

Portraits of Battle

Courage, Grief, and Strength in Canada's Great War

Edited by Peter Farrugia and Evan J. Habkirk



UBC Press · Vancouver · Toronto

Sample Chapter UBC Press

Contents

List of Figures and Tables / ix

Acknowledgments / xi

Introduction / 3

Peter Farrugia

- 1 The View from Above: A Canadian Pilot in the Battle of
Flers-Courcelette / 21

Graham Broad

- 2 “When Told to Advance, They Advanced”: War Culture and the CEF / 45

Jonathan F. Vance

- 3 The Voiceless Dead: Francis Jenkins, Regina Trench, and Living and
Dying on the Western Front / 63

Kyle Falcon

- 4 “Going over the Ground Again”: Major Samuel Bothwell, 1st CMR,
and Vimy Ridge / 84

Peter Farrugia

- 5 Soldier or Ward? Hill 70 and the Lived Experience of Private Wilfred
Lickers / 109

Evan J. Habkirk

- 6 Talbot Papineau: The Life and Death of an Imperial Man / 130

Geoffrey Hayes

- 7 Fallen Sisters: Gender, Military Service, and Death in Canada’s First
World War / 151

Sarah Glassford

- 8 Religion and the Great War: The Canadian Experience / 175
Gordon L. Heath
- 9 Replacing Leaders: Lieutenant Roy Duplissie and the Hundred Days Campaign / 199
Lee Windsor
- 10 “Scars upon My Heart”: Arnold and Clarence Westcott, Brothers and Soldiers / 224
Cynthia Comacchio
- 11 The CEF during the Hundred Days: Desertion and Punishment / 249
Teresa Iacobelli
- Conclusion / 265
Peter Farrugia
- Selected Bibliography / 286
- Contributors / 300
- Index / 301

Introduction

Peter Farrugia

Every soldier must know, before he goes into battle, how the little battle he is to fight fits into the larger picture, and how the success of his fighting will influence the battle as a whole.

– BERNARD LAW MONTGOMERY, *THE MEMOIRS OF
FIELD-MARSHAL THE VISCOUNT MONTGOMERY OF ALAMEIN*

THIS COLLECTION BEGINS WITH a simple, if startling, fact about the Great War. Approximately 13 percent of all Canadian casualties between 1914 and 1918 were incurred on ten specific days in the conflict. To put it another way, about one in eight of the dead and wounded fell during ten battles. Of course, the mere recitation of statistics, no matter how arresting, would be of limited historical value without additional detail and context. By fusing the story of these battles with the lived experiences of some of the men and women who died in the fighting (or those who were otherwise affected by it), this volume mines a rich vein of historical material.

The aim of this collection is to bring together the life stories of a cross-section of Canadians who served in the war, including Maritimers, Westerners, Québécois, First Nations people and recent immigrants, infantrymen, officers, nurses, and airmen, those injured in body or mind, decorated veterans, and those who were court-martialled, and to fit them into the larger social and military picture, in order to understand the profound impacts that the Great War has had on Canada. In applying this approach, the book poses fundamental questions about the nature of the Great War and the ways in which it has been remembered since 1918. By accentuating the individual among larger social and military concerns, we can convey some sense, however partial, of Monty's "little battles" and what they tell us about the war itself.

There are a number of advantages to this approach. First, we can offer a glimpse, however momentary, of battle – not to satisfy some sort of voyeuristic

urge but rather to communicate a sense of the confusion, fear, elation, and pain that intermingle in war. For the present-day Canadian reader, generally living in peace and comfort and spared the sensations and moral quandaries of the battlefield, this establishes important context. In addition, the focus on individuals provides a snapshot of flesh-and-blood men and women who waged war or were caught up in its currents. Given recent post-modernist suspicion about the trustworthiness of grand historical narratives, history has seen a “biographical turn” that some historians have welcomed. For example, Barbara Caine suggests,

At a time when historians want to stress the need to encompass the many different historical narratives which could be produced at any one time, all of which are contingent on particular situations and locations, individual lives have come to appear more and more important because of the many ways in which they can illustrate how differences of wealth and power, of class and gender and of ethnicity and religion affected historical experiences and understanding. Within this framework, biography can be seen as the archetypal “contingent narrative” and the one best able to show the great importance of particular locations and circumstances and the multiple layers of historical change and experience.¹

This biographical turn has been in evidence in both the professional and popular realms of history. During the last two decades, academic examples, such as *Paddling Her Own Canoe*, by Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson, or *Thomas Cromwell: A Life*, by Diarmaid MacCulloch, have won plaudits from peers.² Meanwhile, popular versions of history, from the television adaptation of Daisy Goodwin’s *Victoria* and Lin-Manuel Miranda’s smash Broadway hit *Hamilton* to the television adaptation of Jennifer Worth’s memoirs, *Call the Midwife*, have attracted large followings.³

Call the Midwife is an example of collective biography. An important variation on biography, this has a long lineage that can be traced back to Plutarch. “Often built around the interlinked stories of members of a single family or small group,” it allows the practitioner to avoid artificially isolating the protagonist from other figures, who can become little more than props.⁴ *Portraits of Battle* contains a number of noteworthy exemplars of this type of history. Cynthia Comacchio, Sarah Glassford, and Teresa Iacobelli, in their explorations of twin brother infantrymen, nursing sisters, and court-martialled soldiers, all allow room for probing of the interactions that occurred between the people presented.

The perspective of an individual or of an intimate group can contribute to our understanding of the Great War. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize

limits. None of the people who are at the centre of the following chapters are *typical*. They are meant to be *suggestive* rather than *definitive*. There was no single experience of the First World War; that immediately becomes clear upon reading the stories in this collection. It is in reflecting on points of similarity and points of contrast that a fuller and more variegated image of the impact of this conflict emerges.

In the same way, the authors' exploration of the bloodiest days for the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) is not meant to suggest that these specific dates are the most significant ones between 1914 and 1918. The battles may not even be the most important ones. We should keep in mind that those who were charged with commemorating the conflict deliberated long and hard before selecting Vimy as the site of Walter Allward's impressive monument. The Battles of Second Ypres (22 April–25 May 1915) and Mont Sorrel (2–13 June 1916) – one a victory marked by the use of a new and terrible weapon, the other a catastrophic defeat – were among the engagements that were considered for the honour.⁵ Some of the battles discussed in this collection are etched on national consciousness, and others rest in obscurity; this in itself offers insight into the ways in which history and memory function. And nobody would deny that the implications of some moments – far removed from the battlefield – outstripped those of many a bloody assault. Examples here include Prime Minister Robert Borden's speech in January 1916, promising to maintain a force of 500,000 men, or the Easter 1918 riots in Quebec City. The eleven encounters that have been chosen for exploration in this book serve primarily as portals into the examination of critical questions: How were technological advances integrated into operations, and how powerful and immediate was their impact? Were men in the CEF immersed in a culture of war that slowly brutalized them and made them impervious to the horror around them? What role did First Nations soldiers play in the conflict, and how did their service affect their standing in the eyes of non-Indigenous Canadians? Does the way that we choose to remember the Great War say more about contemporary Canada than it does about the conflict itself?

We have endeavoured to connect individual, battle, and theme in our chapters. In some cases, this has been easier to accomplish than others.⁶ Vimy, Canada's most recognized battle, lends itself easily to a discussion of the interplay of history and memory. At Hill 70, the 107th Timber Wolf Battalion – an infantry unit half of whose soldiers were Indigenous men that was later converted into a pioneer battalion – played a significant role in the assault, which provides an excellent opportunity to consider the experiences of Indigenous soldiers during the war and upon their return home. Battles drawn from the Hundred Days – Amiens, the D-Q Line, and Bourlon Wood – offer fertile

ground for the examination of themes such as the coping mechanisms of troops at the front, strategies for replacing officers due to high casualties, and the motives for and reaction to desertion among Canadian units.

In other instances, the individuals selected linked well with specific historiographic themes. Talbot Papineau’s extraordinary trajectory and his preoccupation with manliness, loyalty, and duty suited a discussion of shifting gender expectations during the war. Similarly, the intense emotional bond between the Westcott twins and the enduring grief of the surviving brother, Arnold, provided the perfect platform for a treatment of mourning in the Great War. The themes that the authors have chosen to investigate are intended to fill out our picture of the war and to sharpen our image of this country during the most significant test in its young life.

IN CREATING THIS COLLECTION, the editors wanted to ensure that the individual soldiers and nurses chosen represented a cross-section of Canada socially and geographically. We also wanted the social and military history surrounding these individuals to be as strongly represented as possible. We approached this through a twofold process. First, during the initial stages of this project, we identified potential themes and dominant questions about the First World War and gathered the names of scholars whom we could approach to write on these subjects. The team then began to identify soldiers from across Canada who were connected to the ten costliest battles for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. During this process, we also discovered that Canadian nursing sisters

Table 1.1

The costliest days for the CEF in the Great War		
Battle	Date	Number killed
Vimy Ridge	9 April 1917	2,398
Flers-Courcelette	15 September 1916	1,064
Hill 70	15 August 1917	976
D-Q Line	2 September 1918	956
Amiens	8 August 1918	934
Passchendaele	30 October 1917	849
Canal du Nord	27 September 1918	843
Regina Trench	8 October 1916	792
Thiepval Ridge/Mouquet Farm	26 September 1916	742
Bourlon Wood	28 September 1918	719

Note: These figures are courtesy of Geoffrey Hayes, from his presentation “Vimy by the Numbers,” 28 January 2013, which was in turn based on the casualty figures at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission website. Sarah Glassford’s contribution to this collection ([Chapter 7](#)) does not deal with one of the ten costliest engagements for the CEF.

had their own costliest day – 19 May 1918, when German aircraft bombed No. 1 Canadian General Hospital at Étaples. This compelled us to include that episode in our analysis, in the form of [Chapter 7](#), by Sarah Glassford.

As we began contacting authors for the project, we found that some were unable to participate or wanted to shift their contribution to better reflect their current research. This affected the alignment of the themes we wanted to explore. Some authors wished to bring certain servicemen and -women into the project, necessitating further shifts. Although this created a predominance of Ontarians among our veterans, we were still able to include soldiers and nurses from seven of the nine provinces at the time of the Great War. These individuals are split evenly between officers and other ranks. Further, these selections continued to represent a cross-section of experiences, including those of recent immigrants, women, Indigenous people, bachelors, married men with families, working-class Canadians and individuals from prominent families, and those with differing levels of education. In addition, their battlefield experiences varied: some survived, whereas others were killed; three were court-martialled, and two were decorated for bravery. Even their ages varied, ranging from twenty to thirty-seven.

Although the adjustments described above were time consuming, they furthered the overall goal of exploring the war as a multi-faceted event that affected the experiences of Canadians, allowing us to examine many seemingly discordant themes, using a battle, personal narrative, and exploration of key historiographical debates. These chapters talk to each other, sometimes agreeing and sometimes differing. This underscores the fact that the debates we have scrutinized are ongoing and that no single experience of the war was universal. These examinations, like the war itself, can be messy and controversial, but they enabled us to provide a balanced treatment of Canadians' experiences in the First World War.

AS MENTIONED ABOVE, Canada's introduction to the ferocity of the Great War came in early encounters such as Second Ypres in April–May 1915 and Mont Sorrel in June 1916. However, the moment imprinted in public consciousness when Canada was thrown into the cauldron of war remains the Somme offensive, launched on 1 July 1916. This collection begins with Graham Broad's examination of the experiences of Eddie McKay in the fledgling Royal Flying Corps around the Battle of Flers-Courcelette. The role of new technologies in the combat on the Western Front has long been of interest for scholars.⁷ Broad focuses on the impact of the airplane, both as a novel piece of technology that promised to help unlock the front and as a vehicle that enabled young men like McKay to break free of class bonds. He also explores the enduring myth of

“lions led by donkeys” (or as Broad puts it, “eagles led by ostriches”). This interpretation insists that the military leaders of the Allies (the donkeys) – especially Field Marshal Douglas Haig, commander of the British Expeditionary Force – were callous to the suffering of their men (the lions) and squandered lives in futile attempts to break through enemy lines.⁸ Broad’s analysis is at loggerheads with this view. He finds evidence that commanders used aircraft reasonably well, even if casualty rates remained high among pilots.

The airplane was but one technological innovation that had an impact on the Great War. The manner in which new developments were quickly adapted to the battlefield has been linked to the larger militarization of culture that some historians have seen as operating between 1914 and 1918. In [Chapter 2](#), Jonathan Vance examines the war experience of Robert Buchan, from the rural Ontario community of Waterdown, and tackles the notion of war culture. This term, coined by Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, refers to the network of beliefs, artifacts, and practices that were shaped by the war and that manifested in trends such as the appropriation of military images and names for commercial products, the development of militaristic games for children, and the tightening of military justice at the front.⁹ Could the penetration of the war into all facets of life and the mounting violence on the battlefield transform citizens – especially the citizen-soldiers at the front – as some have suggested? Reminding the reader that his soldier hailed from the village of Waterdown near Hamilton, Ontario, Vance argues “it is unwise to minimize the isolation of a village, even one that was just a few miles from a major city” (page 51), Vance dismisses the notion of an all-powerful and all-permeating set of associations. He suggests that Buchan remained a small-town lad, motivated by and drawing support from his bonds with friends and family rather than any smouldering hatred of the enemy stoked by elites or some process of brutalization that was operative at the front. He concludes, “Nothing in Rob’s life before 1914 suggests that he was an inherently violent man, but he seems to have assimilated well into a world of violence. He saw his friends killed, and he almost certainly killed men on the other side, and yet toward the end of it all, he insisted that he was essentially unchanged by the experience” (page 60).

As Vance is quick to note, though talk of a pervasive war culture might be exaggerated, there is no question that the experience of 1914–18 profoundly affected those who served at the front. In [Chapter 3](#), Kyle Falcon looks at the various elements of trench life that helped soldiers cope with what they were seeing. He follows Francis Jenkins, a Scottish-born carpenter who attested in Manitoba, into the Battle of Regina Trench. Using the experience of Jenkins and other combatants, Falcon shows that the troops “developed a unique culture,

one in which large, impersonal forces were acknowledged, but meaning and agency were bolstered” (page 66). He underlines the fact that the men in the firing line were not above a certain ecumenism, willing to embrace a variety of spiritual practices and beliefs that may have conflicted with their stated religious faith. Like Vance, Falcon sees a great deal of home paradoxically surviving in Flanders and France, with music, trench journals, and concert parties all playing their part in helping the men adjust to their circumstances. These were the means by which they asserted their individual agency, all the while taking out insurance policies such as charms and rabbits’ feet to guard against capricious fate.

If it was impossible for the men and women of the CEF to predict whether they would survive the war, it was equally improbable that they could predict how their exploits on the battlefield would be portrayed in years to come. The interplay of history and memory in the remembrance and commemoration of the Great War has spawned a vibrant literature.¹⁰ In [Chapter 4](#), my own contribution to this collection, I focus on the assault on Vimy Ridge, beginning with the role of Samuel Bothwell of the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles and widening the scope to understand the ways in which Vimy has been deployed by various elites for their own purposes since 1917. A survey of how the battle was regarded over time reveals that the meaning of Vimy has been anything but stable and uncontested. The empty combat boots that were arranged around the Vimy monument for the 100th anniversary ceremony in 2017 act as a metaphor for the disembodied soldiers, remobilized all too often for contemporary political or commercial purposes. For its part, the life of Bothwell argues against a simple, monochromatic, and heroic interpretation of the battle in April 1917.

[Chapter 5](#), by Evan J. Habkirk, could also be said to touch on the elusiveness of memory. It delves into what has often been labelled the forgotten engagement: the Battle of Hill 70.¹¹ It is fitting that Habkirk examines this particular battle, as a central theme of his work is the frequently overlooked contribution of First Nations soldiers to the CEF between 1914 and 1918. A stubborn fallacy endures among some Canadians that Indigenous communities did little to support the war. Habkirk demonstrates that, on the Six Nations of the Grand Territory at least, this was not the case. He argues that Six Nations men enlisted “as a natural extension of their traditional military support of the British Crown” (page 110).¹² He further notes the irony of the fact that Indigenous warriors were integral to Canadian success on the battlefield and yet failed to attain full humanity in the eyes of their European overseers. Focusing on federal government intrusion into the life of First Nations soldier Wilfred Lickers, Habkirk demonstrates that “surveillance and interference in the lives of Indigenous soldiers began well

before they were discharged from service” (page 110). The poignant story of Lickers’s personal losses, coupled with his inability to exercise full control over his affairs upon his return to Canada, makes it clear that the Great War did not have the desired emancipatory effect for First Nations people.

Ostensibly, a more striking contrast to Lickers’s powerlessness could not have been found than the subject of [Chapter 6](#), by Geoffrey Hayes, which looks at the bloody battle of Passchendaele and explores the twofold struggle of Major Talbot Papineau. Descendant of the Lower Canada radical Louis-Joseph Papineau, he became a key Quebec voice in favour of the policy of conscription,¹³ which was introduced by the Borden government. Born into wealth and influence, and with dreams of a post-war career in politics, he grappled with his own choices on and off the battlefield in light of the strict gender expectations operating at this time.¹⁴ Like Samuel Bothwell, who died at Vimy, Papineau had many reasons not to place himself in harm’s way. Hayes argues that his actions – most notably his decision to return to the front lines after having served in relative comfort as a staff officer – were largely determined by prevailing gender norms, which emphasized duty, manliness, and loyalty. In the final analysis, the well-connected and politically ambitious Papineau may not have enjoyed the unencumbered agency that a cursory glance at his case might suggest.

Gender roles during the Great War are central to [Chapter 7](#), written by Sarah Glassford.¹⁵ She delves into the experiences of three Canadian nursing sisters who were killed in a German air raid of May 1918. This is the only chapter that does not concentrate on a specific battle. Because the nurses in the Canadian Army Medical Corps were non-combatants, they suffered comparatively few casualties; nevertheless, their wartime experiences are definitely worth examining. Glassford looks at their motivations for enlisting, the numerous gendered expectations that confronted them, and the ways in which their service was understood by others, both during the war and in the decades that followed. She contends that “acknowledging the gendered ways in which early-twentieth-century military service was perceived encourages a rereading of nursing memoirs, one that looks past the stereotypes of caring mothers and angels of mercy to recognize the labour, skill, and professional competence they demonstrate, as well as how nurses themselves understood their service” (page 169). She shows that the women whom she selected – Katherine Maud Macdonald, Margaret Lowe, and Gladys Wake – encountered the common stereotypes of the day and overcame them, kindling a spirit among themselves and their peers that would equip those who did return for the battles they would fight for equality back in Canada.

Stereotypes have also recently been challenged when it comes to the Great War's impact on faith.¹⁶ In [Chapter 8](#), Gordon L. Heath tells the story of Solon Albright, who went to war and died in the Battle of Amiens at the outset of the Hundred Days. Heath looks at the role that religious belief played among Canadians at the time of the First World War and also touches on the tensions that confronted a young man such as Albright, who was of German descent and who lived in Kitchener (formerly Berlin), Ontario. To what extent might ethnicity fuel or extinguish the urge to fight on behalf of Canada in the Great War? The author rightly acknowledges that the war acted as a crucible, testing individuals' identity, both in terms of ethnicity and religious observances.¹⁷ He also points out, much like Vance in [Chapter 2](#), that "there was no radical post-war decline in religion, but neither was there a widespread revival. People returned to life as best they could and, in many cases, sought solace in religion and religious communities" (page 192). At both the front and at home, they were forced to learn how to accommodate to the new normal, even though the war challenged many individuals' theology, most notably on the issue of the propriety of war.

Learning has proven a contentious theme in the historiography of the Great War. The theory of the "learning curve" has gained considerable support, particularly in the United Kingdom over the last twenty years.¹⁸ This interpretive approach holds that the British High Command – far from being the callous donkeys of popular imagination – worked assiduously to implement hard-won lessons during the war. In [Chapter 9](#), Lee Windsor examines one important way in which the Canadian Army learned its own lessons on the job. He draws on the life of New Brunswicker Roy Duplissie to emphasize the value of the emerging system of Canadian officer replacement and argues that, in the system that finally developed, "it was up to battalion and company commanders at the front to observe the performance of their soldiers and to flag the ones that had officer potential" (pages 203–4). Duplissie fully justified the faith of his superiors, fighting with courage and initiative through the Battle of the Drocourt-Quéant Line and deeper into the Hundred Days until his death on 28 September 1918. The recognition that the Canadian military developed an effective officer replacement system under considerable duress would go some way to counter-acting the "lions led by donkeys" understanding of the Great War and would, instead, bolster the notion of a learning curve.

The final two contributions in this collection return us to the central fact of the Western Front between 1914 and 1918: death and its impact on both those in the midst of the carnage and those who anxiously awaited word of loved ones.¹⁹ In [Chapter 10](#), Cynthia Comacchio tells the story of Arnold and

Clarence Westcott, twin brothers from Seaforth, Ontario, who served with the CEF. Clarence was killed in the Battle of the Canal du Nord, but his brother survived the war. Comacchio conveys both the personal and the societal impact of loss during the conflict. On the one hand, she underlines the ways in which traditional grieving rituals were challenged as a result of the pervasiveness of death at the time. She concludes that “the Great War’s unrelenting death count ... pre-empted some of the public signifiers of loss” (page 228). The enormity of the cost incurred in France and Belgium was bound to act as a catalyst for change. At the same time, grief on a more intimate level was also leading to profound consequences. The author traces the echoes of Arnold Westcott’s aching loss down through the generations, painting a picture of a man who was, in many respects, seeking to justify his own survival in the wake of his brother’s death.

In [Chapter 11](#), Teresa Iacobelli also treats the impact of death. The unremitting drumbeat of suffering marked the men and women at the front. Most managed to keep going, to perform their duties with resolve if not relish. However, others could not maintain their balance and sought to escape the fighting. Iacobelli explores the phenomenon of desertion and courts martial in the CEF.²⁰ She examines the cases of John Wellman Campbell, George Murree, and Edward Dean, three friends from the same unit who fled the battlefield prior to the assault on Bourslon Wood, immediately after the taking of the Canal du Nord. Iacobelli notes that “in comparison to other forces, the CEF was relatively stable” (page 254); that is to say, the indiscipline that characterized some armies during the war was largely absent. However, she also remarks on the inconsistency in official response to cases of desertion. The previous disciplinary records of offenders counted for less than the current state of unit morale or the likelihood of a major attack in the near future. Thus, the stories of Campbell, Murree, and Dean illustrate the precarious balance between individual agency and chance that operated on the Western Front.

WHAT MIGHT AN EXPLORATION of the ten costliest days for the CEF in the Great War yield? Why is this approach worth taking? The cumulative impact of the chapters in this book – at once balancing personal narratives, battle accounts, and the examination of key historiographical debates – is threefold. First, by focusing on individuals – regardless of the wealth or dearth of material – the authors underline the obvious (though sometimes overlooked) fact that the war was fought by flesh-and-blood men and women. Just as Abel Herzberg could write of the Shoah in the Second World War that “there were not six million Jews murdered; there was one murder, six million times,”²¹ it is equally true that

knowing the sum total of killed and wounded between 1914 and 1918 does not necessarily help us to understand the meaning of the Great War. Being able to quote statistics conveys neither the enormity of the grief occasioned by these losses nor the ways in which Canadian thinking about and modes of waging war shifted in the course of the conflict. Rather, the personal is the gateway into the general, with individual veterans providing suggestive commonalities, despite their differences in age, gender, region, and a host of other markers. Who would have imagined that Talbot Papineau, the scion of a wealthy Quebec family, and Wilfred Lickers, a simple farmer from Six Nations, were both constrained by external pressures in their choices in the field? The son of German immigrants and the middle-aged family man with military honours earned in the Boer War – Solon Albright and Samuel Bothwell – both felt duty bound to enlist despite currents that could easily have dissuaded them from participating. And the twin whose brother never returned, as much as the three men who deserted when they were pushed past their limits, were indelibly marked by the trauma of the war in which they fought.

This last comparison raises a second important theme that emerges from these collected stories. The American historian Thomas Laqueur was among the first to articulate the ways in which the Great War fostered a sense of the “democracy of death.”²² Certainly, particularly as the war dragged on and the casualties mounted, some Canadians would have agreed with Erich Maria Remarque’s wily veteran, Kat, who asks, “Now just why would a French blacksmith or a French shoemaker want to attack us?” and answers his own question with, “No, it is merely the rulers. I had never seen a Frenchman before I came here, and it will be just the same with the majority of Frenchmen as regards us. They weren’t asked about it any more than we were.”²³ Some critiques of the Great War suggested that certain sectors were profiting while others were suffering disproportionately. Still, even as ardent an anti-war campaigner as E.D. Morel of the Union of Democratic Control could write, “Death is in the very air we breathe ... Its outstretched wings beat against the mansion of the rich and the cottage of the lowly.”²⁴

Was this merely a literary flourish on Morel’s part? The evidence would suggest otherwise. Some forty years ago, in 1977, Jay Winter tackled the myth of the “Lost Generation” and found that it was not without some validity. Whereas casualties among the elites represented a fraction of those suffered by the working class in sheer numbers, a different story emerged when it came to percentages, leading Winter to conclude that “the demographic consequences of male mortality during the Great War varied by class. The most severely depleted social groups were the most privileged.”²⁵

Certainly, this imbalance seems to have operated in the industrial hub of Brantford, Ontario. There, the Cockshutt family – which had established a leading farm implements manufacturing company in 1877 and which continued to have a profound effect on economic, political, social, and cultural matters in the city – saw five of its privileged sons serve overseas. Of them, Harvey Watt Cockshutt, only son of the late founder of the Cockshutt Plow Company, died in the debacle at Mont Sorrel in June 1916.²⁶ Similarly, the future Group of Seven painter, Lawren Harris, and his younger brother Howard – born into another influential manufacturing family – both volunteered for combat. After being deemed medically unfit for overseas action, Lawren worked at Camp Borden and later Hart House as a musketry instructor. Howard enlisted in the British Expeditionary Force and served with the 3rd Battalion Essex Regiment, where he earned a Military Cross before being killed in action on 22 February 1918.²⁷ If the sons of two wealthy families in one of Canada's most productive industrial towns were vulnerable, who was safe?²⁸

Many of the privileged ranks, who might reasonably have escaped death in earlier conflicts, perished in the Great War. There was not only a democratization of suffering but also a democratization of recognition. This is clearly demonstrated in the insistence of Fabian Ware of the Imperial (later Commonwealth) War Graves Commission on uniformity of gravesites and prohibition of distinction by rank.²⁹ So, too, do the many monuments that record the names of the local dead, major next to private, lawyer beside farrier, old stock English teen next to middle-aged Hungarian immigrant. Finally, there was a lively discussion throughout the empire about the relative merits of artistic versus utilitarian monuments, with populations in some locales insisting that memorials should serve a useful contemporary purpose for the common people.³⁰ Thus, a thirty-seven-year-old Brantford dentist named Panayoty Percy Ballachey, who had ten years' experience on the Brantford School Board and who was killed in action near Ypres, was recognized by having a local elementary school named in his honour.³¹

Despite all of this, it is equally important to remember that democratization had limits. The faithful service of those who belonged to the "other ranks" was not universally rewarded with democratic reform upon their return. Likewise, the women who served so capably in Europe were largely expected to revert to their pre-war roles in Canadian society, and the First Nations men who fought in the CEF saw, if anything, further government intrusion into their lives after the conflict ended.³² In this, they were much like the African Americans who served with distinction in the American Army.³³ Nevertheless, the experience was formative for many Canadians. This is captured movingly in "My Company," a poem by Herbert Read:

You became
 In many acts and quiet observances
 A body and soul, entire.

I cannot tell
 What time your life became mine:
 Perhaps when one summer night
 We halted on the roadside
 In the starlight only,
 And you sang your sad home-songs,
 Dirges which I standing outside you
 Coldly condemned.

Perhaps, one night, descending cold,
 When rum was mighty acceptable,
 And my doling gave birth to sensual gratitude.

And then our fights: we've fought together
 Compact, unanimous;
 And I have felt the pride of leadership.³⁴

Labourers, women, First Nations people, and visible minorities all bled the same way. They laughed, cried, and died just like those who were perceived as their superiors. And that recognition was pregnant with the possibility of change.

Finally, these portraits of men and women who lived through (and, in many cases) died during the ten costliest days for the CEF help to present a more nuanced picture of Canada in wartime. The notion of “costliest battles” can be extended (metaphorically) well beyond the cessation of hostilities into our own era. All too often, the Great War has been refought in the pages of magazines, newspapers, and learned journals. For some, it was an amalgam of mud, blood, and ineptitude.³⁵ It was irredeemable, and only armchair generals and nationalists would dare seek to resuscitate notions of honour and glory.³⁶ For others, this response epitomized precisely the sort of left liberal bias that has ruined the field of Canadian history. This position was famously articulated by J.L. Granatstein in his bestseller *Who Killed Canadian History?* Granatstein summed up his argument thus:

My point is, or should be, simple: history happened. The object is not to undo it, distort it, or to make it fit our present political attitudes. The object of history, which each generation properly interprets anew, is to understand what happened and why. A multicultural Canada can and should look at its past with fresh eyes.

It should, for example, study how the Ukrainians came to Canada, how they were treated, how they lived, sometimes suffered, ultimately prospered, and became Canadians. What historians should not do is to *recreate history to make it serve present purposes*. They should not obscure or reshape events to make them fit political agendas.³⁷

Whatever the objections to Granatstein's larger thesis – and there have been many – we must, at least, take seriously the charge that we have often reinterpreted the First World War through the lens of the present and even, sometimes, with specific contemporary agendas, whether political, cultural, or commercial, in mind.³⁸

A more nuanced approach would allow us to integrate seemingly discordant themes, to bring together ostensibly contradictory facts. Undeniably, the Western Front between 1914 and 1918 was replete with horrific scenes, with shattered bodies, chest-deep mud, and desecrated landscapes. But it was also home to acts of bravery, bonds of camaraderie, and even, on occasion, revelry and joy. The women who enlisted may have been infuriated when they were expected to return to their subordinate position in Canadian society. However, their experiences had confirmed their belief in their abilities and opened the eyes of many others who had doubted their qualities. Returning Indigenous soldiers like Wilfred Lickers were no doubt frustrated by the persistence of paternalism that marked settler-Indigenous relations in Canada. But the knowledge of the strength of their Great War contribution, coupled with the passion aroused by continual injustice, fuelled the efforts of people such as Frederick Loft (who founded the League of Indians of Canada, forerunner of today's Assembly of First Nations) or Levi General (who attempted to address the League of Nations regarding Canadian mistreatment of First Nations people).³⁹ Their activism helped to launch a new period in the long fight for First Nations rights that persists to this day.

A similarly lengthy struggle continues over the meaning of the Great War. What were its cascading effects on Canadians at the front and back home? How has it been remembered and commemorated? Have we flattened out the narrative in an effort to simplify its significance or to deploy it for contemporary ends? The contributors to this volume asked themselves these questions as they applied the novel approach favoured here – bringing together biography, battle accounts, and historiographical discussion. This new approach enables us to work from the personal to the general, to contextualize the losses that made these moments in the Great War so costly, and to bring a fresh perspective to some of the key historiographical issues that have long been controversial in the study of the First World War in Canada.

Notes

- 1 Barbara Caine, *Biography and History*, 2nd ed. (London: Red Globe Press, 2019), 2.
- 2 Veronica Strong-Boag and Carole Gerson, *Paddling Her Own Canoe: The Times and Texts of E. Pauline Johnson (Tekahionwake)* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Diarmaid MacCulloch, *Thomas Cromwell: A Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2018).
- 3 The debut of ITV's *Victoria* was viewed by an estimated 5.4 million people. BBC Reel, "ITV's *Victoria* Reigns over BBC's *Are You Being Served?* and *Porridge* Revivals," *BBC News*, 5 September 2016, <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-37213042>. A December 2018 article announcing that Lin-Manuel Miranda and three key collaborators had been awarded Kennedy Center honours reminded readers that the play *Hamilton* had won several Tony Awards in 2016 for "Best Musical," "Best Score," and "Best Choreography," and added that its creator had received the 2016 Pulitzer Prize for drama as well. Gwen Aviles, "Lin Manuel Miranda, Hamilton Creators Awarded First-of-Its-Kind Kennedy Center Honor," *NBC News*, 3 December 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/latino/lin-manuel-miranda-hamilton-creators-awarded-first-its-kind-kennedy-n943171>. The February 2012 launch of the BBC drama *Call the Midwife* attracted a viewership of 11.4 million people, helping make it the "highest-rated BBC new drama launch on record." PBS, "BBC Worldwide and PBS Sign Deal to Bring Critically Acclaimed 'Call the Midwife' to the US," Press release, 14 May 2012, <https://www.pbs.org/about/blogs/news/bbc-worldwide-and-pbs-sign-deal-to-bring-critically-acclaimed-call-the-midwife-to-the-us/>.
- 4 Jeremy Popkin, "Review of *Biography and History*," *Biography* 34, 2 (2011): 331.
- 5 John Pierce, "Constructing Memory: The Vimy Memorial," *Canadian Military History* 1, 1 (1992): 5.
- 6 Inevitably in a collection of this kind, scholars whom we originally approached were not always able to participate. Themes sometimes shifted in alignment with the research interests and expertise of contributors.
- 7 See, for example, Guy Hartcup, *The War of Invention: Scientific Developments, 1914–1918* (London: Brassey's Defense, 1988).
- 8 This theory was first articulated in Alan Clark, *The Donkeys* (London: Hutchinson, 1961). A strong overview of the theory's continued relevance is provided in Dan Todman, *The Great War: Myth and Memory* (London: Continuum, 2005), 199–203.
- 9 Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau, *Men at War, 1914–1918: National Sentiment and Trench Journalism in France during the First World War* (Washington, DC: Berg, 1995), 164. For an early foundational work on this theme, see Stéphane Audoin-Rouzeau and Annette Becker, 14–18: *Understanding the Great War*, trans. C. Temerson (New York: Hill and Wang, 2002). For a work bringing together younger and more established scholars, see Pierre Purseigle, ed., *Warfare and Belligerence: Perspectives in First World War Studies* (Boston: Brill, 2005). For an excellent overview of the debate surrounding "war culture," see Leonard V. Smith, "The 'Culture de guerre' and French Historiography of the Great War of 1914–1918," *History Compass* 5, 6 (2007): 1967–79.
- 10 The discussion begins with Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1975), and continues with Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), and Todman, *The Great War*.
- 11 An excellent recent volume on this engagement makes the link to forgetting explicit. See Douglas E. Delaney and Serge Marc Durflinger, eds., *Capturing Hill 70: Canada's Forgotten Battle of the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2016).
- 12 Here, Habkirk cites Janice Summerby, *Native Soldiers – Foreign Battlefields* (Ottawa: Veterans Affairs Canada, 2005), 8. It is critical to understand that First Nations communities

saw themselves and Britain as allied nations, equal in dignity and rights. There was no conception of a ward-protector relationship.

- 13 Papineau's heightened notoriety was achieved largely as a result of his conversation with Henri Bourassa on the issue of Quebec's contribution to the war effort. Although this is not the main focus of his chapter, Hayes does provide insight into it. An early study of conscription was J.L. Granatstein's *Broken Promises*, which was reprinted in 2016 with a revised analysis of the question. J.L. Granatstein, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Oakville, ON: Rock's Mills Press, 2016). For the mechanics of conscription, see Richard Holt, *Filling the Ranks: Manpower in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914–1918* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2017). For an important reassessment of the impact of conscription on Canada's effectiveness, see Patrick Dennis, *Reluctant Warriors: Canadian Conscripts and the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2017).
- 14 Masculinity and the war is a relatively new area of historical interest. Important texts include Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class, and Militarism in Ontario, 1902–1914," *Labour/Le travail* 42 (Fall 1998): 115–41; Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jessica Meyer, *Men of War: Masculinity and the First World War in Britain* (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009); Allison Fell, "Gendering the War Story," *Journal of War and Culture Studies* 1, 1 (August 2007): 53–58; and John Horne, "Masculinity in Politics and War in the Age of Nation-States and World Wars, 1850–1950," in *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History*, ed. Stefan Dudink, Karen Hagemann, and John Tosh (New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 22–40.
- 15 A strong overview of issues regarding women in the Great War is provided by Susan R. Grayzel and Tammy Proctor, eds., *Gender and the Great War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017). An indispensable volume for the Canadian perspective is Sarah Glassford and Amy Shaw, eds., *A Sisterhood of Suffering and Service: Women and Girls of Canada and Newfoundland during the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2012).
- 16 For this subject, see Michael Snape and Edward Madigan, *The Clergy in Khaki: New Perspectives on British Army Chaplaincy in the First World War* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013); Jonathan H. Ebel, *Faith in the Fight: Religion and the American Soldier in the Great War* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010); Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997); Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains and the Great War*, 2nd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2014); and Gordon L. Heath, ed., *Canadian Churches and the First World War* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014).
- 17 Recent scholarship has made it clear that reflection, experimentation, and re-evaluation in the spiritual realm were definitely operative at this time. For example, Kyle Falcon demonstrates that, in the wider British context, acts of syncretism that grafted superstition or belief in the supernatural onto orthodox Christianity were commonplace. See Kyle Falcon, "The Ghost Story of the Great War: Spiritualism, Psychical Research and the British War Experience, 1914–1939" (PhD diss., Wilfrid Laurier University, 2018).
- 18 Countless treatises have been written on this subject. Among the best are Gary Sheffield, *Forgotten Victory – The First World War: Myths and Realities* (London: Review, 2002); Geoffrey Jukes, Peter Simkins, and Michael Hickey, *The First World War* (New York: Routledge, 2003); and I.F.W. Beckett, Timothy Bowman, and Mark Connelly, *The British Army and the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).
- 19 For death and bereavement in the Great War, see David Cannadine, "War and Death, Grief and Mourning in Modern Britain," in *Mirrors of Mortality: Studies in the Social History of Death*, ed. Joachim Whaley (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 187–242; Adrian Gregory, *The Last Great War: British Society and the First World War* (New York: Cambridge

- University Press, 2008); Pat Jalland, *Death in War and Peace: A History of Loss and Grief in England, 1914–1970* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); and Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning*.
- 20 For the British situation, see Cathryn Corns and John Hughes-Wilson, *Blindfolded and Alone: British Military Executions in the Great War* (London: Cassell, 2001). For the Canadian case, see Teresa Iacobelli, *Death or Deliverance: Canadian Courts Martial in the Great War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2013).
 - 21 Abel Herzberg, quoted in “The Holocaust: Crimes, Heroes and Villains,” <http://www.auschwitz.dk/>. This sentiment underpins the remark allegedly made by Josef Stalin to US ambassador Averell Harriman, to the effect that “the death of one man is a tragedy. The death of millions is a statistic.”
 - 22 Thomas W. Laqueur, “Memory and Naming in the Great War,” in *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity*, ed. John R. Gillis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), 151.
 - 23 Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front*, trans. A.W. Wheen (New York: Random House, 2013), 151.
 - 24 E.D. Morel, *Truth and the War* (London: National Labour Press, 1916), 114. Formed in 1914, the Union of Democratic Control was tinged with isolationism. Between 1914 and 1924, it was one of the most authoritative anti-war voices in Britain, largely as a result of its influence among unions. Martin Ceadel, *Pacifism in Britain, 1914–1945: The Defining of a Faith* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 319.
 - 25 J.M. Winter, “Britain’s ‘Lost Generation’ of the First World War,” *Population Studies* 31, 3 (November 1977): 465.
 - 26 The other four sons included Captain C. Gordon Cockshutt (son of Frank Cockshutt), as well as Lieutenant Eric Morton Cockshutt, Captain George Turner Cockshutt, and Lieutenant William Ashton Cockshutt (all sons of William F. Cockshutt). These soldiers are among the more than five thousand individuals from Brantford, Brant County, and Six Nations who are chronicled on the website of the Great War Centenary Association at <http://www.doingourbit.ca>.
 - 27 “Lawren and Howard Harris,” Great War Centenary Association, <https://doingourbit.ca/blog/9494>.
 - 28 Kyle Falcon attributes the rise of spiritualism in part to the dramatic casualty numbers, which were especially bad for junior officers, who were drawn from the higher ranks of society. See Falcon, “The Ghost Story,” especially 19–21.
 - 29 “About Us,” Commonwealth War Graves Commission, <https://www.cwgc.org/about-us>. A 1918 report to the Imperial War Graves Commission by Lieutenant-Colonel Sir Frederic Kenyon, Director of the British Museum laid out many of the principles that were to inform the process of interment (see Frederic Kenyon, *War Graves: How the Cemeteries Abroad Will Be Designed* (London: His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1918), 8, which is available through a link at the Commonwealth War Graves Commission webpage above).
 - 30 Nowhere was this more apparent than in Australia. See K.S. Inglis, *Sacred Places: War Memorials in the Australian Landscape*, 3rd ed. (Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2008), 131–38.
 - 31 “Panayoty Percy Ballachey,” Great War Centenary Association, <https://doingourbit.ca/profile/panayoty-ballachey>.
 - 32 This was most clearly evident in October 1924, when elections were ordered by the federal government to replace the deposed hereditary council of Six Nations. See Tom Hill and Joanna Bedard, *Council Fire: A Resource Guide* (Brantford: Woodland Cultural Centre, 1989), 25–26; E. Brian Titley, *A Narrow Vision: Duncan Campbell Scott and the Administration of Indian Affairs in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1986), 126; and Susan M.

- Hill, *The Clay We Are Made Of: Haudenosaunee Land Tenure of the Grand River* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2017), 234–36.
- 33 See, for example, Arthur E. Barbeau, Bernard C. Nalty, and Florette Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers: African-American Troops in World War I* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1974).
- 34 Herbert Read, “My Company,” available at <https://allpoetry.com/My-Company>.
- 35 Todman, *The Great War*, especially xi–xii, where the dominant myth of the war as futile is laid out in detail.
- 36 This is in large measure the approach taken by Ian McKay and Jamie Swift in *The Vimy Trap: Or, How We Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Great War* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2016).
- 37 J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: HarperCollins, 1998), 105 (emphasis added). Granatstein’s statement is particularly relevant in view of the contemporary purposes for which the war was mobilized during the centenary commemorations, nowhere more than in the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.
- 38 For responses to Granatstein, see, for example, Ken Osborne, “Who Killed Canadian History?” *Canadian Historical Review* 80, 1 (March 1999): 114–18; and Veronica Strong-Boag, “Who Killed Canadian History?” *Historical Studies in Education* 11, 2 (October 1999): 283–85.
- 39 For Loft, see Timothy C. Winegard, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2012), 164; and Peter Kulchyski, “A Considerable Unrest’: F.O. Loft and the League of Indians,” *Native Studies Review* 4, 1–2 (1988): 95–117. For General, see Laurence Hauptman, *Seven Generations of Iroquois Leadership: The Six Nations since 1800* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2008), 137–38; and Grace Li Xiu Woo, “Canada’s Forgotten Founders: The Modern Significance of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Application for Membership in the League of Nations,” *Law, Social Justice and Global Development Journal* 1 (2003), https://warwick.ac.uk/fac/soc/law/elj/lgd/2003_1/woo/.

© UBC Press 2021

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without prior written permission of the publisher.

Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing in Publication

Title: Portraits of battle : courage, grief, and strength in Canada's Great War /
edited by Peter Farrugia and Evan J. Habkirk.

Names: Farrugia, Peter, 1965- editor. | Habkirk, Evan J., 1983- editor.

Series: Studies in Canadian military history.

Description: Series statement: Studies in Canadian military history |
Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: Canadiana (print) 20200400509 | Canadiana (ebook) 20200400541 |
ISBN 9780774864916 (hardcover) | ISBN 9780774864930 (PDF) |
ISBN 9780774864947 (EPUB)

Subjects: LCSH: World War, 1914–1918—Canada.

Classification: LCC D547.C2 P67 2021 | DDC 940.4/1271—dc23

Canada

UBC Press gratefully acknowledges the financial support for our publishing program of the Government of Canada (through the Canada Book Fund), the Canada Council for the Arts, and the British Columbia Arts Council.

This book has been published with the help of a grant from the Canadian Federation for the Humanities and Social Sciences, through the Awards to Scholarly Publications Program, using funds provided by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada.

Publication of this book has been financially supported by the Canadian War Museum.

Set in Helvetica Condensed and Minion by Artegraphica Design Co. Ltd.

Copy editor: Deborah Kerr

Proofreader: Alison Strobel

Indexer: Cheryl Lemmens

Cartographer: Mike Bechthold

Cover designer: Alexa Love

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

www.ubcpress.ca