change, a rest, & an education.”⁶³ Leave’s not only allowed soldiers a reprieve from the battlefield and the hum drum work in the military, but also gave them a chance to re-immense themselves in civilian culture and, quite simply, relax and be reminded of the cause for which they were fighting. It was not just the famous sights that reaffirmed their motivation, but the people in Europe itself. Many civilians, particularly those unable to fight, would frequently go out of their way to help soldiers, including McGregor, who did the fighting for them.⁶⁴

Not all Canadian soldiers were excited about leave though. While young, unmarried soldiers were essentially on vacation during a leave, the older married men tended to enjoy leaves’ less than their younger compeers. This was particularly true of Canadian soldiers as they could not go home to visit their families as most European combatants could. R.A.L. offered a good example of this contrast, as he only went on leave one time in London, and this tarry only warranted a three page description written to his wife. In that letter R.A.L. stated he spent most of his time in the local club with two acquaintances, and went to see the sights which he reported enjoying.⁶⁵ However, his longing for his wife is stated outright as he found the leave ultimately made him homesick: “I was homesick as the very devil; often I wished I had never come—I wanted *you*.”⁶⁶ The experience away from the grinding relentlessness of the frontlines reminded R.A.L. of home life—of a life before the war where shows, music, shopping and loving were all part of family life—in a way, being rapt in civil life made him long for home in a way that life in

⁶³ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>, 131

⁶⁴ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>, 144

⁶⁵ R.A.L., 218

⁶⁶ R.A.L., 218

the front did not, and indeed, could not. R.A.L. stated he went to see a friend's mother whose own worry reminded him that those at home did not have it easy; and this reminder in turn made him feel for his wife.⁶⁷ What for young men was an adventure, for an older man was a solemn reminder of what wait for him back home in Canada.

One thing soldiers always had trouble escaping was the boredom of military life. There can be no doubt that there was no boredom during raids and active combat, but the vast majority of a soldier's life was out of direct combat. Approaches to battling boredom were naturally quite varied, though certainly there were also commonalities. Writing letters to people was perhaps the most ubiquitous way to spend one's time and McGregor's frequent letters to his mother help illustrate this point. But he did not write only his family, he wrote to many people, including a French pen-pal. McGregor had previously undertaken learning some French, but with minimal effort and minimal results—mostly confined to conversations with locals. However, in December of 1917 he resolved to try again: "I'd like to take a crack at French again, & to urge myself along I have written to a girl in Villemomble who wants to write to some one in English—Then I will write back in French."⁶⁸ It is no surprise that McGregor would seek to widen his epistolary contacts, as he frequently spoke of mail as being a great way to pass the time, and also praised French as a godsend which allowed him to exercise his brain.⁶⁹ And, luckily for him, his writing partner outside of Paris, in Villemomble, took him in friendship: "That girl that I'm writing to in Paris has taken me as her 'filleul'. That isn't the masculine of

⁶⁷ R.A.L., 220

⁶⁸ JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>, 209

⁶⁹ JasmineRae Friedrich, "Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor," Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 43

‘finance’, but it means a kind of ‘adopted-half-brother-for-the-period-of-the-war’.”⁷⁰

Unfortunately, the letters between him and his ‘*fileul*’ did not survive except for a few wherein his French grammar was corrected by his pen-pal.⁷¹ This friendship shows not only McGregor’s gregarious and intellectual nature, but offers a glimpse into the types of daily activities soldiers engaged in when not at work.

The most important relationships a soldier could have were those with other soldiers. Soldiers often had to make their own fun and the Canadians were no exception. One of the most common means of recreational activity seems to have been various field games and competitions. On one rather full day of such activities, McGregor wrote home: “In the evening pretty nearly our whole section seemed to gather together for a sort of field-day. We had impromptu competitions in jumping, running, pick-a-back wrestling—tumbling, finishing up with a few stunts on the horizontal bar.”⁷² Soldiers had very little to do to when they were not off working, so necessarily they found ways to fill their time with spontaneous activities. Aside from friendly, inter-section matches, there were also occasions where battalions would compete, whether at work or in games, and these rivalries could grow quite intense and even break into passing skirmishes.⁷³ Games in the line helped not only to blow off steam after long days, but also served to strengthen the bonds and solidarity of the smaller units of men. But in the end when the competitions had subsided, men still ultimately identified with their allies: “It’s funny

⁷⁰ Jasmine Rae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” *Letters Home from the Great War*. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 40

⁷¹ Jasmine Rae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” *Letters Home from the Great War*. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 96-103

⁷² Jasmine Rae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” *Letters Home from the Great War*. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 93

⁷³ R.A.L., 252

the way you keep bumping shoulders with fellows—everybody is your ‘mate’. They will all give you a lift & you are naturally supposed to return the compliment. So we all manage to live together & enjoy ourselves.”⁷⁴

Canadians in particular were rather anomalous in their relations with one another, notably in their impious treatment of officer-man relations. In many armies, most prominently the British army, officers and men were two distinct classes, and as a rule they did not casually comingle. The Canadians did not approach this in any manner like their British counterparts; relatively little concern was shown towards such intermingling—this irreverence became a hallmark of the Canadian way of war. Not a full month after enlisting McGregor wrote his mother: “Most of my acquaintances are officers & I have had a captain around the tent looking me up—I’m some pumpkins for sure.”⁷⁵ As educated men were more likely to be commissioned as officers, the likely explanation for McGregor’s acquaintance with the officers he knew is that he met them at University, though as evidenced through McGregor himself, educated men did not necessarily acquire commission. Later in 1917, McGregor took a short break from his duties in the Engineering Corps and briefly worked at a local YMCA. His note home on this matter revealed quite a bit about the nature of officer-men relations in the Canadian army: “I understand my job is to be travelling around with Carl Farmer (alias Capt. Farmer) & Rev. John MacNeil (disguised as a Captain)—myself to be a producer of music from various pianos.”⁷⁶ This is an excerpt the likes of which would rarely if ever be found in British correspondence. The distance inculcated

⁷⁴ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>, 41

⁷⁵ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1916.pdf>, 14

⁷⁶ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>, 79

through the class system in Britain assured a remoteness between officers and men that Canadians were utterly unfamiliar with in their own army.

Officers were never to interact informally with regular enlisted men in the British system, whereas in the Canadian service this simply was not the case. A particularly pointed example can be found in a letter from R.A.L. to his wife after a day in the trenches: “When they went over the top in the big show, our officer—not the one we have now—started to give orders. The sergeant says,—‘Hey.’ Puts up his hand. ‘*I’m* running this show.’ And he did.”⁷⁷ The importance of NCO’s has long been understood among military officers and historians alike, however, not many instances where the officer defers to the NCO in such a manner as R.A.L. depicts can be said to exist, but the Canadian army was a peculiarity in this sense: officers simply did not enjoy the same esteem as in most other armies. This is not to say officers were widely rejected as fools or that orders were ignored, but rather that they were not seen as a distinctly separate class unavailable to common enlisted men. In the trenches, the relations between officers and men in the Canadian Corps were roundly different than that of other armies; only the Anzacs (Australian and New Zealander) armies’ matched them in their lax attitude between the ranks, and eschewing of traditional class distinctions in the officer corps.⁷⁸

Serving in the trenches in a forward position was in many ways the baptism by fire for soldiers. It was this service that distinguished them as truly battle-tested veterans and no longer fresh recruits; serving in the trenches was a rite-of-passage that conferred a respectability from one’s comrades: “You can never mistake a man who has been ‘in’, no matter how smartly you dress him and polish him. Put him amongst a thousand who work behind, and you’ll pick him

⁷⁷ R.A.L., 217

⁷⁸ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 50-51

out instantly.”⁷⁹ Serving in the frontlines created a certain distinctiveness in men, a difference not easily articulated, but undeniable to those who recognized it. Ever careful in his correspondence, McGregor wrote only once to his mother about serving in the frontlines: “I have seen sights which I wish never in all my life to see again. Many many men have gone through infinitely more than I have, but I can merely respect them for it—I don’t envy them.”⁸⁰

McGregor mentioned this only in passing, but it is quite obvious the trenches made a dour impression on him, an impression which he was not interested in—or able to—share with his loved ones at home. But McGregor *was* slightly safer than some of his comrades by merit of serving in the Engineering Corps; this is not to say he was never under fire, because he certainly was on occasion, but this did not compare to the constant hammering known to the infantry. Indeed, the dangers of the infantry became so well known that by mid-1916, prior to conscription, most Canadian volunteers opted for any Corps but the infantry.⁸¹ Some men, however, did choose the trenches willingly, including R.A.L. who repeatedly volunteered for dangerous work: “I want to get a job as Battn. Stretcher bearer. It’s a rotten job, of course, and nobody wants it; but I rather think I would be more use binding up wounds than I would be just carrying a gun in the ordinary way.”⁸² In fact, before he was officially commissioned as a stretcher bearer, R.A.L. served in the trenches for his first time, a day he called the biggest in his life, aiding a “picture-man” by handling film plates.⁸³ Service in the frontlines often brought about disillusionment in the men who fought.

⁷⁹ R.A.L., 212

⁸⁰ Jasmine Rae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” *Letters Home from the Great War*. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1917.pdf>, 50

⁸¹ J.L. Granatstein, “Conscription in the Great War.” In *Canada and the First World War: Essays in Honour of Robert Craig Brown*, ed. David Mackenzie (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005), 60

⁸² R.A.L., 106-107

⁸³ R.A.L., 165-167

World War One was markedly different than the wars that preceded it. The smooth-bore muskets of the Napoleonic age had become obsolete and been replaced with weapons the likes of which the world had never seen. Machine guns, flamethrowers, tanks and artillery all became commonplace in the war, leading to mass death and carnage unlike the conflicts of the past.

R.A.L. put the inherent dissonance well in a letter to his wife:

This war is so 'different.' In any other we might talk of 'our noble cause', 'the clash of arms', 'death or glory', and all that kind of thing; but this one is so vast, one wee atom of a man so small, the chance for individuality coming out so remote, that is has developed, for a single Unit, into merely a job of work to be done: eat, sleep, and work.⁸⁴

The war was a dissimilar one, assuming a repute that no veteran of previous wars, alive or dead, could possibly have anticipated. In the same letter R.A.L. also wrote that heroics were dead in France and that a charge was in no way the romantic vista historians and poets had painted in the past.⁸⁵ The war became a job, the work that men like R.A.L. and McGregor had set out to do was being done and that was all there was to it; the glory so often associated with wars past was nowhere to be found.

There was one aspect of the war that did heavily influence the Canadians who served, and that was the transformation of Canada into a country that mattered—a country that had a genuine claim to newfound pride. R.A.L. served at the Battle of Vimy Ridge wherein Canadian forces were pivotal in a victory which helped seal Germany's defeat in the war; for just over two years the lines had not moved at Vimy despite French and English efforts—it took the Canadians to secure victory. It was then that R.A.L. wrote his wife: "One day you must walk over the trail from Neuville St. Vaast to Vimy and remember—indeed it would be impossible to forget—that

⁸⁴ R.A.L., 100

⁸⁵ R.A.L., 100

here Canada made herself ace high with France.”⁸⁶ Canada had established itself as an equal with England and France on the international stage, and thereby secured a respect normally saved for the countries with the most history and power. In one letter from McGregor to his mother, written as the war entered its last year of combat, he stated: “In this last week I have learned quite a few things & the one thing that I am most conscious of is that I am a Canadian—and I’m proud of it. I never realized before just now how much more I think of Canada than of all the rest of the world.”⁸⁷ The war had exposed a great many Canadians to the rest of the world, and this experience served in many men to strengthen their love for home. In the same letter, McGregor finished his thoughts thus: “I’m sorry if I’ve gone to quoting poetry & talking patriotic like, but if anybody doesn’t think a fellow can honestly come by that feeling let them stay away from Canada and Canadians if only for a week.”⁸⁸ A distinct Canadian identity was made much clearer when these men were sent overseas and immersed in a culture so foreign to their own. This reinforcement of the Canadian identity was a consequence of the war, and had there been no war, Canada would not resemble its modern incarnation.

⁸⁶ R.A.L., 179

⁸⁷ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 24

⁸⁸ JasmineRae Friedrich, “Letters Home from the Great War: A Chronicle of WW1 from Rob Roy McGregor,” Letters Home from the Great War. Accessed February 14, 2012, <http://www.lettershomeww1.com/pdf/1918.pdf>, 26-27

British Section

On 5 August 1914, a young British regimental named Henry Williamson received the order to mobilize in preparation for the Great War.⁸⁹ Williamson would serve for the entirety of the war despite several injuries he sustained in combat. His story is a remarkable one not only because he survived, but because he would rise from the rank of Lance-Corporal in the infantry, to the rank of Captain in the Royal Air Force by the war's conclusion, despite a lackluster class background which otherwise would not have permitted immediate commission. Williamson was just one of many, many men who served in the British forces during the war, but his diary, kept throughout the war and updated regularly, provides a fine glimpse into the day-to-day life of British troops. Furthermore, his spectacular ascension through the ranks offers a unique view into the stark contrast between the experiences of officers and enlisted men. His story, along with many others helps to shed light on this intriguing topic. Williamson, along with several other primary sources, will help to illustrate the lasting impact of the Great War on the men who fought it, and how their experiences differed greatly along class lines, which in turn created a distinctly different British experience than that of Canadians.

Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914 and general mobilization began at 4 in the afternoon that very day.⁹⁰ In a passage mirroring many Canadian reactions to the outbreak of war, one soldier wrote in his memoir: "The declaration of war caused tremendous excitement throughout the country, resulting in magnificent displays of patriotism on every hand. Perhaps for once in my life, I, too, was excited, as I knew it would mean a terrible fight."⁹¹ From August to September that year over 700,000 men enlisted within Britain alone, and most for different

⁸⁹ Henry Williamson, *In Spite of all Rejoicing* (New York: Duffield & Company, 1929), 4

⁹⁰ J.M. Bourne, *Britain and the Great War: 1914-1918* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1989), 17

⁹¹ John Jackson, *Private 12768: Memoir of a Tommy* (Gloucestershire: Tempus Publishing Limited, 2004), 13

reasons.⁹² Soldiers were in high spirits in ‘Kitchener’s Army’ and the issue of conscription was far from relevant at the outset.⁹³ Recruitment was strong and the volunteers were willing; some men knew well what they were signing up for, others were woefully unprepared for what lay ahead, yet all were agreed that Germany had to be stopped: “Workers of all grades, students, doctors, policemen, gentlemen-about-town, dukes’ sons and cooks’ sons all united under the motto, ‘For King and Country’, and all ready to see the game through to the end.”⁹⁴ Determining precisely what prompted men to enlist and then continue fighting is no easy task, but identifying general congruities in their motivations is a less daunting charge. Like so many other nations, including Canada, Britain’s populace was astounded and appalled by the German invasion and atrocities in Belgium, and these acts constituted, in the minds of most Britons, proof of Germany’s absolute barbarity, which stood in direct contrast to their view of the British as principled and independent.⁹⁵ Though perhaps more important, many in Britain viewed the situation in Belgium and France as the likely fate for their nation if there were an ineffectual British resistance to the onslaught of German *Kultur* and military aggression.⁹⁶ The sheer numbers of men enlisting would have prompted many men to enlist themselves, if only to be a part of the war and avoid societal shaming for refusing to fight.⁹⁷

The German army was seen as an imminent threat to the British way of life, and any man who refused to protect Britain, and by extension its citizens and families, would have been viewed as cowardly. To sustain combat, several institutional structures, both implicit and

⁹² Alexander Watson and Patrick Porter, “Bereaved and aggrieved: combat motivation and the ideology of sacrifice in the First World War,” *Historical Research* 83, no. 219 (February 2010): 152.

⁹³ Jackson, 15

⁹⁴ Jackson, 15

⁹⁵ Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 47-48

⁹⁶ Watson, 49

⁹⁷ Watson, 53

explicit, were in place in the army: soldiers were granted different forms of leisure, and had important traits such as loyalty reinforced constantly in their subsidiary units. Furthermore, contact with civilians, both at home in Britain and in France, reinforced their will to continue in the Great War. The war was going to be an experience of a lifetime, an experience that would instill and validate the treasured qualities such as honor, courage, justice and manliness that these young men had respected in their elders who fought in the South African War. Williamson himself volunteered, along with eighty percent of his battalion, for overseas service.⁹⁸

Williamson's explanation for serving is not given outright, but he did write one revealing passage in his diary which suggested he felt it was his duty as a Briton: "At lunch a bounder of a man cheerfully asked me if I did not think the war would be over in a few weeks, with the Germans beaten? Ass! Why doesn't he help?"⁹⁹ Williamson also wrote it would be a 'black shame' for Britons to not stand by their friends at war.¹⁰⁰ In many men's eyes, the war was a just one against unprovoked German aggression, and it was their duty as citizens of Britain to stop this onslaught.

Mobilization was an exciting time for the men who volunteered; the war's true character was mostly unknown to these dewy-eyed recruits, so in place of horror and fear, excitement reigned. Soldiers in England were treated well by their civilian population, with examples of civilians offering the newly enlisted volunteers dinner, tea, and even places to sleep, refusing payment for their graciousness.¹⁰¹ Williamson wrote in his diary nearly a month after rejoining his regiment and beginning training: "I am beginning to thoroughly enjoy myself, getting used to

⁹⁸ Williamson, 15

⁹⁹ Williamson, 8

¹⁰⁰ Williamson, 3

¹⁰¹ Williamson, 11

the discipline, and delighting in the open air and good fellowship.”¹⁰² Camaraderie, a central experience in any army, had already begun to take hold in the regiment. The experience was more systematic and duty oriented for some officers, including Lt. Jack Giffard, whose first diary entry in August of 1914 lacked any emotive passages, and instead was all business.¹⁰³ The time in Britain was for many soldiers a time of enthusiasm coupled with an eagerness to reach France. When Williamson did finally entrain for France in September of 1914 he wrote in his diary: “I shall never forget the mingled emotions of those moments, the poignancy of the throbbing music, and the cheers with which we expressed our exhilaration on being really embarked on a great adventure.”¹⁰⁴ A Private in the British infantry reflected similarly on his deployment to France in 1914, noting the impressive excitement prevalent, after months of training, on finally being headed to the ‘great game across the water’.¹⁰⁵ These warriors were finally going to the war they had been trained to fight, with eagerness and resolve that would be tested in the months and years to come.

Men understood the significance of the war in which they had enlisted to fight from the very outset, and diaries kept during the war help substantiate this fact. Eddie Giffard, an officer, kept a diary throughout the war, probably in part to occupy his time as a great deal of it was spent doing nothing, but he also realized the importance of keeping a record: “I said I wasn’t going to keep a diary any more, but as I suppose this is the most colossal battle both in magnitude and importance that the world has ever seen, I think I will continue, although I may

¹⁰² Williamson, 14

¹⁰³ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, ed. Sydney Giffard (London: The Radcliffe Press, 2003), 41. (8/16/1914)

¹⁰⁴ Williamson, 52

¹⁰⁵ Jackson, 35

take no part in it.”¹⁰⁶ Private Jackson too must have realized the significance of his experiences, because he also kept a diary throughout the war; a diary he would use in 1926 to write a memoir of the ordeal.¹⁰⁷ Similarly in 1928, two years before his diary was published, Williamson wrote after reading it, that it seemed to have a definite ‘historical interest’ suggesting that, even in the inter-war period, the significance of the war was not lost on the author of the diary—not while he wrote it, or years later when he read it.¹⁰⁸ Diaries may have been written for a variety of reasons—but that these men wrote frequently in their diaries shows that they were well aware of the war’s lasting impact.

Upon arriving in France, soldiers were finally in the midst of the greatest war Europe had ever known, and men responded rather differently to being thrust into this situation. Williamson reacted coolly after his first experience under fire, writing in his diary: “Personally, I didn’t feel a bit nervous; merely interested. I was pleased at that, because I didn’t know how it would affect me.”¹⁰⁹ His reaction was matched and surpassed by that of Lt. Jack Giffard who relished one of his first days at war, and wrote how he enjoyed shelling Germans while eating apples from a nearby tree.¹¹⁰ But not every experience upon arriving in France was connected to combat. One humorous account from a Private in the war related being sent to retrieve supplies:

An incident happened at this time, which makes me smile yet when I think of it. Lt. Cameron, my officer, sent for me one morning and said ‘Look here Jackson, I want you to go to Bethune, and get me some things. You can speak French’ (I hardly knew a word) ‘and you’ll manage fine’. Of course I couldn’t argue; he was my officer, so off I set with 80frs in my pocket.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 217 (3/26/1918)

¹⁰⁷ Jackson, 10-12

¹⁰⁸ Williamson, vii

¹⁰⁹ Williamson, 63

¹¹⁰ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 47 (8/29/1914)

¹¹¹ Jackson, 43

Private Jackson was hardly alone in his inexperience, and even less alone in his commitment to his superior officer, a quality which helped to sustain men's focus in combat. Williamson, on one of his first rotations in the frontlines, also showed his greenness: "I innocently asked a Regular, 'When do we attack?' His answer was full of amazement, mingled with scorn, and horror at the bare idea of such a thing. It appears that in this war both sides spend much of their time sitting in wet ditches waiting for the other fellow to begin."¹¹² Indeed, most time was not spent on daring trench raids, or engaging in hand-to-hand combat, but was instead spent doing the daily tasks that kept a military functional. As Private Jackson reflected in his memoir, most time was spent at sentry posts, trench maintenance, nighttime patrols in no man's land, and mending barbed wire fortifications.¹¹³ The impatience associated with waiting for combat would not, however, last long—there was a war raging and fighting to be done.

Private Jackson's first day of actual combat (not just stray bullets across the line) was at the Battle of Loos in September 1915. The Battle of Loos was the first major British operation of 1915 and the goal was to create a diversion so the French could successfully attack the Noyon salient in the Champagne region; despite British objections, the attack went forward and was unsuccessful, with the British suffering 60,000 casualties—more than twice the casualties they inflicted.¹¹⁴ Leading up to the attack, the men knew an offensive was coming, and the lower-ranks were proud to be leading the strike.¹¹⁵ Jackson does not write extensively on the attack itself, except to note that German machine gunners who attempted to surrender were given no quarter and, according to the Private, deserved none.¹¹⁶ However, Jackson did write extensively

¹¹² Williamson, 66

¹¹³ Jackson, 52

¹¹⁴ Michael S. Neiberg, *Fighting the Great War: A Global History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 90

¹¹⁵ Jackson, 45

¹¹⁶ Jackson, 47

about his commanding officer, one Colonel Douglas-Hamilton, who died during the battle; Jackson mentions that the Colonel was posthumously awarded the Victoria Cross, an honor which filled the regiment with great pride, and the sentiment that had the Colonel survived, he would have been proud of his men.¹¹⁷ That he spoke so highly of his slain Colonel indicates the officer had instilled a great loyalty in his men, a factor that cannot be overstated in its relation to morale and endurance.¹¹⁸

But this introduction to combat stands in stark contrast to Williamson's early experiences on the frontlines, culminating in the now famous Christmas peace of 1914. Williamson wrote in his diary several days after Christmas as the peace sustained:

Extraordinary as it may seem, it is a firing-line in name only. In the trenches held by our brigade at all events there has been a truce since Christmas Day. As I write now some of the British are out talking to the Germans in the No-Man's Land between our trenches, swapping souvenirs and tobacco, and becoming good friends.¹¹⁹

Despite the ephemerality of the short ceasefire, the notion that German's were not necessarily evil stuck with the young man who later lambasted the press at home for emphasizing their barbarity; Williamson stressed instead, the bravery and skillfulness of the enemy, opining that they too were enduring the same plight as the British.¹²⁰ While not all soldiers shared this impression, and certainly not to the same degree as Williamson had, other British troops also recognized the courage of the enemy: "I also came across a Britisher and a German who had fought hand to hand, each dying with his bayonet driven through the body of his adversary. Truly two brave men they must have been."¹²¹ Similarly, while wounded in a hospital that had been taken by Germans, Lt. Jack Giffard witnessed many German soldiers stealing various belongings

¹¹⁷ Jackson, 49-50

¹¹⁸ Watson, 114

¹¹⁹ Williamson, 81

¹²⁰ Williamson, 100

¹²¹ Jackson, 82

of the hospitalized British soldiers, however, when the German commanding officer arrived, he ordered all things to be put back and nothing else to be taken.¹²² While neither soldier was moved enough to lay down arms, their clarity exhibits a mutual respect, offered at least to a portion of the enemy across the way.

The front was an absolutely bizarre place, even to men who had been inculcated with a military tradition; the Great War was marked by industrialized warfare to a degree unknown in the wars of the past. The idealism that marked the beginning of the war was undermined by the horrific reality soldiers contended with in the frontlines. Williamson provided insight into the jarring nature of the front in a passage in his diary: "As I remarked before, things are queerly mixed. One picks up a man with his brains blown out (they *will* not keep their dear silly heads down!) and five minutes after we have forgotten the pitiful sight, and are laughing over some jest."¹²³ Active service frequently exposed men to extreme sights that the propaganda at the war's outset could not prepare them for; often the only way to deal with it was simply to go on doing one's work, or else suffer a breakdown. Private Jackson also commented on how the war instilled a roughness in the fighters:

How callous, hardened, and indifferent we had become amongst such scenes may be judged from the fact that after assisting to carry out those wounded men with their lacerated bodies and the 'feel' of their warm blood still on my hands, I could sit down and take my breakfast.¹²⁴

This unusual reality was not an isolated feeling, but was common among all combatants who experienced trench warfare; the physical demands of active service combined with long periods away from loved ones and ordinary life, as well as the constant presence of death often resulted in a distinctive war-weariness, characteristic of nearly all who survived long enough to

¹²² *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 53-54 (9/2/1914)

¹²³ Williamson, 118

¹²⁴ Jackson, 151

understand the reality of this kind of warfare.¹²⁵ Though men did become desensitized in a general manner, they still held onto certain episodes from the war; while this may seem paradoxical, to simultaneously be indifferent and somehow deeply moved, it is worth noting the paradoxical nature of warfare in general. Men were put under such extreme and strenuous situations that an odd melding of emotion developed as a consequence; this indeed would seem to be an unavoidable consequence of all warfare, despite what the enlisting officers may have had them believe.

The Great War was unlike anything the contemporary history books could proffer; it was unprecedented in its magnitude, scope and industrial carnage. This left men with a variety of images forever engrained in their consciousness. One man wrote of the remarkable sights in and about no-man's-land: "All about are huge shell-holes, dead bodies from both sides, the dreadful battle-field litter of rifles, bombs, shells, steel helmets, equipment and letters..."¹²⁶ An officer reflected after one of his first days of heavy losses: "Mean while at the other guns they were behaving like heroes, & got knocked out one after the other. Poor Bradbury had both his legs taken off & died ½ hr later, John was wounded & then killed outright & Mundy was badly hit in the legs, shoulders & head."¹²⁷ Nothing in life, not even previous wars, could prepare a man for the nature of combat in the Great War. Private Jackson recalled an experience after one gloomy night in the trenches: "The trenches were full of bodies both British and German. They lay in grotesque shapes, some indeed stood propped against the parapet, and more than once in the inky darkness we spoke to men who were beyond the power of answering our questions."¹²⁸ For most soldiers, these experiences, sights, smells, and emotions would stay with them for the remainder

¹²⁵ Watson, 74

¹²⁶ Williamson, 166

¹²⁷ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 51 (9/1/1914)

¹²⁸ Jackson, 80

of their lives: “The ruddy glare from the mouths of the guns, which lighted up the surrounding district each time the batteries fired, followed by the roar and crash of bursting shells was something to see, hear, and always remember.”¹²⁹ Being thrust into the war was trying on men’s dispositions, and their involvement left lasting scars, either emotional, actual or both.

Despite some war-weariness, soldiers were not by any means completely disheartened by or apathetic towards their predicament, even if such feelings did occasionally take hold. Many men were deeply moved by their friends’, and even strangers’, ultimate sacrifice on the battlefield. One touching example of such a sentiment can be found in Private Jackson’s memoir. Although a great many men fell frequently, men occasionally could be overcome with great respect for fallen comrades. Jackson had, rather early in his deployment, stumbled across a fallen British soldier who was a stranger to him; nevertheless, he and his friends retrieved his identification, buried him, erected a wooden cross, and then sent a letter to the dead man’s mother.¹³⁰ Although this was hardly the first or last body Jackson would come across, and as far as the sources show, the only one he ever helped to bury, he and his comrades were compelled to honor the fallen man, whom they clearly respected. With all the madness surrounding soldiers, it is easy to understand why they would wish to instill some order and meaning on the chaos that engulfed them.¹³¹ However, not all time was spent dwelling on such matters, to be sure, if men spent all their time thinking about the reality that surrounded them, they might well have gone insane.

When at the front, with no prospect of leave, the next best thing was a relief, or a rotation to the back lines, relatively safe from the threat of death at the front. Williamson wrote: “Relief

¹²⁹ Jackson, 146

¹³⁰ Jackson, 53-54

¹³¹ Watson and Porter, 159-160

is well named. It is indeed a relief to go back to billets. Physically we are tired out at the end of the tour, and for those with any responsibility the mental relief is great too.”¹³² Removing men from the hectic and dangerous front, if only for a short while, allowed soldiers to relax as best they could, and renew their convictions, which in turn sustained units and kept them combat effective. Officers were all too aware of the necessity of relief, and often worried for their men; Williamson at one point discussed having to get ‘ruthless’ with civilians just to put his men under a roof and keep them out of the mud.¹³³ Jackson too wrote fondly of reliefs: “Away from the battle line, the memories of the awful sights we had seen and lived through, had been softened by our month of quietness, and we were now as new men.”¹³⁴ The frontlines were violent, uncomfortable and jolting; no man could endure constant exposure to such conditions, and as such, reliefs were greatly valued.

Relief was not the favored reprieve though, as soldiers were still engaging in militaristic activities and surrounded only by other soldiers; instead, leave was the ultimate rest for many combatants. Leave was an exceptionally valued privilege among nearly all fighters in the Great War, and the British were no different, as they could typically go home to their families in England when leave was granted; a luxury Dominion troops did not enjoy. Jackson was granted a ten day leave from October 31st to November 9th 1915, and relished it after having been away for sixteen months; he wrote how he spent a very busy time visiting friends and telling the folks of life at the front.¹³⁵ Leave was not only for the soldiers, however, but was also for the civilians at home who had not seen their menfolk often for vast stretches of time. Private Jackson provided

¹³² Williamson, 161

¹³³ Williamson, 137

¹³⁴ Jackson, 85

¹³⁵ Jackson, 121

an apt description of the mood at Victoria Station, where men arrived and departed, either meeting or leaving their loved ones:

Here, one saw the various moods of people as caused by the coming and going of soldiers. It was at once the venue of hopes and fear, of joys and tears. Hope and smiles for those safely at home, fears and tears for those departing. Victoria was the last barrier, the dividing line, where men left wives, mothers, sweethearts, and kiddies, where last, fond, farewells were given, and women wept unrestrainedly.¹³⁶

Williamson also noted the tension at the train station as loved one's saw off their menfolk: "To anyone it must be a poignant sight; hundreds of brave women, who keep back somehow their tears, and turn sadly and empty away when the last lingering look has been taken at the vanishing train."¹³⁷ Whether by leave or relief, time away from the bombardment in the frontlines was essential to maintaining morale, for both soldiers, and civilians at home, although departing back to the frontlines made the occasions bittersweet for all involved.

Soldiers, of course, could not always rely on a leave to come through, and as such they had to make their own fun when not at work. British soldiers often played sports to pass the time and to keep an element of normalcy in their lives: "We were rather fortunate in having a good deal of leisure at this time which was spent mostly in games and athletics generally."¹³⁸ British officials at first reacted negatively to the games, but as the war progressed, officers at all levels began to recognize the value of sports, and started actively promoting such games, most prominently, football.¹³⁹ Games had the added benefit of keeping men fit and in shape whilst allowing them to blow off some steam. Rivalries developed between regiments in the different games and helped to solidify primary-group solidarity in soldiers and reinforce the *spirit de*

¹³⁶ Jackson, 121-122

¹³⁷ Williamson, 229

¹³⁸ Jackson, 104

¹³⁹ J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), 87-88

corps.¹⁴⁰ Competing in friendly matches against other regiments strengthened the bonds between men, and in turn made them better fighting forces: “It was not the army or its leaders, however, but rather subsidiary units which were the primary objects of soldiers’ military loyalties.”¹⁴¹ Building loyalty between troops increased trust, combat motivation, and ultimately performance on the battlefield; participating in games helped to inculcate this valuable trait in soldiers through means more voluntary than the military alone could accomplish.

One of the most interesting elements of the British army was the difference of experiences between low ranking soldiers and their officers. British officers enjoyed remarkably better conditions than their men: they had servants, better quarters, better food and better circumstances in general; however they did suffer higher casualty rates than regular enlisted men, with 13.6 percent of officers being killed compared to 11.7 percent of regular enlisted men.¹⁴² The British, at the war’s outset, appointed most of their officers by commission, drawing from the educated and higher classes for their appointments.¹⁴³ But as the war raged on and casualties mounted, Britain was forced to draw from the lower-middle and working classes, which would account for thirty-nine percent of new commissions during the war.¹⁴⁴ One officer, a brother of Lt. Giffard, Walter Giffard, on his first day at war wrote: “First day at war, breakfast in bed at 11 a.m.”¹⁴⁵ Walter Giffard was a balloon reconnaissance officer, owing in large part to his amputated leg (an accidental injury from childhood unrelated to the war) which would have made many other types of service inaccessible. Walter Giffard’s first Christmas was described in his diary thus:

¹⁴⁰ Fuller, 89

¹⁴¹ Watson, 63

¹⁴² Watson, 136

¹⁴³ Watson, 120

¹⁴⁴ Watson, 120-121

¹⁴⁵ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 197 (12/7/1917)

I can imagine them saying ‘poor fellows spending Xmas in France’. Well we had a dinner party of 14 and this was the menu: Hors d’oeuvres, Oxtail soup, Lobster Mayonnaise, Roast Turkey with sausages, Potato and Peas, Plum pudding (on fire), fruit jellies, Cheese straws, Coffee, ‘FIZZ’.¹⁴⁶

This Christmas feast contrasts greatly with Williamson’s description of the front: “Everything and everybody plastered with mud: mud on your hands and face, and down your neck and in your food, and bits of mud in your tea.”¹⁴⁷ To be sure, such a feast would not have been the norm, even for officers, but it evidences the disparity between conditions for the different classes. Indeed, officers certainly valued the differences; every officer’s account reviewed for this study mentioned, often in great detail, the meals and sleeping arrangements for the officers. Eating better food and sleeping in better quarters reinforced the superiority, both perceived and actual, that pervaded the British officer corps.

Officers’ servants were a particularly British tradition. Being an officer’s servant was an enviable position as these men were typically less likely to be killed in action as they did not participate regularly in trench warfare, but instead were occupied with tending to their charge. Eddie Giffard, a Major in the Royal Artillery, mentions his servant, or batman, Kane, only twice in his diaries, noting one day that he brought him the mail and his warrant for leave.¹⁴⁸ It would have been unseemly to discuss his servant at any great length, but his writing does seem to indicate Kane was an acceptable servant. Eddie’s brother, Walter Giffard, had a rather humorous complaint concerning his newly replaced servant who he called a ‘dud’; to Walter’s chagrin, the new batman would not leave Giffard’s wooden leg alone, as he wanted to polish the prosthetic.¹⁴⁹ But these servant’s in general cared greatly for their officer’s well-being. After

¹⁴⁶ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 200-201 (12/25/1917)

¹⁴⁷ Williamson, 69

¹⁴⁸ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 133 (6/19/1917)

¹⁴⁹ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 210 (2/6/1918)

being wounded and the hospital being overrun with Germans, Lt. Jack Giffard spoke kindly of a servant who tended to him throughout the ordeal: "I am being looked after by a servant of Butler, 1st L Gds, who was brought in last night shot through the lung."¹⁵⁰ Despite the servant's own officer being wounded in the lung, which would have required a great deal of tending to itself, this servant was still compelled to split his time and help this unknown officer as well; it seems certain that this servant helped look after Giffard, not only because he was a fellow British soldier, but also because this was part of his duty as an officer's servant.

While it is unquestionably valid that ordinary rank-and-file men could not fraternize with higher ranking officers, officers themselves frequently socialized with other officers of higher and lower ranks. Once an officer, the soldier was proved to be of a higher class, more gentlemanly and sophisticated than the enlisted men; this implied that the company would be refined, and uncouth behavior would not be expected or tolerated. Major Eddie Giffard wrote several times about mingling with other officers, including one time after he ate with a General: "Met the general (Wardrope) at Breakfast: very nice man; & spoke very kindly of The Twins."¹⁵¹ [Note: the twins were his brothers, Lt. Jack Giffard, and Bob Giffard who died in combat] Officers, like the enlisted men, participated in sports, but this was only between regimental officers and occasionally NCO's: no enlisted men would have participated in these officer matches.¹⁵² However, even if they did not participate, they were allowed to spectate and this in turn helped to humanize officers and strengthen regimental bonds.¹⁵³ Though interaction between officers tended to be rather lax, occasions still arose that tested the limits of acceptability: "Went to tea with A Batt 330 Brigade, slapped a subaltern on the back and

¹⁵⁰ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 53 (9/3/1914)

¹⁵¹ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 65 (11/14/1915)

¹⁵² Fuller, 88-89

¹⁵³ Fuller, 90

cheeryohed him and he turned out to be a colonel. However, all's well that ends well."¹⁵⁴ In fact, officers would sometimes let such mistakes pass without much incident, even with NCO's:

This was a rather responsible position for us, and we never knew who might be speaking to us on the 'phones. For instance, on one occasion I answered rather sharply an enquiry from the Brigade Office regarding a certain message, only to be informed later on that I'd been cheeking the Brigadier General. He must have taken my reply in good part, for I heard no more about the matter.¹⁵⁵

Without a doubt, had that Brigadier General cared to pursue the matter, Jackson could have faced serious consequences, though in general these matters were not pursued as the war was far more pressing than such unintended mistakes.

The work men did was very important to them, and succeeding in their tasks was of supreme significance for all, whether the lowly private or the esteemed officer. Duty was driven in part by the identification of most soldiers to the aims of their army, and also in part by their loyalty to their subsidiary units.¹⁵⁶ Williamson was in hospital recovering from a leg wound inflicted by a shell when he received a surprise visitor, the King of England. The visit was most unexpected and most appreciated by the injured soldier; the King and Queen had come to visit the hospital and talked to each wounded man individually, which greatly pleased Williamson who wrote how kind it was for them to come cheer up the wounded.¹⁵⁷ Clearly no man who did not identify with his country's goals in wartime would be happy to see the *de facto* leader of the armed forces; Williamson's pleasure evidences his commitment to the work. Major Eddie Giffard also showed an interest and admiration for the higher ranks, as he saw Winston Churchill in 1915, following Churchill's departure from his post at the Admiralty because of the failed

¹⁵⁴ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 208 (1/28/1918)

¹⁵⁵ Jackson, 108-109

¹⁵⁶ Watson, 62-63

¹⁵⁷ Williamson, 130-131

Gallipoli offensive; his mention of seeing Churchill indicates he was struck enough by the man's presence to find it noteworthy.¹⁵⁸

It was not only the great leaders who enhanced combat motivation, but also the men and work in general. While at Passchendaele, Jackson wrote about one experience: "My thoughts must have been too much occupied in laying the wire to notice the majority of the shells, for now I sometimes wonder how I managed to get that line out, working all on my own. At the time I thought nothing of it, it just seemed to be all in the day's work."¹⁵⁹ Doing work was central to all soldiers' sustained motivation: when there was a task to be done, it was their duty to accomplish that task and not let down their unit: nothing else mattered. Williamson wrote towards the end of the war, after being injured numerous times:

Had the chance of a home appointment when I was at Troon before I came out. Turned it down; must see the show through while perfectly fit. There is too much dodging going on. This may sound priggish: but that's what I think. Besides, I really like being with the men, and I'm proud of being in the regiment.¹⁶⁰

Williamson saw it as his duty to remain with the men and regiment he had grown so fond of; had he abandoned them for a home post, he would have seen himself as abandoning his duty as a healthy Briton capable of fighting and doing his bit.

Work was not always confined to tasks unrelated to combat, and certainly combat itself helped cement men's resolve. The need to justify comrades' sacrifices often reinforced men's ability to endure, and sometimes, motivated them to seek revenge.¹⁶¹ After witnessing stretcher-bearers at Passchendaele, Jackson wrote: "There were many pathetic scenes regarding these white-faced, blood-stained fighters, which caused lumps to rise in our throats, and made us set

¹⁵⁸ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 67 (11/25/1915)

¹⁵⁹ Jackson, 124

¹⁶⁰ Williamson, 176

¹⁶¹ Watson, 69

our faces in grim determination to have revenge.”¹⁶² It is noteworthy that Jackson did not know the men he saw, he simply knew them to be allies and this alone was enough to incite the need for revenge against those that had perpetrated such carnage; the perpetrators had dehumanized themselves, while humanizing the injured Allied troops. Williamson also was deeply moved by the sight of a dead comrade: “Etched in my brain is the picture of one of our officers lying dead, sprawling on his back, head down, mouth open, eyes staring in the middle of what was once a section of trench, now a jumble of upturned earth and ruptured sandbags; a pitiful sight.”¹⁶³ As Alexander Watson has demonstrated, when soldiers saw their dead comrades, it reinforced their tenacity in combat; these fallen men had to be avenged, their deaths had to be made to matter in the Great War, and if the Allies had lost, this would have been impossible.¹⁶⁴ So these sights, rather than serving to dishearten the combatants, could instead refresh their sense of purpose in the war.

Soldiers did not spend all of their time preoccupied with other soldiers; civilian populations, at home and in France, had a tremendous impact on the men who served. Without question many men fought only to protect civilians, usually but not exclusively their families. Williamson greatly appreciated the strength his parents filled him with through their demeanor: “My mother and father are absolute bricks. They know I am going overseas, and they take it splendidly. I am grateful; it makes it so much easier for me.”¹⁶⁵ But it was not this man’s family alone that helped him; in France he became friends with a French family and on 23 December 1914, just before Christmas, he wrote of thanking them: “We subscribed for presents for Monsieur and Madame and the young ones; gave them three cheers and musical honours, to their

¹⁶² Jackson, 125

¹⁶³ Williamson, 125

¹⁶⁴ Watson, 69

¹⁶⁵ Williamson, 49

astonishment and delight. The *patron* became quite animated, he said ‘Vivent les Anglais’ a great many times.”¹⁶⁶ The French family had been gracious to the English soldiers, and the English soldiers acted in kind; the war was not limited to military experiences, the civilian encounters were just as important to the soldiers, if only to remind them why they fought. Lt. Giffard had stayed in a house that belonged to a French woman:

There was only a caretaker who said that Madame had fled to Paris that morning with what she could stuff into 3 cars, she was very pleased to see us & produced wine of all sorts, & the gardener brought up a couple of rabbits & any amount of apples, melons etc. we could have done a rest cure there quite nicely.¹⁶⁷

The French were, in general, very happy to have the British helping them fight the Great War, and often supplied soldiers with whatever they could spare; the British in turn greatly appreciated the kindness of the French they were helping to protect. Though it is worth pointing out that not all French were overcome with graciousness to the point of charity, many in fact took advantage of the mass of soldiers: ‘Business as usual, where possible, is the citizens’ motto; and the Grand Place is thronged with peasant women selling produce at their stall, and the streets are alive with uniforms from England, Scotland, Ireland, and Wales, France, Belgium, and North Africa, and last, but not least, Canada, good husky men.” Some of those peasants undoubtedly overpriced certain commodities, but there were also those that were charitable in their possessions.

British families also mobilized, in a sense, to help their loved ones abroad; countless correspondences, care packages and other forms of help were readily volunteered. After being wounded in the leg, Jackson wrote kindly of those who tended him back to health: “Here, I had every care from British Red Cross nurses, and none but those who have passed through so much fighting know the feeling of comfort and pleasure caused by being looked after by British

¹⁶⁶ Williamson, 79

¹⁶⁷ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, 48-49 (8/30/1914)

women, and these were the first I had seen for many months.”¹⁶⁸ The soldiers at the front, and the civilians who helped them (from home, or in France) were intricately connected and constantly helped each other to continue with the task at hand. It was while at war that Williamson married his sweetheart, writing only one entry in his diary on that day: “MARRIED Norah, a glad day.”¹⁶⁹ After receiving his Military Cross, Williamson wrote that while it did not mean much at the front where many great deeds went unnoticed, it would be good for his wife and family at home; it meant a great deal to honor their sacrifices through his own achievements.¹⁷⁰ Those at home were always on the minds of those at war because they were the primary reason these men fought and continued to fight, even to the death if it was necessary.

When British men first enlisted in the Great War, they could not have possibly understood precisely what was in store for them. Men enlisted because they feared the barbarity of the German army, and the consequences it would mean for Britain. Once in France, when the nature of the war had become abundantly clear, their combat was sustained by a variety of institutional structures. Men were cycled out of the frontlines in reliefs which gave them time to rest, away from imminent death; men were also granted leaves, where they could go back home and see the loved ones they were in France fighting to protect. While in France, contact with the locals helped them to refresh their sense of civility and life without war. The camaraderie with fellow soldiers also helped men to persevere in their plight; this could be through football games when at rest, or through joint effort in work. Furthermore, experiencing the war and the death of friends and allies helped to sustain combat motivation in men who otherwise may have grown apathetic towards their country’s goals. The work men did was important to them, and so it also

¹⁶⁸ Jackson, 63-64

¹⁶⁹ Williamson, 151

¹⁷⁰ Williamson, 175

was important for them to not let down their comrades, whether their fellow ranks or their commanding officers. Without these compounding experiences reinforcing men's will to endure the horrific realities in the frontlines, combat motivation would not have been maintained and sustained. The Great War would have ended quite differently for Britain.

Conclusion

When the young teenager Gravilo Princep shot the fatal bullet into the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, he could not possibly have understood the full ramifications of his actions; indeed, a great deal of the world's nations could not have expected the single act to cascade into World War. Certainly, men like Rob Roy McGregor or Henry Williamson would not have seen such an act transpire and expect a World War; and yet, that is exactly what happened. One Serbian nationalist's action put the world into the throes of war, causing men from all across the earth to mobilize for the Great War. In Britain, as Germany took hold of the political opportunity afforded by Princep, men mobilized to block the spread of German *Kultur* and what was interpreted as unchecked aggression. In Canada, a loyal Dominion of Britain, men mobilized to help their English brothers stop the onslaught of German militarism. But as the war unfolded and men were dying by the tens of thousands, fear of Germany was not alone capable of keeping men fighting in the trenches in the worst war ever known. The war became a unique experience for each nation involved. The experiences of Britain and Canada were quite similar in many aspects; however, they also differed quite drastically.

At the war's outbreak, Britain and Canada responded quite similarly. In Britain, the society responded to the German violation of Belgian neutrality with indignation; this outrage was only enhanced when the atrocity stories reached the general public. People were livid at the barbarity of the German army in its handling of Belgian civilians, and many felt a duty to enlist to protect those that could not protect themselves. When France was invaded by Germany, those who had not been prompted to enlist by the Belgian situation now had newfound reason to fight; not only was France sure to experience the same atrocities as Belgian had, but it now appeared there was no limit to German expansion, and this meant that Britain itself would likely be next.

Men were incensed to enlist and protect their country, their families, and indeed, their very way of life from the threat of German *Kultur*. In Canada, where they were at war when Britain was at war, men flocked to enlist. A great number of British-born men living in Canada felt compelled to help their families and friends under siege. Canadian-born men were also outraged, as the Britons had been, at the atrocities in Belgium and the invasion of France, and these like-minded individuals also enlisted in great numbers. Canada was not geographically near the Germans, but that was either unimportant for the men with deep ties to England, or only seen as temporary if Germany would be allowed to have its way; furthermore, in 1914, there were still rumors of an invasion by German-Americans. In both countries, high diction flourished and recruiters and propaganda employed ancient chivalric, heroic language to entice men to enlist. The masculinity they preached, along with the inherent honor and character, could only be instilled by the military; the military, which was staged to fight off the greatest assault on civilization these men would bear witness to in their lifetimes. These appeals drove thousands of men to enlist in both Britain and Canada as the war began.

The war of movement did not last long; from August to September of 1914 the Germans saw their Schlieffen Plan fail. The German plan was to avoid a two front war at all costs by knocking out the French resistance quickly and turning their attention to the east, but the French proved to be better fighters than the Germans expected, and with British assistance, at the First Battle of the Marne, the German advance was stopped. To make matters worse for Germany, Russia began fighting while still mobilizing, making a two front war inevitable. Germany had hoped for a quick victory, but this proved to be impossible. For the next four years, the Great War would be marked by stalemate and deadlock, and trench warfare became the norm for all combatants on the Western Front. This in turn marked new combat motivations among all troops.

Chivalry and the fight against German *Kultur* would no longer suffice as combat motivators on their own. The madness of shells, machine guns, and chemical gas when combined with the static nature of trench warfare demanded new methods to sustain combat motivation.

For Canadians and the British, a central component of their sustained combat motivation was their conviction that work that was done was necessary and honorable. Repeatedly the sources reflect men's desire and need to do work that mattered: whether it was fixing telephone lines, mending barbed wire fortifications, or tending to the wounded—soldiers were committed to their tasks. Completing their work not only occupied their time, but it reinforced combatants' belief that their participation was substantive; when there was a job to be done, men could take pride in its accomplishment, and the assurance that their part helped protect their subsidiary units. No man was under the false illusion that their actions alone would cause the victory or defeat of their country, but doing their bit helped motivate the men to keep on doing their job—their work, which if not essential to the country at large, was essential to their unit. Both British and Canadian soldiers drew on their work to maintain their motivation in the Great War.

Work alone does not fully explain the sustained combat motivation among combatants in the Great War. Connection to family was of consummate importance for many of the men who fought. Rob Roy McGregor provides an excellent example of the importance of this connection; his frequent correspondence with his mother and family in Canada help elucidate this point. It was not just the care-packages that McGregor valued; he valued having a family to converse with, and to keep him focused. His letters evidence again and again his appreciation for his family at home, and the solidarity they provided him with. R.A.L.'s letters were quite similar in this regard, as he too frequently expressed his appreciation to his wife at home in Canada for all the comfort she provided through her letters. In a slightly different sense, a similar element can

be drawn from the Giffards' collective experiences in the war; although there is no surviving correspondence between the brothers or from the brothers to their parents, it is apparent from their diaries that they all cared deeply for each other. In fact, it could be reasonably suggested that the younger brothers joined the war in an effort to emulate the brothers who had fought from the outset. When the hospital where Lt. Jack Giffard was convalescing was overrun with Germans, he wrote in his diary that he wished to get a letter to his wife, but feared it may be some time before he could do so.¹⁷¹ Remaining in contact with one's family was extremely important in maintaining combat motivation among combatants.

Relief from the stress of frontline service, and leave, were important institutional structures that helped to maintain combat motivation among soldiers fighting the Great War. Relief was valued by all men who fought; it was necessary to be rotated out of the frontlines, if only briefly, in order to maintain combat efficacy. The stresses of the front could only be endured for so long before men needed a break. Leave also functioned as an important combat motivator among troops, but in different ways depending on the nationality and age of the men who were granted leave. For British soldiers, leave was usually an opportunity to go see their families in England, where they could re-connect with their loved ones. For Canadian soldiers, leave was an altogether different phenomenon. Going home was simply not an option, and for the older men who served, leaves were consequently relished less than by their younger counterparts. For young Canadians, the prospect of a leave was exciting; they could visit some of the famous sights of Europe, which they otherwise would not likely be able to see. Older men, with wives and children thousands of miles away, often found leave more frustrating than reinvigorating compared to the younger men. Whatever the means, a reprieve from the

¹⁷¹ *Guns, Kites and Horses: Three Diaries from the Western Front*, ed. Sydney Giffard (London: The Radcliffe Press, 2003), 54. (9/4/1914)

battlefields of the Great War was necessary for maintaining morale, endurance and resilience in combat.

Leisure in general was a valued aspect of military life, which is seldom associated with leisure. For the Canadians and Britons, leisure time was greatly cherished. The most common activities seemed to be athletics and sports, which allowed men to have fun when not at work while strengthening their regimental pride and small-unit cohesion. Participating in sports helped to strengthen loyalty and trust between men without exposing them to the danger of the frontlines. When so much of their time was devoted to military work, a few hours a week playing games and competing with one another helped to alleviate the stress of forward positions. Contact with civilians also helped men to reaffirm their reasons for fighting, particularly when those civilians expressed their gratitude and sympathy. Leisure was also valued by British officers, who frequently dined with one another and went on various outings together. For all involved, leisure was an important factor in maintaining combat motivation.

The Great War deeply impacted all nations that fought. The Great War was a turning point in the history of Britain, and the world in general. Wars would no longer be fought without the technologically advanced weapons introduced in World War One; the entire character of warfare had evolved. Britain was a changed nation after the war; the class distinctions that marked pre-war Britain were offset by the mass death and necessary introduction of lower-classes to the upper-class way of life as reflected in officer-rank accommodations; this was apparent even to the Canadian R.A.L. who wrote his wife:

I often think how significant it is—how the world for years and years has covered itself with a sort of armour. Very clever it all was. People with money and no brains, to cover their lack of brains hedged themselves around and called the hedge class distinction, even educated themselves in separate schools, using a different accent and form of speech.

What a joke! Then along comes this war—more than a war, that word doesn't come to describe it—and off has to come the armour, and a man is just a man—or not—as God made him. What surprises, what shocks must have occurred! But you can't realize it as I can, because you have never seen the home life of England as I have.¹⁷²

One of the most important differences between the Canadian and British experiences in the war was the different attitudes towards class. The Canadians were not as bound as the British by the rigidities of class and the assumptions of class hierarchy being valuable. The Canadians approached warfare and the higher ranks with a casualness bordering on nonchalance; they saw the British army, permeated by class distinctions, to be distasteful. In short, the Canadians were not fighting to preserve the same pre-war order that the British were fighting to restore—though the men who volunteered for active service abroad all believed they were fighting for the same cause, to defeat German barbarism; the conduct of the war exposed the very different place that class hierarchy occupied in the two nations' understanding of social order. It was in this sense that the Canadians came to believe they were fighting for a future that was not identical to that the British fought for, but instead was a future that was not as bound by class distinctions as Britain had been.

Britain's triumph in the war christened it the most powerful nation in the post-war period. Casualties were massive and society had been permanently affected by the Great War. The memory of the Great War is present even to this day in Great Britain, where civilians recall the tragic first day of the Battle of the Somme, and families still remember their loved ones who perished. World War One changed the face of the world, and Britain was at the forefront in those nations most greatly affected. The impact of World War One on British society cannot be overstated. Britain, in its modern embodiment, is still deeply influenced by the Great War.

¹⁷² R.A.L., *Letters of a Canadian Stretcher Bearer*, ed. Anna Chapin Ray (Boston: Little, Brown, and Company, 1918), 137

Canada was also profoundly affected by the Great War. A young and not fully independent nation in 1914, Canada was a Dominion in the British Empire. Canadian's only previous experience in war as a nation was the Second Boer War which was a relatively limited experience, particularly when compared with their participation in the Great War. Canadian national identity was, in part, shaped by World War One; it was in the war that Canada proved itself a formidable fighting force, and more than just an inconsequential part of the British Empire. Canadians had earned a newfound respect among the Western nations of the world, and had demonstrated themselves to be major actors on the international stage. Canadians had accepted their British heritage but had also forged a new, distinctly Canadian identity.¹⁷³ They were less concerned about class distinctions and yet still hard fighters, and now the world knew it. If the Great War had been lost, Canada would not be the nation it is today.

Comparing the experiences of the two nations is imperative in better understanding the Great War. The societies were similar in many regards, but also different in important, albeit subtle ways. Examining these differences helps to explain how combat motivation was maintained and sustained in the four years of brutal combat and harsh conditions that defined the Great War. The Canadian and British experiences in the war were naturally similar in many regards, but it is the differences which reveal the nature of the societies, and why combat motivation was maintained in those nations. The First World War was one of the most important events in modern history, and to better understand the nature of the war, and the nation's which fought it is an important task for historians to undertake.

¹⁷³ Jeff Keshen, "The Great War as Nation Builder in Canada and Australia," in *Canada and the Great War: Western Front Association Papers*, ed. Briton C. Busch (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2003), 3-26

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