

**Zombie Army**  
**The Canadian Army and Conscription**  
**in the Second World War**

*Daniel Byers*



**UBC Press** · Vancouver · Toronto

Sample Material © 2016 UBC Press

STUDIES IN CANADIAN MILITARY HISTORY

*Series editor: Andrew Burtch, Canadian War Museum*

The Canadian War Museum, Canada's national museum of military history, has a threefold mandate: to remember, to preserve, and to educate. Studies in Canadian Military History, published by UBC Press in association with the Museum, extends this mandate by presenting the best of contemporary scholarship to provide new insights into all aspects of Canadian military history, from earliest times to recent events. The work of a new generation of scholars is especially encouraged, and the books employ a variety of approaches – cultural, social, intellectual, economic, political, and comparative – to investigate gaps in the existing historiography. The books in the series feed immediately into future exhibitions, programs, and outreach efforts by the Canadian War Museum. A list of the titles in the series appears at the end of the book.

© UBC Press 2016

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**

---

Byers, Daniel Thomas, author

Zombie army : the Canadian Army and conscription in the Second World War /  
Daniel Byers.

(Studies in Canadian military history)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued in print and electronic formats.

ISBN 978-0-7748-3051-5 (hardback). – ISBN 978-0-7748-3053-9 (pdf)

ISBN 978-0-7748-3054-6 (epub). – ISBN 978-0-7748-3055-3 (mobi)

1. Draft – Canada – History – 20th century. 2. Canada. Canadian Army – Recruiting, enlistment, etc. – World War, 1939-1945. 3. World War, 1939-1945 – Canada. I. Title.

II. Series: Studies in Canadian military history

UB345.C2B94 2016

355.2'2363097109044

C2016-901342-1

C2016-901343-X

---

**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.

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

Printed and bound in Canada by Friesens.

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

Copy editor: Matthew Kudelka

Proofreader: Dianne Tiefensee

UBC Press

The University of British Columbia

2029 West Mall

Vancouver, BC V6T 1Z2

[www.ubcpress.ca](http://www.ubcpress.ca)

## **SALUTE TO A ZOMBIE<sup>1</sup>**

*[Sung to the tune of "My Darling Clementine"]*

*I'm a Zombie, I'm a Zombie,  
I'm a Zombie. Yes, I am  
I'd much rather be a Zombie  
Than an Active Service Man.*

*I'm a Zombie, I'm a zombie,  
I'm a Zombie, till I die.  
Active Service makes me nervous,  
So I'll never go and try.*

*I was a Zombie, I was a Zombie,  
I was a Zombie, and it's right,  
While in Col. Ralston's Army,  
I'll never have to go and fight.*

*I was a Zombie, I was a Zombie,  
I was a Zombie I'll allow.  
Tired of BS., I put up a GS  
So I'm in the army now.*

*So I joined Active Service,  
Sailing over with the tide,  
I can walk along the street now  
And never have to go and hide.*

*Now come listen all you Zombies,  
You drink our wine, you drink our beer,  
But you won't turn G[eneral].S[ervice].  
For a handcuffed volunteer.*

*That's the end of our story,  
All you Zombies, Please take heed,  
Why not join the Active Service,  
Help us out, where ere there's need.*

# Contents

List of Tables and Figures / ix

Acknowledgments / xi

Introduction / 3

## **Part 1: The Historical Legacy**

- 1 Conscription and Canadian History, 1627–1939 / 13

## **Part 2: The National Resources Mobilization Act and the Rise of the Big Army**

- 2 Mobilizing Canada: The Creation of the Thirty-Day Training System, 1939–40 / 43
- 3 Enshrining the NRMA: Compulsory Military Service, 1940–41 / 71
- 4 Creating the “Big Army”: Conscription and Army Expansion, 1941–43 / 94

## **Part 3: Canadian Conscripts and Their Experiences during the War**

- 5 Canada’s Zombies, Part 1: A Statistical Portrait / 125
- 6 Canada’s Zombies, Part 2: Life in Uniform / 144

## **Part 4: The Fall of the Big Army**

- 7 “No stone ... unturned”: The Failure of Conscription and the Big Army, 1943–44 / 177
- 8 Revolt or Realization? The NRMA and the Conscription Crisis of 1944 / 204

## **Part 5: The Aftermath**

Epilogue: Conscription and Canadians in the Second World War / 233

Appendix: The National Resources Mobilization Act, 1940 / 245

Archival Sources Consulted / 247

Notes / 249

Index / 312

## Introduction

DURING THE SECOND WORLD WAR, compulsory military service took on the longest, most comprehensive form that it has ever had in Canada. Under the authority of the National Resources Mobilization Act (NRMA) of June 1940, more than 150,000 men were compelled to undergo training and serve for up to four years on home defence duties in the Canadian army – over 15 percent of the total of 1.1 million men and women who served in the country's three armed services during the war. Until 1944, conscripts were not forced to serve overseas. Almost 60,000 agreed to change their status after they had enlisted, however, providing 10 percent of all of the army's wartime volunteers. Another 60,000 remained available to man countless defence posts and other establishments across Canada, thus releasing a similar number of volunteers to proceed to Europe. The bulk of that latter 60,000 were still in uniform in late 1944, when shortages of reinforcements led to a crisis over sending 16,000 of them overseas that almost tore apart the government of Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King.<sup>1</sup>

The numbers raised by conscription are significant. Yet the direct effects of this massive wartime mobilization have largely been forgotten. Few historians have investigated the creation, administration, or impact of the training system that was set up under the NRMA, or the experiences of the hundreds of thousands of Canadians who were subjected to it. Instead, attention has focused on political aspects of conscription, partly due to the sheer significance of the issue during the Second World War, and partly due to the reliance of most historians on the records of Prime Minister King and his Cabinet colleagues to tell the story of the events. Early on, historians also came to concentrate on these aspects thanks to a sensational allegation reported by Bruce Hutchison in *Macleans* in 1952. In an excerpt from an upcoming popular biography of King, Hutchison revealed for the first time the prime minister's claim that in 1944 he had been confronted with a "revolt of the generals" that had forced him to extend conscription to overseas service or face mass resignations by the army's senior leaders. According to King, by taking matters into their own hands in this manner the generals had threatened the very foundation of democracy in Canada. So he had yielded in order to preserve at least the outward appearance of civilian control.<sup>2</sup>

As a result of studying conscription from this perspective, a number of historians have come to be particularly critical of the army's role in wartime events. King's official biographer, R. MacGregor Dawson, was motivated by Hutchison's revelations to interview participants and prepare three advance chapters on the subject, which were later published separately after he died (although this meant he was unable to go back and perhaps reconsider his initial, more critical reactions). While dismissing the notion of an outright revolt, Dawson viewed developments from the point of view of King and other political leaders who had firmly opposed extending conscription to overseas service. He took the generals to task for the large, inflexible training organization they had built up in Canada during the Second World War, and for what he considered to be their open resistance to attempts to find alternatives to sending the conscripts overseas in 1944.<sup>3</sup> Later accounts by J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman relied on more thorough research in the papers of the various political figures who had been involved, but also ultimately blamed the army's commanders for a lack of foresight in building up a military force larger than could be maintained through voluntary service.<sup>4</sup> In 2001, Michael Stevenson investigated the actual machinery that had been created to mobilize civilian manpower below the political level. But given that he studied events almost entirely from the point of view of the key government agency that had to reconcile the competing needs for men between the military and other parts of Canada's war effort, he too tended to be critical of the army's constant demands.<sup>5</sup> Most recently, Richard Walker has been even more damning in his judgments of the senior generals who commanded the wartime army, suggesting that they knowingly misled and even coerced their civilian masters into accepting a force that was too large to be maintained throughout the war, without regard for the consequences.<sup>6</sup>

Even those authors who have explained the role of the army more sympathetically have tended to concentrate on its actions mainly because of their political implications with respect to conscription. In 1956, E.L.M. Burns, a former Canadian general and one of the architects of the army's wartime conscription machinery, produced a thorough study of how the army had used its human resources during the war, titled *Manpower in the Canadian Army*. In its pages, he suggested that political factors such as prewar neglect of military affairs by the politicians, their requirement that military leaders maintain two distinct administrative systems for conscripts and volunteers before 1944, and the wish for reasons of sovereignty to maintain a national reinforcement system completely independent of Britain's overseas (and for two separate theatres, after Canadian troops became engaged in both Italy and northwest Europe in 1943–44) had all helped cause waste and inefficiency in wartime mobilization.

As a result, even if it was not entirely their own fault, the army had used too many men, and by 1944 there were no alternatives to sending conscripts overseas.<sup>7</sup> In a somewhat similar vein, historians such as J.E. Rea and David Allan Wilson have argued that the army also grew to be larger than intended in those years because of the reluctance of the federal Cabinet to face having to reign in either it or various other aspects of the country's larger war effort.<sup>8</sup> In the most thorough account of the military aspects of the crisis to date, C.P. Stacey, the army's official historian, concluded in 1970 that senior officers had only acted properly and done their constitutional duty in late 1944 by trying to make their political superiors aware that the overseas army no longer had enough volunteers to sustain it in its present form.<sup>9</sup> But even Stacey's primary focus remained to explain the background to and the events of the crisis around the Cabinet table, rather than to examine in great detail developments at lower levels within the army itself.

This book goes below the political level to explore the actual role of the Canadian army in creating and administering compulsory military training during the Second World War, and particularly the influence of H.D.G. "Harry" Crerar, its overall commander when the program was introduced in 1940, and later its commander in northwest Europe in 1944–45. While conscripts were not compelled to serve overseas until late 1944, from the time the program was first created in 1940 many men changed their status voluntarily. Faced with a directive from civilian leaders to design a program to mobilize and train conscripts, but one that their political superiors were for the most part then satisfied to leave to the army to run as long as it did not later result in having to send conscripts overseas, Crerar and his subordinates allowed many of their own personal and – even more importantly – professional ambitions for the place of the army in Canada after the war to shape the result. In particular, in their desire to create a large, powerful army that could take a leading role in the fighting overseas (and therefore gain greater recognition among postwar Canadians), they deliberately organized the army's training system to encourage as many conscripts as possible to convert after the men had been placed in uniform. One consequence was that although for the early part of the war Crerar still tended at heart to be a conscriptionist, he and to a greater extent his fellow senior officers seem to have convinced themselves that they could maintain a larger volunteer force in Europe than had at first been thought possible, simply by calling out more conscripts for home defence whenever necessary. Based on that certainty, they then convinced their political superiors to authorize what became known at the time and later as the "big army" of five divisions and ancillary units that was eventually formed overseas. This study's review of these

developments will provide a fuller answer than has been put forward by previous historians as to why military officials were prepared to push so hard for the “big army” during the first half of the war (and, even more importantly, why their political superiors were willing to accept it).

Another consequence of the way that conscription evolved after 1940 was that increasing pressures were placed on the conscripts to volunteer for overseas service. Ultimately, this led to allegations of verbal and even physical abuse. Using statistical records and other sources that have been unknown or ignored until now, this book explores the history of all 157,841 men who served as conscripts between 1940 and 1945 – their ethnic, linguistic, religious, and occupational backgrounds, their experiences of compulsory training, the ways that army officials attempted to convince them to volunteer once they were in uniform, and the responses of conscripts themselves to those pressures. By the middle of the war, the Canadian public knew them pejoratively as “zombies,” after the undead movie monsters of the 1930s, who mindlessly obeyed their masters’ commands without feeling or opposition. Nobody was quite sure where exactly the term originated.<sup>10</sup> But many people assumed that they were mostly French Canadian, or from other ethnic groups that did not share the dominant British Canadian beliefs of the time. Yet more than has been previously realized, these men tended to reflect the makeup of the country as a whole. And they had many reasons for refusing to volunteer. No historian has explored these aspects of conscription in detail until now.

By 1944, almost all of the country’s easily available reserves of manpower had been exhausted, and only those men who had firmly resisted all attempts to make them volunteer seemed available as potential reinforcements. Suddenly, the army’s leaders discovered that they might have to ask their political superiors to order conscripts overseas after all. The federal Cabinet agreed to do so, but only after weeks of acrimonious debate, the forced resignation of the federal defence minister, J.L. Ralston, and the voluntary exit of another powerful minister, C.G. Power.<sup>11</sup> Prime Minister King came to see the crisis as a betrayal by his military leaders, with negative consequences for the larger and more influential postwar army that H.D.G. Crerar had been hoping to build as a result of its wartime successes. The events of late 1944 are much more understandable, however, when we know how conscription actually operated below the political level, the characteristics of the conscripts themselves, and how all of this came together to affect events.

This study also provides considerable information about how Canada’s entire wartime army was mobilized, and how hundreds of thousands of both conscripts and volunteers experienced military training and service during the war. The

ability to raise so many additional soldiers through the NRMA, at a time when Canada was also greatly threatened generally, led to the creation of a domestic network of training camps and defences larger than anything Canadians have ever experienced on their own soil, before or since. The daily sight of hundreds of men in uniform in dozens of small communities across the country was a regular reminder of the war's huge scope and its potential human costs for all Canadians.<sup>12</sup> Beyond that, conscription itself became part of the collective experience of an even larger number of Canadians who were friends, parents, brothers, sisters, girlfriends, and spouses of men called out under the NRMA. At an even broader level, almost no Canadian male between the ages of eighteen and forty-five escaped being affected by some aspect of the military mobilization system during the war. Thus, the NRMA is a significant part of the history of Canada in its own right and should be better known.

Furthermore, this study highlights the degree to which at least some French Canadians participated in military activities, both in the training centres and among the larger public. As a result of the NRMA, large numbers of francophones entered the Canadian army, even if not all of them did so willingly. Senior officers were forced to deal with the situation by creating many new French Canadian training centres and military units and finding French-speaking officers to command them. Although the participation rate of French Canadians never came close to matching that of their English Canadian counterparts, National Defence Headquarters calculated in March 1944 that they made up 19.1 percent of the army's total strength, including conscripts (perhaps as many as 95,000 French-speaking volunteers alone served during the war as a whole, and 132,000 in the three services in total). This was a small proportion of Quebec's population compared to other provinces, but a considerable number in real terms.<sup>13</sup> And while opportunities for French Canadians to use their own language within the army remained limited beyond the unit level, they gained the ability to function in French to an extent greater than before, and English- and French-speaking soldiers themselves often worked closely together, getting to know each other better not only overseas but in numerous defence posts up and down the east and west coasts of North America (and even slightly beyond). These developments predated by more than two decades, and helped lay some of the groundwork for, the bilingual policies the federal government developed from the late 1960s onwards.<sup>14</sup> And while we have tended to focus on the statements and actions of the most vocal nationalist critics in describing Quebec's opposition towards conscription and the war,<sup>15</sup> many leading political and religious figures as well as press organs actually supported Canada's participation. They were able to distinguish between conscription for overseas service (which

was still clearly opposed by a large majority of Quebec's French-speaking population) and conscription to help defend the soil of Canada, and they were aware that some Quebecers might wish to play an even more willing role overseas as volunteers.<sup>16</sup> Yet this has all largely been forgotten, by both English- and French-language historians. It was certainly a surprise to me as an anglophone historian, when I began my own research on this subject in the mid-1990s, although since then a dedicated group of French-speaking authors has been attempting to revive the memory of this part of French Canada's war effort.<sup>17</sup> I hope my own work will add to that understanding.

One thing this book unfortunately is not, is a detailed study of the personal feelings and reactions of individual conscripts towards their time in uniform. While the sources I found in my research allowed me to reconstruct the character and experiences of the NRMA men, as a group, to a degree much greater than I first expected, my focus remained on administrative sources, to reconstruct the decision-making that took place regarding how such men would be used within the larger Canadian army. In addition, while in the course of my research I met a few individuals and families who were indirectly affected by compulsory military service in some manner during the war, the prevalingly negative public attitudes that were expressed towards conscripts in the 1940s have tended to make it difficult to locate people who experienced such service more directly, even today. But I do hope that this book will help spur a few among the shrinking number of remaining veterans who experienced conscription first-hand, to record their memories and make them available to archival depositories for the benefit of future historians.

Lastly, in carrying out this study I have been influenced from the beginning by the fact that every historian who writes about politics in the first half of the twentieth century has available to him or her the well-known personal diaries of Prime Minister King. First published in edited form between 1960 and 1970, they have since been made available directly to the public and today are fully available online.<sup>18</sup> In their detailed, comprehensive entries, they do provide a wealth of information about almost every aspect of Canada's Second World War effort. Yet, ultimately, they were produced by King himself, and as Tim Cook has recently noted, as part of King's process of using his diary to help bring himself to political decisions (or to justify his reasons for making them, after the fact), "he had an amazing capacity to deceive himself, or to make sense of the day by slighting others and putting himself in the best light."<sup>19</sup> For this reason, whenever possible in my own research I have tried to make greater use of other sources, such as the now mostly published accounts of behind-the-scenes events recorded by journalist Grant Dexter, and the minutes of the

Cabinet War Committee that oversaw most key decision-making from 1940 onwards. All of these have also been consulted by other historians, but perhaps not so deliberately as I have, as alternatives to the King diaries. I make no apologies that my goal is to describe the events surrounding conscription at the highest political levels from these alternative points of view rather than from King's, even while acknowledging that clearly he played one of the most important roles in (and almost always had the final word on) Canadian policy-making during the Second World War.

Overall, then, the goal of this book is to remind readers of the extent to which Canada, the Canadian army, and the political debates of the war were all shaped by the way the wartime compulsory training system was set up and functioned between 1940 and 1945. In doing so, I hope to make readers more aware of the degree to which conscription was a fact of life for every citizen in those years, and especially how it came to affect tens of thousands of people directly. While it has not been a part of our country's history since the Second World War, it is worth remembering that, for a considerable time during those years, conscription was of more than simply abstract academic interest for millions of Canadians.



## **Part 1: The Historical Legacy**

**THE ZOMBIE PSALM<sup>1</sup>**

*Mackenzie King is my Shepherd,*

*I shall not wander.*

*He maketh me not to wear the G.S. Badge.*

*He restoreth my vote.*

*He leadeth me along the paths of Canada for  
his Party's sake.*

*Yea, though I move about from one camp to another  
I fear no draft.*

*For Mackenzie King is with me.*

*His Government and his Cabinet they comfort me.*

*He prepareth a table before me*

*In the presence of my Active enemies.*

*He does not clip my hair too short.*

*My glass runneth over with Canadian beer,*

*Surely the Government will not alter this*

*Its policy at this late date*

*And I shall live in the confines of Canada forever.*

*AMEN*

# 1

## Conscription and Canadian History, 1627–1939

THE MANNER IN WHICH conscription was instituted after 1939 was shaped in many ways by the memory of what had occurred in the First World War, and even before. It was a response particularly to the attitudes of French Canadians towards conscription, and towards the Canadian army in general, as both evolved before 1914 and then were exacerbated by the European conflict that began in that year. Full-time professional troops had been provided only rarely by the metropolitan authorities for the first 150 years of French Canadian history (and almost never in large numbers); as a consequence, most French Canadians came to see the very real need to perform regular military service to help protect their homes, first against the neighbouring Iroquois, with whom they found themselves at war for much of the 1600s, and then against their English counterparts in the Thirteen Colonies to the south. As early as 1627, all male residents of the French settlement of Port Royal had been ordered to help provide for its defence, and the earliest records of a militia organization in Quebec date from 1636. By the early 1670s, a more formal system had been created, wherein all male citizens between sixteen and sixty were divided into separate units for each district, and directed to meet every one or two weeks to practise marksmanship and other basic military skills. The system was so widespread that the militia captains who commanded local units came to be relied on as part of the larger governing apparatus of the colony. And in times of war, thousands of men reported for duty, not only to fight but to perform any number of other vital functions, such as helping move supplies or guard lines of communication.<sup>1</sup> During the Seven Years' War in the late 1750s, so many men answered their calls that agricultural production was disrupted, and flour and other provisions that were normally produced locally had to be imported from France simply to allow the colony's military forces to keep fighting.<sup>2</sup>

Yet from the beginning, the distinction was clear that French Canadian militiamen were there mostly to help protect their own homes and families rather than to serve larger imperial interests. Complaints were received as early as the 1690s, when settlers were called out to perform military duties in peacetime in place of regular troops.<sup>3</sup> Immediately after the fall of New France in 1763, roughly three hundred volunteers from the administrative regions of Quebec City, Trois-Rivières, and Montreal served in the British campaign that

helped end the Pontiac Rebellion of 1763–66, by Aboriginal groups who were resisting Britain's new dominance of eastern North America. But General James Murray had some trouble finding enough men to provide even his small share from the Quebec area who were ready to undertake such a distant expedition.<sup>4</sup> When the American Revolution broke out a decade later, it was not clear at first whether French Canadians would side with the British or the Americans. Hundreds turned out to fight on each side. When the British began planning a counterattack under General John Burgoyne that would result in his defeat at the Battle of Saratoga in October 1777, a new law was passed that formally revived the local militia organization from the French period, and included the return of compulsory service. French Canadians who were called out under its provisions were unhappy that they were expected to help invade the new United States rather than defend their homes, and as they crossed the frontier they began to desert in droves.<sup>5</sup> This was the first step in breaking down their allegiance to their by then lengthy military traditions.<sup>6</sup>

In spite of that experience, French Canadians remained willing to serve the British to help defend Canadian territory. They joined the Royal Canadian Volunteer Regiment, a provincial corps raised by the British for service only in North America, during the French and Napoleonic Wars after 1793, and the *Voltigeurs canadiens* under Lieutenant-Colonel Charles de Salabarry, a French Canadian career officer in the British regular army, in the lead-up to the War of 1812. Most militiamen also reported for duty when called out on the outbreak of the war that June, although in the Lachine area some rural units resisted because they did not want to have to leave their farms at the height of the agricultural season. Led by the *Voltigeurs*, French Canadian militiamen formed the bulk of the force that won the Battle of Chateauguay against an invading American army in October 1813.<sup>7</sup> As Allan Greer has argued, in the approach to the Rebellions of 1837–38 the militia was still such a large part of rural French Canadian society that Patriote supporters called on local militia captains, who tended to be elected by consensus by their men, to aid the cause. And hundreds of its members later fought on the Patriote side.<sup>8</sup>

In a broader sense, from the beginning of French settlement in North America the society that would later come to be centred within the province of Quebec also evolved to be different from the later English Canadian population. By the 1760s, New France was heavily influenced by its Roman Catholic faith, by a firm attachment to the land and rural values that seemed to have allowed its population to grow and flourish, and by a French language that distinguished it from the predominantly English-speaking European population of much of the rest of the continent. They were then left to survive largely on their own

after Britain defeated France in North America in 1763, and were cut off even more from their former mother country by the outbreak of the French Revolution, largely thanks to revulsion at the revolutionaries' attacks on the Catholic Church there in the early 1790s. In contrast, the Church came to play an even greater spiritual and even political role in guiding French Canadian society over the years. Its leaders usually supported British and later federal Canadian authority at times when francophones seemed to be under threat in Canada, in order to preserve their own position as well as to avoid provoking attacks that might undermine the freedom of religion and other rights that French Canadians had won within the British Empire. By the end of the 1800s, the former French settlers felt little direct attachment to France, from which they were now many generations removed, in contrast to the way many English Canadians retained their more immediate ties to Britain as the new mother country that guided Canada's fortunes. Although industrialization and urbanization were already transforming Quebec society just like that of the rest of the country by the early 1900s, a significant proportion of French-speaking Canadians continued to live in the countryside. Demographically, French Canadian men and women continued to marry younger and to have more children, compared to the rest of Canada. During the First World War, this would mean that such men were either less able or less willing (or both) to leave their families to go off and fight in foreign lands, where they would most likely have to deal with not being able to speak French, as well as more difficult access to religious and other cultural supports.<sup>9</sup> Partly thanks to the influence of the Catholic Church, familiarity with military traditions remained alive in one form, cadet corps being supported as much or more strongly in Quebec than the rest of the country for the way that they helped to reinforce a trinity of healthy mind, body, and spirit. By 1914, 40,000 young men were enrolled in such corps across Canada and military training was beginning at the university level. A good proportion of both programs were offered in Quebec.<sup>10</sup>

Conscription had also been known to the early English-speaking settlers of Canada before the 1900s. But ironically, they had never accepted it quite so strongly. As James Wood has recently argued, English views towards maintaining armed forces in peacetime were shaped by the tradition of the navy, rather than the army, providing the bulwark of the country's defence. And while most average English-speaking citizens might not have thought consciously about it, their aversion towards maintaining a large peacetime military organization was also shaped by the negative memory of their country's Civil War, and especially the resulting seizure of power by the military under Oliver Cromwell in the mid-1600s.<sup>11</sup> English-speaking settlers in one part of what would

later become Canada also experienced divided loyalties during the American Revolution, along the lines of those experienced within Quebec, in this case because the majority of the population in Nova Scotia had arrived very recently from New England and preferred not to have to help actively defend their colony against attack from their former neighbours.<sup>12</sup> And despite the myth that was created in English Canada in later years about their loyal service during the War of 1812, most men in the colony of Upper Canada ignored calls to turn out and fight in particular battles during the conflict, tending instead to report only after the guns had gone silent so that they could surrender to American commanders and legally avoid having to perform further military duty by claiming right of “parole.”<sup>13</sup>

The result of these various trends was that by the 1850s in British North America, while conscription remained a theoretical obligation for all able-bodied men, political leaders had come to rely mostly on the imperial army to provide local defences, aided by domestic militias only when absolutely necessary. When Britain’s regular troops were recalled in large numbers to fight in the Crimean War in Europe, members of the colonial government in what were by then the united Canadas decided to build on the growing enthusiasm of a number of citizens who had become dissatisfied with the current state of the militia to raise a semi-permanent force of 5,000 men in 1855. Weapons and other equipment were supplied at public expense, and members were paid to train for ten days a year (later six) in order to provide some greater readiness in the event of war. The policy was so popular that more units were soon authorized, whose members at first could not even be paid. Yet what became known as the Non-Permanent Active Militia (NPAM) was largely an English-speaking institution. Only about one-quarter of the units in Canada East, and one small company in Bytown (later Ottawa), Canada West, were French-speaking. Expanded before Confederation in response to increasing worries about the American buildup to the south during the Civil War there, and after 1867 to include forces that had been created in the separate colonies of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia in the same period, it came to number closer to 40,000 men.<sup>14</sup>

At the head of the post-Confederation militia was a francophone, George-Étienne Cartier, as Minister of Militia and Defence. And in the early years after 1867, he consciously tried to encourage both English- and French-speaking Canadians to participate. Quebec was organized into three military districts, two of which were to be staffed by French-speaking officers and to include French-speaking units.<sup>15</sup> Out of a total reported strength of 37,170 men across the country in 1868, 6,812 or 18.3 percent came from these two districts, and perhaps as many as 2,000 French Canadians were part of the third primarily

“English-speaking” one. Thus, a proportion of French Canadian men did remain committed to serving voluntarily in the military. The commanders of the two French-speaking districts even argued that more men would serve if it was made compulsory, as it had been under the old traditions, so that employers would not penalize those who wished to miss work to attend training.<sup>16</sup>

While the North-West Rebellion of 1885 was and remains a low point in Canada’s relations with Aboriginal peoples, the response was organized by another francophone Minister of Militia and Defence, Adolphe Caron, and the fighting on the government side was carried out almost entirely by volunteers from the Canadian militia. Among them were the French-speaking 65th *Carabiniers Mont-Royal* and the 9th *Voltigeurs de Québec*. But due to worries on the part of the British officer assigned to command the militia, Frederick Middleton, that they would be required to face the French-speaking *métis* in battle, he assigned the two units only secondary roles. These developments, along with the animosities that arose between English and French Canadians over whether to execute Louis Riel for treason afterwards, further soured the latter’s views towards participating in larger Canadian military affairs.<sup>17</sup>

The NPAM declined everywhere during a time of extremely rigid budgets from the 1870s to the 1890s. Rural units suffered the most, as their once-a-year summer training camps were cancelled as an economy measure, and since a larger proportion of French Canadian units were rural, they suffered worst of all. Urban units remained popular among both English and French Canadians. In Montreal, as many as 2,000 civilian spectators regularly attended the evening training periods of the *Voltigeurs*, and crowds at the *Carabiniers’* annual public inspections reached as high as 50,000.<sup>18</sup> But increasing attempts to make the militia less political and more professional as a whole, also made it even more British in character thanks to reliance on the current mother country to provide various officers, training standards, and other models to guide its evolution, as well as the increasing strength of imperial sentiment among English Canadians generally by the late 1800s.<sup>19</sup> Among the most frequently cited examples of the militia commanders’ insensitivity to the desires of French Canadians was their refusal to authorize an attempt to revive a battalion in Montreal by permitting it to wear *Zouave* uniforms to link it to recent Catholic traditions in Europe, because doing so would have strayed too far from British traditions. From the time of its founding in 1876, the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) required cadets to function entirely in English, and to pursue heavily mathematics-based studies rather than the more traditional liberal arts that were at the core of most French Canadian educational programs. The goal of enhancing professionalism was furthered by the creation after 1871 of what came

to be known as the Permanent Force, whose individual units were to serve as year-round schools for the NPAM. The first, an artillery battery created in Quebec City when the last British regular troops left Canada in 1871, contained a sizable number of francophones, and a French-speaking infantry headquarters was formed at St-Jean after 1883. But the latter remained very small, and in 1880 the artillery battery was exchanged with its counterpart in the anglophone centre of Kingston, Ontario. In the words of historian Desmond Morton: “The bilingual character of the unit was lost within a few years.”<sup>20</sup>

Canada’s involvement in the South African War from 1899 to 1902 brought differences between English- and French-speaking Canadians further into the open. Small but vocal groups of critics emerged in English Canada among farmers, labour groups, German and Irish Canadians (who respectively identified ethnically with the Dutch Boers, or against the British due to ongoing sectarian conflicts in the British Isles), and individual religious leaders and pacifist groups.<sup>21</sup> Not all French Canadians opposed the war, and careful efforts were made to try to ensure that they were represented in the first contingent that sailed for South Africa in October 1899. A total of six contingents and 7,368 Canadian volunteers were eventually raised to serve there. But many French Canadians also identified with the Boers, given that they were another linguistic minority surrounded by and facing pressure from a larger British majority. From their perspective, the conflict was also far from Canada’s shores and was being fought to further British imperial interests rather than direct Canadian ones. Ultimately, French Canadians made up only 5.4 percent of the first contingent and under 3 percent of all Canadian recruits.<sup>22</sup>

The differences between English and French Canadians were reflected in the Cabinet of Prime Minister Wilfrid Laurier, the first francophone to hold the post after Confederation. One of his overriding goals throughout his career was to preserve national unity by trying to find a middle ground that could allow English and French Canadians to live in compromise.<sup>23</sup> In the case of the Boer War, he managed to hammer out an agreement that the first contingent would be raised, equipped, and officered by Canadians, but would come under British control as soon as it arrived in South Africa, to make it clear that he was not setting a precedent that Canadians would automatically support future imperial adventures.<sup>24</sup> Even then, one of Laurier’s protégés, Liberal MP Henri Bourassa, resigned his seat in protest against what he saw as a precedent (in fact if not in theory) as well as against British treatment of the Boers generally. He was re-elected by acclamation, making him a rising star among nationalists in Quebec, who were also growing concerned about other ways in which English Canadians seemed to be pushing aside the rights of French Canadians in battles

over the preservation of French outside the province. Bourassa and other nationalists did not necessarily speak for all or even a majority of francophones in Quebec. But as a result of events in 1899, he began to attract support among other French Canadian elites, who saw him as standing up for their community against threats especially to their language of education in various parts of Canada.<sup>25</sup> For a time, Laurier's efforts to promote compromise helped keep larger divisions from appearing. They also helped him to stay in power for over fifteen years – still today the longest uninterrupted period of rule by any Canadian prime minister.

Laurier's downfall was finally brought about in part by another debate over Canadian defence policy, in 1911. Thanks to technological changes, as well as the rise of several countries as political and economic rivals by the early twentieth century, British governments found themselves increasingly pressed to maintain the naval dominance the Empire had enjoyed for the previous century. In 1909, a short-term panic led to fears that Germany would take the lead in building modern battleships. In an attempt to find a compromise once again, Laurier decided to create a separate and distinct Canadian naval service that would be controlled by the Canadian government in times of peace but could be placed under command of the Royal Navy in times of war. Bourassa and other nationalist figures within Quebec again challenged him, arguing that this would simply make it easier to place Canadian sailors in the hands of the British to serve the latter's interests. As was sometimes his habit, Bourassa allowed his rhetoric to take him beyond what was realistically likely, and argued that even conscription would probably become necessary to maintain the strength of the navy given that it would be subject to constant use by the British. Thus, by the early 1900s, at least among Bourassa and his followers, conscription had come to be seen as a negative force to compel French Canadians to serve interests beyond their own homeland. For his part, Conservative leader Robert Borden initially supported creating a separate naval force. But under pressure from French and English Canadian wings within his own party that were more divided between extremes than was the case among the Liberals, he eventually came to a somewhat more awkward solution. He opposed the existing naval plan as either going too far or not far enough for his supporters, depending on to whom he was addressing his particular arguments, and he also promised to provide an immediate cash payment to Britain to help them build more battleships now. When a wide-ranging free trade deal with the United States also materialized unexpectedly in 1911, Laurier called an early election, but then found himself facing a rising chorus of business people who opposed the deal in English Canada. Borden attacked Laurier on this front outside Quebec, while

inside the province, nationalist-leaning Conservatives led by F.D. Monk cooperated openly with Bourassa to campaign against Laurier's navy. Laurier still won the most seats in Quebec, but with a reduced majority. And Borden won the election. With his English Canadian seats, he did not need support from his French Canadian MPs in order to remain in power, and he began to consider their advice less and less often. After further consultations with the British, in 1912 he decided to present a bill to Parliament to provide his cash payment, relying on closure for the first time in the history of the Canadian House of Commons to end the lengthy debate it engendered. But at the end of May 1913, the Liberal-dominated Senate sent the bill back, and ultimately nothing was accomplished. The consequences could not have been foreseen at the time, but over the next few years Borden would be keenly affected by the lack of major voices within his party to help him understand French Canada's concerns during the First World War.<sup>26</sup> And in the meantime, English Canadian opinion towards military affairs had gone in the opposite direction, towards supporting a more militant version of British imperialism, and a very small but influential and vocal group of intellectuals and other public figures even began to call for universal training, both to improve Canada's defence preparedness and for its perceived health and other benefits.<sup>27</sup>

When Britain went to war in August 1914, Canada was also automatically at war. Both Laurier and Bourassa famously agreed that Canada should take an active role in the conflict. So did Catholic leaders and most other organs of public opinion in Quebec. But Bourassa was careful to make clear that he saw the war as justified more for the dispassionate reason that Britain and France had to maintain the balance of power compared to Germany in Europe, and he argued that Canada should not participate beyond its own rational capacity to contribute.<sup>28</sup> At first, it seemed that the principle of voluntary as opposed to compulsory service would allow the country to play a role in the war to the limits of even its most ardent supporters. Within days, Borden's Cabinet agreed to send a force of 25,000 volunteers to Europe. Thanks to the mistrust of professional military officers in favour of the part-time militia by its minister, Sam Hughes, as well as what he saw as the need to get Canadians overseas as quickly as possible generally, he dismissed the existing mobilization plans, which had provided for an orderly call-up of units from the various military districts across the country. Instead, he sent a series of personal telegrams directly to commanders across the country, almost all of whom were English Canadian, and instructed them to collect suitable volunteers and bring them directly to a new camp that was to be built at Valcartier, Quebec. Eight weeks later, 30,621 Canadians were sailing for England, a justifiable accomplishment at the time but one that left

what would become the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) to have to work out a number of difficulties after they arrived in England.<sup>29</sup>

More significantly, while a considerable number of French Canadians (1,245) were part of the first contingent of volunteers to proceed overseas in the fall of 1914, all were submerged within larger English-speaking units. This suggested that at least some were ready to serve – approximately 15,000 did so as volunteers in the army throughout the war, 5,000 in other British and Allied forces, and 15,000 as conscripts overseas, or in total roughly 11 percent of the 318,705 Canadian-born men who served within the CEF, and 5.6 percent of the entire strength of 619,636 men in the CEF, including British-born citizens.<sup>30</sup> It also showed the spirit of cooperation with which lower-level commanders had responded to the confusion into which Hughes threw mobilization, in that smaller groups of French-speaking soldiers were welcomed into the entirely new, composite, numbered infantry battalions and engineering, artillery, and other units that were formed as small and disparate groups of volunteers poured in from various cities and regions. Anonymous-sounding numbered units would become the model for organizing the entire CEF for the rest of the war. As it became obvious that the fighting would last longer than people had initially expected, in September the Borden government decided to double its contribution by raising a second contingent. By December 1914 they were planning for a third. In Sam Hughes's world, there was no understanding that French Canadians as a group might not automatically support a war outside North America as ardently as English Canadians, and only after a large delegation of influential Quebecers led by Dr. Arthur Mignault waited on Borden in Ottawa was the 22nd Battalion finally authorized specifically as a unit for French-speaking soldiers as part of the second contingent.<sup>31</sup> Over the next year, further waves of Canadian troops were raised and proceeded overseas, and the government increased its authorized totals of Canadian volunteers that it promised to maintain in uniform to 150,000 in July 1915, and 250,000 that November. Finally, on January 1, 1916, without even consulting his full Cabinet, Borden announced a grandiose target of 500,000 men (out of a total Canadian population of about eight million at the time). While the reasons for his actions are not entirely clear, at that point recruiting still seemed to be going well. It was also a way to try to help inspire further efforts. In addition, historians have suggested that Borden had begun to realize the lack of influence Canada was having in shaping British direction of the war effort, and that he saw the new number as a significant enough increase in its commitments to justify such influence.<sup>32</sup>

By the fall of 1916 a Canadian Corps of four divisions was serving in France, and a fifth division was forming in England, along with a number of separate

Canadian formations in other roles. Gradually, career officers took control of mobilization and other operations within Canada. Courses provided by more experienced British military authorities, not to mention the large number of British staff officers who were assigned directly to the Canadian Corps to help guide it for most of the war, helped make the CEF the equal of any professional army on any side by 1918.<sup>33</sup> By 1917, Canadian generals Richard Turner and Arthur Currie had come to command the country's forces in England and France, respectively, thus directly guiding both their training and their operations in the field. At the highest level, in June 1918 Prime Minister Borden deliberately sought out Currie to provide independent military advice when dealing with British political leaders over the conduct of the war.<sup>34</sup> Yet despite prodigious efforts by individuals in local communities across Canada, who managed to maintain patriotic enthusiasm until well into 1916 (and who ultimately did find at least an overall total of upwards of 500,000 men for the army), by early 1917 the flow of volunteers had fallen off considerably. In addition, the Canadian economy, which had been idle in 1914, now needed more men to produce food, munitions, and other materials after having expanded to support the war. And the long lists of casualties from France had given Canadians a fuller sense of the true costs of volunteering. This had been one problem with Borden's and Hughes's whole understanding of the war: both men seem to have ignored the fact that after completed units were sent overseas, men might actually be injured or killed in the fighting and need to be replaced. This meant that many more than 500,000 volunteers would be necessary to maintain a force of that size for any length of time.<sup>35</sup> While several further French Canadian battalions were authorized to recruit in Canada, only one or two were able to reach full strength, due to problems of competition and duplication of effort that plagued recruiting across the country after 1915, as well as the lack of a more open acceptance of French-language contributions earlier in the war. None of the new battalions got farther than England before they had to be broken up to find enough reinforcements just to keep the 22nd Battalion at strength.<sup>36</sup>

By then, another primary reason why recruiting had fallen off among French Canadians was that discord had begun to appear more broadly between the two main language groups. English Canadians began to note with increasing insistence that their numbers of volunteers were larger than those of French Canadians. Not only had the latter been alienated by the frustrations of the recruiting system but, as we have seen, they viewed participation in British wars differently from English Canadians. Furthermore, the bulk of French Canadians still lived in rural areas, where enlistment rates tended to be lower across the country due to the complex needs of agriculture (and especially its

large demands on male family members) as well as to wartime publicity campaigns that encouraged farmers to increase production for the war effort. And Quebecers did marry earlier and have children at a younger age than elsewhere, which meant that fewer of them could leave their homes as easily to go off and serve. According to figures that were calculated for Parliament at the height of wartime debates in Canada in 1917, Quebec had far fewer single men between twenty and forty-five – the likeliest group from which to be able to find volunteers – with a total of 143,540, compared to Ontario at 243,050. These figures were 22.2 percent and 33.6 percent, respectively, of all single men in the country in that age group. In comparison, each province's overall share of the national population (including men and women) was 27.8 percent and 35.1 percent.<sup>37</sup> And just 51.4 percent of the entire CEF was Canadian-born, suggesting that recruiting numbers outside Quebec were inflated by recent immigrants with stronger ties to Europe, and especially to Britain (38.3 percent).<sup>38</sup> Feelings between the two groups were also aggravated by the revival of old animosities over the language of schooling outside Quebec, and specifically by Regulation 17, which limited the use of French in Roman Catholic education in Ontario.<sup>39</sup> At the outbreak of the war, the rush to volunteer had seemed so positive that Borden had stated publicly that conscription would never be required.<sup>40</sup> Throughout 1916 and into 1917, federal leaders did everything else they could to find men, including creating a National Service Board to try to gain a better sense of how the expanding economy was affecting enlistment. The members of the Board advocated a mandatory national registration of manpower, which began in January 1917, but only after Cabinet had overruled them and made it voluntary. An abortive attempt was also made to create a Canadian Defence Force in the spring of 1917, comprised of volunteers who would serve only in Canada, so that others providing internal security could be released to go overseas. The army's overall commander as Chief of the General Staff (CGS) in Ottawa, Major-General Willoughby Gwatkin, suggested calling out the militia to meet this need, a use of conscription that might have been more acceptable since it was still technically a part of Canadian law and would clearly be limited to home defence. In a later memorandum, he even noted that it might help encourage some of such men to volunteer to serve overseas once they were in uniform. But instead the Cabinet relied on the voluntary Canadian Defence Force, which ultimately raised less than 200 men out of a planned 50,000. In early April the neighbouring United States entered the war, immediately instituting conscription. In mid-May, Borden returned from a trip to England and France, where he had seen first-hand the horrors of the war while visiting Canadian soldiers in military hospitals and at the front, and been told both

by British leaders and by his own Canadian generals that even more men would be needed to win the conflict. After a brief consultation with his Cabinet, he reversed himself and publicly declared his government's support for conscription.<sup>41</sup>

Much as they do when discussing the Second World War, historians have come to focus mostly on the political aspects of how conscription was instituted in 1917–18. Certainly, the events were dramatic.<sup>42</sup> From the moment he announced his policy of conscription, Borden began trying to form a political coalition with the Liberal opposition. Laurier ultimately refused to participate, fearing that beyond his personal abhorrence as a traditional liberal at overriding the individual rights of Canadians in that way, conscription was clearly directed at French Canadians, and would alienate them from the Liberal Party and drive them into the arms of Bourassa, who Laurier feared might come to have an even greater influence and thus help divide English and French Canadians even further in the future.<sup>43</sup> Borden's government was old, had suffered from a number of scandals related to other aspects of Canada's mobilization during the first half of the war, and now seemed to be trying to use conscription to avoid having to face Canadians in an election that politicians had agreed in February 1916 to delay beyond the constitutional maximum of five years due to the fighting but that Laurier was less and less willing to continue to support. Nevertheless, Borden was eventually able to convince most other English-speaking national and provincial Liberal leaders to join him. He was aided in this goal by two blatantly political measures: the Military Voters Act, which created a system for collecting votes from serving soldiers overseas but seemed to give Conservative organizers considerable latitude to assign those votes to any constituency they wished in order to counteract Liberal support in particular ridings; and the Wartime Elections Act, which removed the right to vote from any immigrant who had been born in or whose mother tongue was that of an enemy country, and who had been naturalized as a Canadian resident after 1902 (most of whom tended to vote Liberal). At the same time, it granted the vote to all women who were the wives, widows, mothers, sisters, or daughters of serving soldiers.<sup>44</sup> The election that followed quickly became a national referendum on conscription, and saw some of the nastiest vitriol ever recorded in a Canadian campaign, with Borden's new Union Government increasingly targeting Henri Bourassa and Quebec as the cause of almost all of the country's ills during the war. The Unionists won a decisive victory, taking 153 out of 235 seats in the House of Commons. But the popular vote was much closer, and Liberals who had remained loyal to Laurier were elected in sixty-two out of sixty-five seats in Quebec. As a result, for at least a generation afterwards the Conservatives became the party of conscription there.

Just as would be the case during the Second World War, however, there was much more to conscription than simply its direct political impacts. In early August 1917, the Cartierville summer home of Lord Atholstan (Hugh Graham), the publisher of the *Montreal Star*, was dynamited due to his vocal support for the policy. By then, troops passing through Quebec City to sail overseas were being booed and pelted with rocks, ice, and rotten vegetables. Riots broke out in Montreal when the Military Service Act (MSA) that authorized conscription was formally enacted at the end of August, with shots fired into the air and windows broken. In Shawinigan a few days later, shops were looted and the local recruiting officer run out of town. Across the province, one man died and seven others were wounded in such incidents. The Dominion Police, meanwhile, were busy searching for the rest of the 350 pounds of explosives that had been stolen from a quarry at the beginning of August and used in the Cartierville bombing, as well as miscellaneous rifles that were said to be missing from

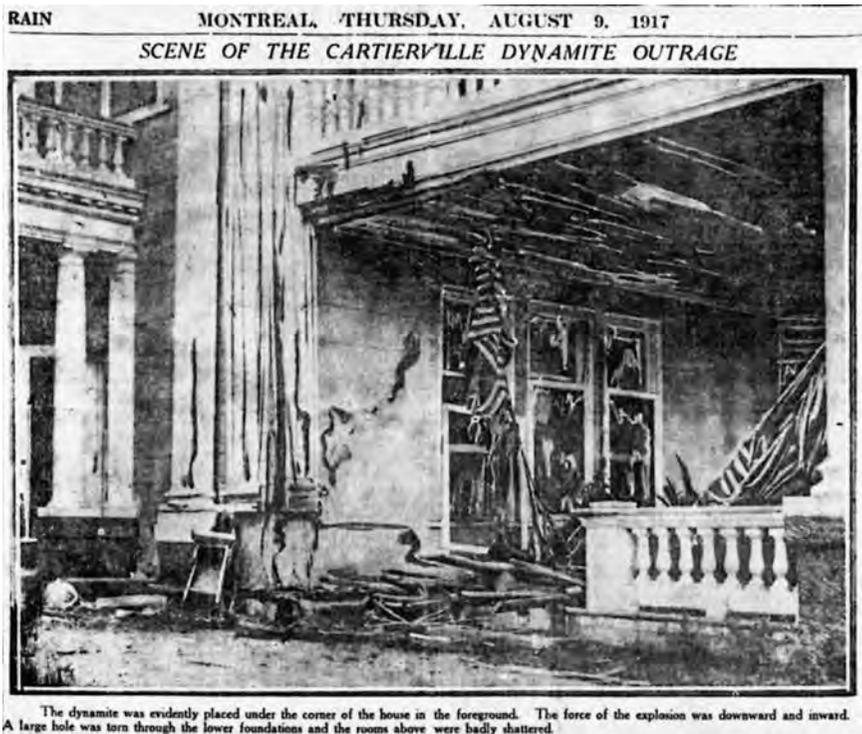


Figure 4 Newspaper clipping from the *Montreal Daily Star*, illustrating the damage suffered by the home of Lord Atholstan (Hugh Graham).

Source: LAC e-01157760

various local cadet corps. Eventually, twelve men were arrested and tried for a list of further targets they claimed to have been planning to attack. More extreme speakers were calling for open rebellion. Nationalist Tancred Marsil was quoted as saying that the people of Quebec would prefer to see “two or three thousand men killed in the streets” than the same number forced overseas, and labour activist Gédèon Martel proclaimed that “if they come to shoot us we will be the first to do the shooting.” During the election itself, most Unionist candidates dared not even try to speak in most of the province. The enforcement of the MSA sparked even more serious rioting in Quebec City over the Easter weekend of 1918, when a man was arrested for being unable to produce his certificate proving exemption from military training, and crowds assembled and attacked the police station to which he had been taken. The rioting escalated from there, lasting for five days, killing at least four civilians, wounding 150 soldiers and townspeople, and causing \$300,000 of damage. It only ended after the federal Cabinet ordered in hundreds of troops from other parts of the country (many of whom were recently enrolled English Canadian conscripts). In addition Henri Bourassa, higher Catholic clergymen and political officials all appealed for people to end the violence and respect authority. Signalling the depth of alienation felt by at least some French Canadians, Joseph-Napoléon Francoeur introduced a motion in the Quebec legislature in January 1918: “That this House is of [the] opinion that the Province of Quebec would be disposed to accept the breaking of the Confederation pact of 1867 if, in the other Provinces, it is believed she is an obstacle to the Union, progress and development of Canada.” While he withdrew it after several members (including the premier, Lomer Gouin) rose to defend Confederation, more alarmist Canadians could be excused for thinking that the country itself seemed to be in danger of coming apart by early 1918.<sup>45</sup> And the trends seemed even more potentially threatening, just months after popular uprisings had led to the collapse of the tsarist government during the Russian Revolution.<sup>46</sup>

Moreover, Quebec was not the only place where divisions over related issues came into the open. As recruiting got more desperate in the still very German Canadian city of Berlin, Ontario, in 1916, pro- and anti-German accusations flew, and soldiers physically assaulted Lutheran clergyman C.R. Tappert for making statements defending local Germans. Two referenda were held that year that narrowly resulted in the city being renamed Kitchener, after the British war minister, Lord Kitchener, who died in the midst of the events when a ship on which he was a passenger struck a German mine. During the federal election of 1917, several thousand people clashed in the streets on the day of a visit from Robert Borden, and at his campaign rally that evening he was shouted

down by the same crowd, which seemed especially upset about how conscription would impact the riding's rural residents.<sup>47</sup> Over several days in August 1918, mobs of returned soldiers attacked non-British ethnic groups in Toronto out of anger at the latter's supposedly having stayed behind and taken their jobs while they had been serving overseas. The violence only ended when five hundred troops were brought in from Camp Niagara and Mayor Tommy Church threatened to read the Riot Act.<sup>48</sup> In early 1919, returned men disrupted meetings by political radicals in several western cities, and in Winnipeg the attacks escalated into two days of rioting against similar ethnic groups.<sup>49</sup>

Among particular occupational groups, furthermore, farmers across Canada were incensed in late 1917 that conscription would take them and their sons away from agricultural production. At the high point of the election on December 2, the Union Government's new militia minister, Major-General Sydney Mewburn (Sam Hughes had finally been removed from office in late 1916) made a public statement on behalf of the Cabinet, promising a blanket exemption for farmers in order to retain their votes. But those exemptions were cancelled a few months afterwards, due to new worries over manpower overseas, after the German army launched a final attempt to win the war on the Western Front in March 1918. Five thousand farmers, mostly from Ontario and Quebec, descended on Ottawa in early May to make their anger known. Conscription was not the only issue about which rural groups were upset: the war had accelerated urbanization across the country, and rural communities had felt threatened by their resulting loss of social as well as political influence since well before 1914. The imposition of compulsory service by urban politicians in the face of rural opposition was seen as the final straw, and over the next few months and years, farmers expressed their resentment at the ballot box, winning control of provincial governments in Ontario, Alberta, and Manitoba between 1919 and 1922 and making strong showings in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. At the national level, they won enough seats to form the official Opposition in the federal election of 1921. Internal debates over the exact part they should play in the political system precluded them from acting in that role, and by the end of the decade, Prime Minister King had largely succeeded in coaxing them into his revived Liberal Party.<sup>50</sup>

Also affected by conscription were industrial workers, and women. For the former, the war brought acceleration of the prewar trend of dilution of skilled labour in industry, in order to aid wartime production. Inflation greatly outstripped wage increases, and a series of increasingly stringent government controls culminated in September 1918 with the outlawing of the right to strike. Then, just as male labourers and their families were facing all of these pressures

most strongly in late 1917 and early 1918, they found themselves in danger of being forcibly removed from their jobs and livelihoods by conscription. Workers in western Canada protested, sometimes violently, and large numbers openly evaded the MSA – on Vancouver Island, labour leader Albert “Ginger” Goodwin even died in mysterious circumstances after he was shot by a Dominion Police officer, allegedly for trying to escape after being apprehended but more likely in retaliation for his labour activism. Working-class anger was demonstrated in a wave of unrest across the country after the fighting ended, the best-remembered example being the Winnipeg General Strike of May and June 1919.<sup>51</sup>

For women, the war tends to be remembered by Canadians as a more positive experience, since they gained the vote, found jobs of their own replacing men in the factories, and seemed to win greater control over their lives generally. Yet as historians who have studied the topic in greater detail remind us, many women had already worked before the war, most of the other changes that took place after 1914 had already been well under way before then, and the conflict merely increased the pressures and demands placed on women as developments such as conscription came to divide society generally. In addition, 3,141 military nurses saw the costs of war first-hand (2,504 of them served overseas, and 46 died), and more than 2,000 women played somewhat similar roles in Voluntary Aid Detachments on the home front (at least 500 of them in military hospitals in Britain). Hundreds of thousands more women spent the war years worrying over the return of husbands, fathers, sons, or brothers who had left to fight.<sup>52</sup>

About the workings of the Military Service Act itself, and its impacts on the men who were placed in uniform after 1917, even less is known. In October, men were ordered to complete another national registration, this time compulsorily, so that the people in the Department of Justice who were assigned to administer the MSA would know exactly how many were available. When the first group of single men aged twenty to thirty-four was directed to begin reporting for potential service in November, 83 percent or more applied for exemptions in every province of Canada, on the basis of one or more of the very broad grounds permitted under the MSA. Ultimately, of the 401,882 men across the country who were expected to present themselves as potential recruits, only 25,253 did so without requesting exemptions of some kind (18,028 of whom ended up in uniform). Of the remainder, another 81,028 eventually had their exemptions refused or overturned, and a further 65,610 men aged twenty to twenty-two were called out after the farmers’ exemptions were cancelled in March 1918, for a total of 146,638. Out of that number, 27,631 men refused to

report for training throughout the operation of the MSA, and 24,139 remained at large at the end of the war. Of them, 18,827 or 68.1 percent were from Quebec (40.8 percent of all of the 46,104 men who were called from that province under the MSA – the next closest default rate was Nova Scotia, at 16.7 percent, Ontario was in the middle of the pack at 9.3 percent, and the overall default rate for the country was 19.4 percent). In the end, 86,144 men were put in uniform by the MSA, and another 19,644 volunteered for other CEF units and 7,673 for other countries' forces (for example, for the Royal Air Force training program that was then in operation in Canada). This means that the MSA provided 105,788 men for the CEF and 113,461 in total.<sup>53</sup> (For a detailed breakdown of the operation of the MSA, see Table 1.)

For many years, historians argued that delays in getting men into uniform caused by the complicated exemption process made conscription a failure in the First World War, since only 47,509 made it to England and 24,132 to France before the war ended. But more recently, we have come to recognize that these same numbers provided the Canadian Corps with a good portion of the men necessary to maintain it at full strength through some of the harshest fighting, in the last several months leading up to the armistice.<sup>54</sup> They also provided 1,653 out of 4,210 Canadian soldiers who were sent to Siberia in 1918–19 as part of an Allied attempt to combat the Bolsheviks who had seized power there, and thus bring Russia back into the war.<sup>55</sup> Unfortunately, aside from a single government report that was produced at the end of the war, and that provides most of the statistical information given above, historians have not investigated in detail how conscription was administered during the First World War, and how it affected the lives of individual Canadians. This is no doubt at least partly because of the political significance of the issue, again as was the case after the Second World War. But it is also because a few years after the war the man who had acted as the central appeal judge under the MSA, Justice Lyman Duff of the Supreme Court of Canada, deliberately destroyed the records of the almost 1,600 local and regional tribunals that had dealt with exemption requests. As he explained his reasoning in later years, “he could not bear the thought of having the conscription records placed anywhere where the public could reach them. The papers of the local tribunals and appeal bodies in Quebec were full of hatred and bitterness and would have been a living menace to national unity.” According to Duff, in Quebec, French-speaking Canadians had been granted blanket exemptions, while almost every English-speaking request was rejected.<sup>56</sup> Two regional appeal judges also reportedly simply refused to hear the cases referred to them, effectively exempting all of their appellants, although it is not clear whether one or both of those judges were actually located in Quebec.<sup>57</sup>