2019-09-19

Yeoman of the Woods: The Operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps During the Great War 1916-1919

Bartlett, Cameron John Acton

http://hdl.handle.net/1880/111024
master thesis

University of Calgary graduate students retain copyright ownership and moral rights for their thesis. You may use this material in any way that is permitted by the Copyright Act or through licensing that has been assigned to the document. For uses that are not allowable under copyright legislation or licensing, you are required to seek permission.

Downloaded from PRISM: https://prism.ucalgary.ca
Yeoman of the Woods: The Operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps
During The Great War 1916-1919

by
Cameron John Acton Bartlett

A THESIS
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES
IN PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE
DEGREE OF MASTER OF ARTS
GRADUATE PROGRAM IN HISTORY

CALGARY, ALBERTA
SEPTEMBER, 2019

© Cameron John Acton Bartlett
This thesis is dedicated to the soldiers of the Canadian Forestry Corps, including Pte. Avard Dimock of Mt. Uniacke, Nova Scotia, who gave his life for King and Country on October 31st, 1918. This thesis is also dedicated to those members of my family who served in the Great War including my great great Uncles Clifford Ellis Rogers and Harold P. Rogers, my great grandfathers Merton McIver and Jack Harold Whitehead, and my great great uncles John Price and George Lawrence Price, as well as my grandfather John Strong who served in Canadian Army for almost thirty years. Finally, I would also like to dedicate this thesis to my grandmother Anne Strong and grandfather William “Bill” Bartlett for it was their love and support that allowed me to make it this far and to have completed this thesis. I would also like to thank the many members of my family and my friends who helped me along this journey over the last two years.
# Table of Contents

Introduction 5

Chapter 1
Lumberjacks and the First World War: The Origins of the Canadian Forestry Corps 14

Chapter 2
Hatchet, Axe and Saw: The Operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps May 1916-December 1916 33

Chapter 3
Unwanted Warriors: Examining the Service of Afro-Canadians, Indigenous, Ukrainians and Medically Unfit Soldiers in the Canadian Forestry Corps 54

Chapter 4
Shoring up the Supply Lines: The Operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps in Britain and France January 1917-December 1917 87

Chapter 5
 Keep the Saw Sharp and the Timber Flowing: The Operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps January 1918-March 1919 111

Conclusion 138

Bibliography 143

List of abbreviations
Organizations:

C.F.C. - Canadian Forestry Corps
C.A.M.C. - Canadian Army Medical Corps
C.A.S.C. - Canadian Army Service Corps
C.E.F. - Canadian Expeditionary Force
R.O.D. - Railroad Operating Division
R.F.C. - Royal Flying Corps
R.A.F. - Royal Air Force
B.E.F. - British Expeditionary Force
A.E.F. - American Expeditionary Force
Y.M.C.A. - Young Men’s Christian Association
A.C.S. - Army Service Corps

Military Ranks

Pte. - Private
Cpl. - Corporal
Sgt. - Sergeant
Lt. - Lieutenant
Capt. - Captain
Maj. - Major
Lt. Col. - Lieutenant Colonel
Col. - Colonel
Brig. - Brigadier
Brig Gen. - Brigadier General
Maj Gen. - Major General
Lt. Gen. - Lieutenant General
Gen. - General
FM. - Field Marshal
Introduction

While the Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC) was a 25,000 strong unit that served as part of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) during the Great War in 1914-1919, scant mention is made of this unit in any scholarly literature published in Canada in the last sixty years. In G.W.L. Nicholson’s official history of the CEF, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919, the CFC is allotted a total of two pages in the section on support units. At best, the volume provides a brief description of the CFC and its work during the war. Although an acknowledgement of the CFC’s contributions to the war effort, Nicholson’s two page summary amounts to little more than a footnote when compared to the CFC’s operational history. If Nicholson’s assessment of the CFC is taken at face value, all it tells the reader is that the CFC was a part of the CEF and that the CFC’s purpose was to harvest lumber for use in the trenches. It stops short of discussing the importance of the CFC’s activities to the war effort. Nowhere is it mentioned, for example, that the Imperial War Cabinet requested the CFC be created as a means to combat Germany’s U-Boat fleet; in fact, it diminishes the reliance by the War Cabinet on the CFC to help reverse its perilous supply situation.

Even less is said about the CFC by Desmond Morton, who briefly mentions the involvement of several foresters in post-war demobilization riots in his article, Kicking and Complaining: Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force 1918-1919. Morton fails to make the link between the high proportion of immigrants serving in the CFC and the scapegoating of immigrant soldiers during the subsequent courts martial. While this may seem to be a small detail, the history of the CFC, as will be discussed, is closely linked to Canada’s immigration history, and it is impossible to ignore the connections between immigrants and their service in the CEF during the war.

Like Morton’s article, Melissa Shaw’s article, Most Anxious to Serve their King and Country: Black Canadians Fight to enlist in WWI and Emerging Race Consciousness in Ontario 1914-1919, only briefly mentions the role of No. 2 Construction Battalion in the CFC, using it instead as a frame for her discussion of racial discrimination against Afro-Canadians during the war. Shaw’s silence on the CFC is concerning; she leaves out

---

critical contextual details about the history of No. 2 Construction Battalion by failing to include any meaningful discussion of the Battalion’s service with the Forestry Corps. For example, no mention is made of Pte. Berry, the Afro-Canadian soldier who fathered a child with a French peasant girl, whose father believed that death was the only justifiable punishment for Berry’s actions. Nor did her article inform the reader that members of the Battalion were often called upon to perform heavy and menial labour (such as cleaning up former logging sites), instead of the traditional tasks of a lumberjack.

David Winegard and Nic Clarke also briefly mention the CFC in their recent works, *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War* and *Unwanted Warriors: Rejected Volunteers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force*. Again, Winegard and Clarke only mention the Forestry Corps within the context of their research and without providing any contextual grounding as to what the CFC was or what it did during the war. The absence of any discussion of the CFC in Clarke’s work is the most surprising thus far because Clarke discusses in *Unwanted Warriors* how soldiers with physical disabilities (as defined by medical standards of the day) were able to serve in non-combatant roles. Records indicate that several thousand soldiers with physical disabilities served in the CFC, constituting one of the largest groups from which the CFC drew reinforcements during the war.

Though focussed on how Canadians have come to memorialize and remember the dead and the war, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World Wars* by Jonathan Vance makes no mention of the CFC. While that absence does not detract from Vance’s narrative, it is my opinion that a discussion about the memorialization of soldiers serving in the so-called “bomb proof” positions would have been a valuable contribution. Vance briefly mentions the subject from time to time, which may reflect the reality of memorialization of the CFC. In Canada, there is only one memorial to the soldiers of the CFC, that being the statue of a lumberjack forming part of the National War Memorial in Ottawa. This lone lumberjack represents the thousands of men who served and have been forgotten - except by the residents in the small towns and villages in France and Britain who still take time to honour those who served and those who gave their lives far from home and the front lines.

---

5 Winegard, Timothy C. *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War*, (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2012)
Finally, in his two part history of the CEF, At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916 and Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War: 1917-1918, Tim Cook makes only one reference to the CFC - though not by name. He says the CEF had forestry units, but he does not elaborate. Cook’s off hand reference to the Forestry Corps suggests that the CFC’s contribution to the Great War was not significant. That ignores the fact that 25,000 Canadian soldiers, most of whom were immigrants, minorities or wounded/disabled soldiers, laboured for two and a half years to produce enough timber to keep the soldiers serving at the front supplied with shelter, food and ammunition, and to support the vast logistical system that moved supplies and reinforcements across hundreds of miles of front lines.

British authors have been equally dismissive when it comes to discussing the Forestry Corps. While John Starling’s and Ivor Lee’s work, No Labour, No Battle: Military Labour During the First World War, does do justice to the history of military labour, it fails to fully acknowledge the CFC’s role. The CFC is mentioned, but only as one of dozens of different kinds of labour units that worked in Britain and France during the war. It is not distinguished from any of the other labour battalions, even though Britain specifically requested specialist labour that could only be found in Canada. Nor does it figure in the later narrative where Starling and Lee discuss the roles played by the different labour battalions, despite the fact that, without the CFC’s support, most of the units Starling and Lee mention would have been pulling double duty harvesting the timber and doing the construction work.

The absence of any mention of the Forestry Corps in Ian Malcolm Brown’s work, British Logistics on the Western Front 1914-1919 is surprising because one of the CFC’s primary tasks was to supply timber construction material used to maintain Britain’s logistical systems in France and Belgium. According to Brown’s abbreviated narrative, Britain’s logistical system functioned solely due to sheer British determination, without any apparent outside help. Brown’s claims seem to suggest that the British managed to obtain from their limited stock of domestic resources enough construction material - including timber - to maintain their logistical system, despite production shortages and rationing throughout the war. Brown places too much significance how the system operated and the personalities who constructed it, and not enough on how the logistical system was maintained.

---

7 Cook, Tim, At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916, (Toronto, Penguin Group, 2006)
9 Starling, John and Lee, Ivor, No Labour, No Battle: Military Labour During the First World War, (Port Stroud, Spellmount, 2009)
Though short and lacking in some detail, Murray Maclean’s *Farming and Forestry on the Western Front 1915-1918* provides an adequate account of the Forestry Corps’ activities on the Western Front. Although he leaves out the details of the CFC’s history, including its inception and service, Maclean does stress the importance of the CFC in the harvesting of timber. However, this is as far as Maclean goes, leaving out critical details such as the CFC’s involvement in other construction projects, including aerodrome construction in 1916-1919.

While not intended as a history of the Forestry Corps, *Haches de Guerre: Les Bucherons Canadiens dans les forêts Normandes (Battle Axes: Canadian Lumberjacks in the Forests of Normandy)*, published by the General Council of the French Prefecture of Orne, is a stunning account of the CFC’s service in Normandy. It is a thorough discussion of the CFC’s operations that is focussed almost entirely on the Corps’ operations in Orne. As such, it leaves out the history of the CFC operations in other areas of France and largely disregards CFC operations in Britain altogether. *Battle Axes* clearly demonstrates the importance of the CFC to the history of the prefecture, and to the local residents. CFC operations outside of Orne are simply outside the scope of this volume.

Published in 1919, just months after the end of the war, *The Canadian Forestry Corps: Its Inception, Development and Achievements* written by C.W. Bird and Lieutenant J.B. Davies is the only complete published record of the CFC. Bird and Davies discuss every aspect of the Forestry Corps’ history - from its inception and arrival in Britain through its rapid expansion into France. Most importantly, Bird and Davies discuss the background against which Britain asked Canada to create the Forestry Corps, something that is lacking from almost every other work that mentions the CFC. Although it is a complete narrative of the CFC’s service, Bird’s and Davies’ account does not properly contextualize its service within the broader war effort. While not intentional on the part of Bird and Davies, the lack of context leaves the reader wondering how the Forestry Corps’ work affected the outcome of the war.

While the Forestry Corps is scarcely mentioned in the research by Canada’s leading First World War scholars, this does not accurately reflect the importance of the Forestry Corps’ role during the war. Support units such as the CFC are commonly ignored, or their contributions diminished, in the research because they did not

---

serve near the front lines. While support and auxiliary units may not have made the same kind of contributions or sacrifices as those made by the infantry, that does not diminish their role. Instead of charging the enemy trenches, the foresters of the CFC made war in the forests of Britain and France, hacking at their foes with broad axes and saws. It was through the Canadian Forestry Corps’ efforts that supply lines to the front were kept open - even in the worst conditions. Without the support of the foresters, the Entente war effort likely would have stalled by the end of 1916 for want of timber, and Britain would likely have faced the prospect of mass starvation in 1917, when it was mere weeks from draining its last reserves of grain.

Overall, Canadian historians’ neglect of the CFC stems largely from the Corps’ proximity to the front lines and, in more recent Canadian histography, from the nationalistic approach pursued by authors and researchers, including Tim Cook, in their writing. As mentioned, Cook’s writing primarily centres on the infantrymen, the foot sloggers who won the battles of Vimy Ridge and the Hundred Days, because it was their victories that contributed to the creation of the national myth that the Great War helped to define Canada as a national entity and not just another dominion in the British Empire. Because Cook and other writers have made so little mention of the support troops, they have created the impression that the Infantry won the glory and the entire war all by themselves. Simply put, they want to satisfy their audience of non-academic readers who want a good war story that captures the action and horrors of the Great War, rather than a detailed description of the logistics and support units.

While it is true that the Infantry’s contribution to the Great War was monumental, their victories could not have been achieved without the support they received from units like the CFC, the Canadian Army Medical Corps and the Canadian Railway Troops. In recent years this trend of primary focus on the infantry has slowly been reversing as emerging scholars - myself included - and established scholars have been refocusing their research on support units and other units that served behind the front lines. One such scholar is Andrew McEwen, who recently completed a PhD on the operations of the Canadian Army Veterinary Corps during the Hundred Days Offensive. His work was ground-breaking in that it explored an understudied aspect of the Hundred Days - just as I have strived to do for the Forestry Corps during the same period of time. Dr. David Marshall has likewise examined the wartime role of chaplains, including Cannon Frederick Scott, the much loved priest of the CEF, who made it his personal mission to comfort the infantry serving in the front line trenches. This new branch of scholarship will hopefully bring about a much needed understanding of the breadth of the commitment Canada made to the Great War.
Therefore, I intend to demonstrate the impact of the Canadian Forestry Corps by discussing the role that it played during the Great War. The first chapter will cover the Canadian forestry industry as it existed in the early 20th century, providing the necessary background about the lumberjacks and their communities. Logging practices differed greatly across Canada, especially in British Columbia where coastal practices were far removed those found in Northern Ontario. The significant geographic and topographic differences created unique environments that influenced the societies in which each group lived, especially in terms of politics. The coastal loggers of British Columbia, for example, were far more involved in union politics than those residing in Central and Atlantic Canada. The second half of the chapter will discuss the economic and military background that led to Lord Kitchener’s request for the first forestry battalion in February 1916. This section will outline how Great Britain’s Imperial trade network was destabilized by the outbreak of the war and how the resulting fallout from its breakdown impacted the ongoing war effort. Furthermore, the mass enlistment of a million men drained Britain’s available labour pool, depriving the economy of a valuable source of potential manpower. Compounding all of this was the rapid increase in the scale of the war and the resulting increase in demand for resources, which in turn increased the demand for more merchant shipping, thus creating a cycle of unending economic frustration.

The second chapter will cover the CFC’s operations between May and December 1916. This was the CFC’s formative period, during which the 224th Battalion established its first logging camp at Smith’s Lawn. This section is intended to flesh out the description of the CFC’s operations, and to discuss in more detail the work they were called on to perform and how. While the work was much the same from camp to camp, the methods of performing the work varied, just as it had in Canada, because each district was faced with different environmental conditions that dictated how each camp went about felling and sawing timber. The Canadians’ adaptability made them an indispensable resource to the British, as well as the French, who soon negotiated for deployment of several CFC companies from the newly mobilized battalions for service in France in the autumn of 1916.

The third chapter will depart briefly from the main narrative to discuss the service of several minority groups serving in the Forestry Corps. These groups, primarily Afro-Canadians, Indigenous men, Ukrainians and the medically unfit, were discriminated against and thus barred from combat, making the CFC and other non-combatant
units the only means by which men from these communities could serve their nation. It is important to recognize that some of the soldiers who served in the Forestry Corps did so because of necessity, and not as a choice; it is also important to understand that, despite having no other option but to serve in the CFC, the soldiers conducted themselves with the utmost professionalism. It is also worth noting that, by the end of the war, Ukrainians constituted 51% of the Corps’ entire strength, and that close to 53% of the Corps’ establishment was made up of immigrants (including Ukrainians) and minority groups that included Indigenous and Afro-Canadian men.

The fourth chapter will cover a period between January 1917 and December 1917. It was during this period that the CFC achieved some of its greatest successes since it was directly involved in supporting the assault and capture of Vimy Ridge, Hill 70 and Passchendaele. Throughout 1917, the Forestry Corps proved its worth to the war effort, through its ceaseless efforts felling and sawing timber for the front lines. Victories such as those achieved by the Canadians at Vimy Ridge and Hill 70 would not have been possible without the support provided by the CFC. The timber cut by the CFC was used to construct the vast logistical system that supplied the artillery at Vimy with the shells that destroyed the German defences, and the hellish morass at Passchendaele would not have been negotiable without the wooden duckboards that the Forestry Corps sawed and delivered to the BEF. The final part of the chapter will cover the relationships between the foresters and French and British civilians. While the Forestry Corps’ impact was primarily felt on the Western Front, the foresters also affected the lives of the civilians who lived near their logging camps. Many foresters formed long-lasting friendships with the local inhabitants (sometimes even resulting in marriage) that are remembered and honoured to this day. It is important that these relationships be documented as well because, while the men’s personal relationships fall outside of the main narrative, examination of these stories provides us with better insight into how military conflicts affected the home front.

The final chapter will cover the operations of the Forestry Corps from January 1918 until June 1919, when the final units of the CFC were demobilized. It was in 1918 that the Forestry Corps became the difference between success and failure on the Western Front - especially in the wake of Operation Michael in March 1918 - and even more so during the Hundred Days Offensive that started on August 8th, 1918. During the Hundred Days, the CFC filled numerous special orders for bridging timber and kept the British Armies supplied with the timber needed to

---

14 Afro-Canadians were barred from combat until the institution of conscription in 1917. Indigenous men were initially barred, but later allowed to serve from 1915 onwards. Ukrainian men of Russian birth could serve, but Ukrainians of Austrian birth could not serve in the infantry or artillery for the entire war.
carry on the pursuit of the retreating German armies. Without the Forestry Corps’ logistical assistance, it is very likely that the Entente counter-offensive would have ground to a halt after just a few weeks of pursuit because there would not have been enough timber to repair hundreds of kilometres of destroyed railway track or the hundreds of bridges blown up by the retreating German Army. Finally, the last element of the discussion is the involvement of Forestry Corps soldiers in two notorious riots that occurred in the Canadian demobilization camp in Kinmel Park in early 1919. Taking place during a period of rising tensions within the ranks of unruly Canadian soldiers, the riots left a black mark on the Canadians’ otherwise respectable conduct record. Unfortunately, common prejudices of the day exacerbated tensions and prevented fair application of justice in the case of those Forestry Corps soldiers that were court martialed.
Chapter 1: Lumberjacks and the Great War: The Origins of the Canadian Forestry Corps

The operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps (the “CFC”) are the primary focus of this paper, but a thorough understanding of soldiers’ background in the logging industry and the economic situation in Great Britain from the outbreak of the war to January 1916 is required to set the context before discussing the CFC’s inception and initial deployment.

The Canadian Timber Industry

By the beginning of the Twentieth Century, the logging industry in Canada was one of the most prosperous sectors of the economy; billions of feet of sawn timber flowed from mills stretching from the Atlantic Provinces to the wilds of Northern Quebec down to the Ottawa River Valley and straight across the Great Plains to the Rain Forest Coast of British Columbia. That prosperity was in large part due to Great Britain’s dependence on Canadian timber imports. From the early Nineteenth Century onwards, Britain had come to rely upon Canada as one of its primary sources for sawn and raw timber products because, having exhausted a significant portion of its domestic timber resources, Britain was reliant on imports to meet its needs. Consequently, Britain’s demand for timber products was the primary force driving the early expansion of Canada’s timber industry, and that demand continued, in part, to sustain the industry throughout the Nineteenth Century. However, to view the Canadian logging industry as one homogenous industry is to belie the fact that each region had a diverse set of logging practices; not to

15 The industry faced stiff competition from the Baltic states and was often plagued by crippling boom and bust cycles throughout the Nineteenth Century. Trade with the United States was often more prosperous than trade with Britain in the long term.
mention the striking cultural and social difference amongst the men working in the thousands of camps and towns across Canada.

While no longer the timber capital of Central Canada, Ottawa (or Bytown as it was known in the early Nineteenth Century) was once a prosperous logging centre with operations extending along the Rideau River. The first logging operations began when a recent American immigrant Philemon Wright arrived in the region in 1800 with the intention of starting a small colony called Hull. Financial problems forced him to reconsider his venture in 1806 in order to satisfy several creditors to whom he was deeply indebted. A solution presented itself in the form of the timber trade where there was a lot of money to be made trading timber - money he could use to pay his debts. Wright was inexperienced and therefore wary of trying his untested hand at rafting timber to Quebec City; however, after some due consideration, Wright, along with several men and one of his sons, embarked down river and arrived in Quebec City in November 1806 with his first load of timber. The journey was rough and Wright saw little reason to continue in the trade, but his opinion changed once Napoleon blockaded Britain’s supply of timber, forcing the British Admiralty to turn to its Canadian colonies for timber. Exports of timber from Canada to Britain increased dramatically. Wright saw an opportunity for profit and established a permanent logging operation that would soon make him the first prominent lumber baron of the region.

The logging operations that Wright established continued to flourish in the decades after the Napoleonic Wars ended. The prosperity drew in hundreds and then thousands of immigrant labourers to work in the rapidly expanding industry. At first, the majority of loggers working in the industry were French Canadiens from the Montreal area but, by the late 1820s, the first of several hundred Irish labourers began arriving in Bytown looking for work at canal construction and at local sawmills. Upon completion of the canals in 1832, the majority of the Irish labourers began to look for work in the local mills, much to the chagrin of the Canadiens loggers, who deeply resented the Irish encroachment on their line of work. Regardless of nationality, those who sought employment in the logging camps were a hardy breed of men.

The men lived in rough earthen hovels and worked most of the year cutting lumber for export to Great Britain. By the 1840s, the hovels were no more, having been replaced by large bunkhouses known as cambuse. These bunk houses were shared by dozens of men for months at a time because the loggers lived at their work sites

---

16 Mackay, Donald, *The Lumberjacks*, (Toronto, National Heritage Books, 1978), pg. 16
17 Mackay, *The Lumberjacks*, pg. 17
deep in the woods. The loggers used large two-person saws, horse teams and steam/water powered mills to cut, move and shape the lumber to current market needs. Once cut, the timber was rafted down river on cribs - timber logs assembled into large rafts on which the men lived - through a series of increasingly dangerous rapids until they arrived at Quebec City. On arrival, the timber was unloaded at one of the numerous timber docks, where the logs were examined by government inspectors before the load was auctioned off to the highest bidder.

There was a deep ethnic divide between the newly arrived Irish and the previously established Canadien loggers. As alluded to earlier, the French resented the Irish in Bytown because the Irish were trying to force their way into the local logging industry after becoming unemployed after the recent completion of the newly constructed canals. This caused much conflict between the two groups as the Canadiens worked to maintain the status quo while the Irish tried with some success to gain employment in the local mills. Events came to a head in 1835 when the Irish - now organized into a gang known as the Shiners and headed by a local Irish businessman named Peter Aylen - embarked on a two-year campaign of violence that terrorized Bytown and the surrounding areas.

Dozens of people were assaulted or murdered between 1835 and 1837 because Aylen was effectively able to overwhelm local law enforcement whenever they tried to put a stop to his reign of terror. There was purpose in the violence; Aylen’s goal was to wrest from the Canadiens their dominance in the local mills, drive them from the region and replace them with Irish labourers. The violence came to an end when public opinion turned against Aylen and the Shiners after they attempted to kill James Johnson, one of Aylen’s fiercest critics in Bytown.

As logging became more industrialized in the latter part of the Nineteenth Century, it became much more common to use donkey engines and steam powered sawmills than to work by hand. These practices increased the size of most lumber operations, which meant that companies were employing hundreds of men rather than a few dozen. Francophone loggers still dominated the trade, but newly arrived immigrants - mostly Finns, Swedes and Ukrainians - began taking up employment as demand for loggers rose at the beginning of the Twentieth Century. Most of the immigrants found employment in Northern Ontario and the Ottawa River Valley. It appears that the Swedes and the Finns were the best received, while the Ukrainians were not always well liked.

---

18 Mackay, The Lumberjacks, pg. 25
19 Mackay, The Lumberjacks
21 Mackay, Lumberjacks, pg. 222
Outside of the Ottawa River Valley, the industry varied widely in its practices, as did the heritage of the lumberjacks who worked in it. In the Maritime Provinces (New Brunswick and Nova Scotia), the logging industry was at least a century old by the time Wright rafted his first load of timber to Quebec City. Prior to the mid Eighteenth Century, most logging was done for personal use in local communities such as Halifax. This changed in the wake of the American Revolution because the British had lost access to the New England timber they had been using to construct ship masts for the Royal Navy. Having lost access to a principal source of timber, Britain turned to New Brunswick timber merchant William Davidson to fill the production gap. By 1782, Davidson’s logging operation along the Miramichi River was producing 400 naval masts a year for the Royal Navy. The arrival of United Empire Loyalists and the boom years following Napoleon’s Baltic blockade brought about a swift increase in the size of the timber market and in the size of the industry in New Brunswick and Nova Scotia.22

With the exception of Davidson’s operation in the 1820s, most logging operations were quite small at first and were carried out by groups of 10 to 15 men hired by local timber merchants to undertake the work on their behalf. The men needed only “a team of oxen, a couple of felling axes, a broad axe…a few barrels of pork and flour and…a keg of rum”23 to venture into the dense forest in search of a vein of suitable timber. Their camps were similar to those found in Ontario - albeit smaller- with a small lodging hut about five feet high with a fire near the back and straw and hay to sleep on rather than bunks. The camps were never meant to last longer than the winter logging season. Once the lumber had been cut and the spring thaw had started, the camp was quickly left behind while the logging team forded the winter’s cut down stream to the coast and then on to St. John for sale to a local timber merchant.24

---

22 Mackay, Lumberjacks, pg. 17
23 Mackay, Lumberjacks, pg. 19
24 Wynn Graeme, Timber Colony : A Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980)
By the latter part of the century, however, logging operations like Davidson’s were more common, especially along the Saint John River and near Liverpool, Nova Scotia, the Maritimes’ other timber port. Logging operations along the Saint John, Miramichi and Restigouche Rivers were booming in the post-Confederation years, with men like Alexander “Boss” Gibson acting as the driving force behind the industry’s expansion. Gibson started as an axeman and eventually rose to preside over an operation employing 2,000 lumberjacks and to hold sole ownership of the Canada Eastern Railway that linked his camps in the south with his sawmill outside Fredericton. The rise in industrial logging operations also contributed to the boom as the new timber barons built large steam powered sawmills across the province. In the span of a decade, these mills transformed the industry as the small logging operations began to be subsumed by larger incorporated operations that dominated the market by the 1870s.

In British Columbia the logging industry was far smaller than the industry in Ontario and Quebec, which, by the 1870s, had become one of the principal areas of economic activity in Central Canada. The British Columbia

---

25 Mackay, Lumberjacks, pg. 31
26 Wynn, Timber Colony
lumber industry, as it existed in 1870, served the domestic needs of the local economy, mostly providing lumber for salmon canneries and local mines.27

There were a few large mills in the region, but they were only open for operations when there was a need for lumber. Therefore, most logging was carried out by small groups or individuals called hand-loggers. These men bought licences and the rights to a small area of forest from the government, and then cut down the trees and prepared them for sale.28 Most of these men lived out in the bush for extended periods of time, although it appears that some brought their families with them and established homesteads on their land. However, by the end of the 19th century, the lumber industry had begun to rapidly industrialize and by the time the war started, large industrial mills had replaced the smaller mills and organized gangs of loggers had absorbed the smaller groups of hand-loggers.29 This transformed the lumber industry. Within the span of only a few years, most lumber operations became more commercialized and use of industrial logging equipment became much more common.

Because of the logging boom, loggers from the Pacific Northwest and other parts of Canada began arriving in increasingly large numbers, often making their first stop in Vancouver. As the logging companies grew, they began setting up their headquarters in Vancouver. That lead to its status as the hub of the logging industry in British Columbia and the easiest place for men to find employment in the industry. Once employed, the men resided primarily at the logging camps, but only as long as they were employed at that particular camp. Men working in the lumber industry tended to live a transient lifestyle, often travelling in search of better employment during slack times or an escape from the particularly awful conditions found in some camps. Their frequent movement often caused employment rates to rise and fall within the industry and changes in local town populations.30

Because of the significant influx of loggers to meet industry needs, loggers often made up a large percentage of the local population31 and they were deeply involved in community building and politics. This was the

29 Rajala, *Up-Coast*, pg. 23
31 By the late Nineteenth Century, employment was far more stable along the coastal regions of the Northwest, where climatic conditions were much more favourable for the year-round operations of logging sites. In the interior, operations were less industrialized and transient labour was still used during the winter when Albertan farmers and ranch hands took to logging in order to earn extra cash for their farms.
case because most of the communities founded from the 1840s onwards were resource communities mostly populated by labourers, merchants and professionals. As such, the men working in the logging industry were much more likely to be involved in local politics - and to have a greater say in political decisions - than loggers operating in more developed areas of the country. Those loggers who involved themselves in local politics tended to be leftists and socialists, and they tended to support union membership, co-operative organizations and the fight against rampant capitalist development.32

By the latter half of the Nineteenth Century, the Canadian lumberjack had become a distinctive feature of the Canadian landscape, although the lumberjack of the mid to late Nineteenth Century only slightly resembled the romanticized image that Canadians associate with lumberjacks. Rather than the lightly stepping gentlemen of yesteryear as depicted by Wade Hemsworth’s memorable folk song “The Log Driver’s Waltz”, lumberjacks were a more rough and tumble bunch, ready to engage in wild bouts of binge drinking followed by months of back breaking labour risking (and often losing) life and limbs in the bush and mills. They were described as “shaggy of hair and beard, dressed out in red…blue and green jerseys with knitted sashes about their waist and…toques on their heads”33. They were also described as daredevils and thieves who were known for clearing out hen roosts and partaking in chaotic bouts of binge drinking during their annual trip into town after a hard winter’s work. While Hemsworth certainly did not intend to depict the less honourable aspects of the lumberjack’s life, his depiction of our nation’s lumberjacks was not completely inaccurate. While there is no evidence of their superior dancing skills, they were acknowledged as being diligent and dedicated to their work. Some Peterborough residents considered them to be among the most noble and kind individuals that one was ever likely to meet. Furthermore, in British Columbia, for example, married men often brought their families to live with them in the small towns established by their employers, rather than living apart from their families for months at a time.

While drinking and searching out female companionship was a principal activity of many a lumberjack, trips to town often turned political, especially in Vancouver, which was the centre of the lumber trade in British Columbia. By the turn of the century, Vancouver had become a hotbed of socialist labour agitation and union politics - in large part because the increased mechanization of coastal logging operations had resulted in significant

33 McKay, Lumberjacks, pg. 20
growth in the industry. According to Gordon Hak, “Companies were becoming larger and direct relations between bosses and workers were almost impossible in the larger outfits.”34. The depersonalization of relations between lumberjacks and their bosses pushed some lumberjacks into discussions about the benefits of unionization as a means of achieving better working/living conditions and wage increases that accounted for inflation. However, unionization efforts pushed by the International Workers of the World (IWW) were unsuccessful until a drive after the war saw a short-lived logging union that collapsed due to internal strife almost immediately after it was founded.35

Socialism was also a popular topic of discussion and was, until the end of the war, a unique element of debates in Vancouver, where delegates from the IWW and the American Labour Union competed to unionize the province’s industrial labourers, targeting in particular those working in the logging industry. In fact, syndicalism (a form of socialism that advocated for general strikes) had an estimated ten thousand adherents in British Columbia and Alberta by 1911; most of them were members of the IWW. As will be seen in my last chapter, socialism would have a role to play in the war and would cause the Canadian Government some significant concerns in the Spring of 1919, but that would play out in Wales rather than in Winnipeg.36

In summary, it can be said that practices of the logging industry in Canada varied from region to region. In Ontario and Quebec, the lumberjacks took to searching the dense belts of forest in the far north while, farther south, they risked life and limb rafting timber down river. In the Maritimes, lumberjacks took similar risks along the St. John River but operated in smaller groups than the much larger camps established elsewhere. Only in British Columbia was diversity seen in industry practices as logging along that coast required innovative and dangerous (and sometimes deadly) logging methods - such as over head yarding - to access the enormous timber resources of the Northwest.37

However, the true diversity in the logging industry was found in the men employed in the different regions; each group stood out for one reason or another. In Ontario, the lumberjacks could be defined by Anglo-French

34 Hak, Lumber Workers Industrial Union.
35 According to Hak, these initial unionization efforts failed due to tight control over the labour supply by employers and the isolated workplaces that made any discussions about unionization extremely difficult.
36 Hak, Lumber Workers Industrial Union
37 Over head yarding was a system of pullies that used metal cables to move logs from one point to another. This kind of logging was employed in regions where other means of transport such as horse drawn or steam trains were impractical to use.
relations and penchant for violence that frequently lead to brawls amongst Anglophone immigrants and Francophone labourers. Maritime loggers were defined by the close bonds formed within the small working groups and through their common lineage as descendants of United Empire Loyalists and French Acadian settlers. The lumberjacks of British Columbia were the most diverse group, taking into consideration their political views. Their role in populating the Northwest of British Columbia and establishing the socialist movement in Canada are accomplishments that make these men stand out amongst their fellow lumberjacks.

**British Economic Difficulties**

By January 1916, the economic situation in Great Britain was grim. During the 15 months since the outbreak of the war on July 27th, 1914, the domestic economy had suffered a steady decline in its capacity to supply its rapidly growing army on the Western Front as well as the Home Front. Using the agricultural sector as an example, it can be estimated that between 150,000 and 200,000 agricultural labourers had already enlisted by 1916, with another 30,000 called up later that year after the passage of conscription in March 1916. The enlistment and later conscription of hundreds of thousands of farm hands forced some farmers to reduce the acreage they could cultivate with the labour they had available. That soon led to shortages of essential foodstuffs, followed by the introduction of rationing. Normally these shortages could have been made up with imports of wheat, grain and timber from its vast Imperial trade network. Principal among Great Britain’s trading partners was Canada, which was-at the outbreak of the war-one of the Empire’s largest suppliers of agricultural products and natural resources. Although the volume of Canadian exports was not as great as that of Britain’s other trading partners, Canada’s modest exports became much more important in the face of the disruptions caused by the outbreak of the war.

Before examining the reasons why Canadian imports, and later Canadian labour, became so critical to the British war effort, it is necessary to address Britain’s military and economic failures so as to better understand the chain of causality that led to the founding of the Canadian Forestry Corps in 1916.

**Military Failures**

Prior to the outbreak of the war, the British Government had signed an alliance with France in 1904 that laid out grounds for mutual military assistance. The terms of the alliance stated that France would bear the burden of fighting the German Army on land, while the British Royal Navy would carry on the fight against the Germans at

---

sea, freeing up French naval forces to cover secondary theatres of war. The British had also agreed to deploy an expeditionary force (the British Expeditionary Force or BEF) on the left flank of the French Army along the Channel coast. The BEF, described by the German Kaiser as a “contemptible little army” 39, was not large. 40 It was a small professional army numbering between 60,000 and 75,000 full time soldiers with a reserve of about 130,000 men grouped into the newly established Territorial Army. 41

While the Liberal government of Herbert Asquith was content with the size of the military, newly appointed Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener was far from satisfied; over the previous decade, he had repeatedly stated that Britain would need far more than the existing twenty divisions (Regular and Territorial forces combined) to fight even a short war in France. He made his point clear when he stated on August 7th, 1914, “We must be prepared to put armies of millions in the field and maintain them for years” 42. The members of the War Cabinet were inclined to disagree with Kitchener because they believed - as had their predecessors - that no war on the continent would last longer than six months. Accordingly, the General Staff carried on with their plan to deploy the BEF without giving any further thought as to how they would handle the situation if the war turned into a prolonged affair.

Kitchener’s prediction was proven correct on the 23rd of August when the BEF fought its first battle against the German Army at Mons; while not quite thrashed, British commander Field Marshal Sir John French feared he would have to evacuate to England. This left Britain in a precarious situation because the French were in full retreat on all fronts. The BEF could not contemplate a retreat to England; nor could it face another sustained battle against the German Army without receiving reinforcements. 43

This was the first broken link in the chain. Once the British had deployed the Territorial Reserves to the BEF in September, there were effectively no more trained reserves of manpower in the nation. The British Government and General Staff were to blame for this failure because they had not planned for the possibility that a future war could last more than six months. When its established strategy failed, the British Government was left

40 Its purpose was to act as an Imperial police force that could be deployed to colonial emergencies. Its ranks were made up entirely of volunteers because the Liberal government wanted to avoid conscription. As such, it was much smaller than the massive million man armies fielded by France and Germany.
42 Gordon, Manpower Problems, pg. 399
43 Hart, Fire and Movement, pg. 59
facing an unprecedented crisis. In response, Lord Kitchener ordered an immediate crash program of recruitment that would see a million men enlisted into the military by the end of the year. While this was a necessary course of action for the British Military, the recruitment program was carried out in such a reckless fashion that it would seriously hinder the nation’s economic capacity.44

Recruiting new soldiers to the colours was an easy task in the first few months of the war. According to Adrian Gregory “by 22 August numbers [of men who had enlisted] had grown to over 100,000”45 and continued to grow for the remainder of the year. By January 1915, Lloyd George, newly appointed as Minister of Munitions estimated that 300,000 men a month were volunteering for military service. By February, it was estimated that 15.4% of all men who had left their jobs were joining the military.46 The influx of men into the army certainly helped shore up the front lines in France and Belgium, but it contributed to a serious weakening of the Home Front’s economic capacity.

**Economic Failures**

During the first six months of the war, Britain’s available pool of economic manpower was being steadily drained away by the silver tongues of recruiting sergeants and a desire for adventure. The declining numbers of the nation’s working class were not noticed until October/November when reports of crippling shortages of ordnance and equipment began reaching the War Cabinet. By November, for example, the Royal Artillery had to ration each gun to no more than two or six shells a day because the small network of ordnance factories (a half dozen at the outset of the war) were unable to meet the demands of a modern battlefield. Asquith responded by ordering an immediate expansion of the factories, but it proved difficult to hire enough employees with the necessary skill sets. The loss of skilled workers hurt, but the loss of unskilled workers was the more injurious in the long term because factories required more unskilled workers than skilled workers. The problem extended beyond the ordnance factories to other major industries, including the mining and farming industries which were also hard hit by the loss of labourers. Production never came close to collapsing, but production levels declined to the extent that the shortfall had to be made up by increasing imports of war materials from overseas until the manpower crisis was resolved.

44 Gordon, Manpower Problems
46 Gordon, Manpower Problems
Prior to the outbreak of the war, British merchants had constructed the largest trading fleet in the world - Lloyds of London had on register 4,000 merchant ships that were suitable for foreign trade - but only 3747 were available for service when the war broke out.47 Of those 3,747 ships, 1,574 (or 42%) were already committed to shipping routes from which they could not be diverted. This left only 2,173 merchant ships of 1000 tons or more, free to be reassigned to new shipping routes.48 On paper the fleet should have been enough to create a safety-net that could be used to cover the shortfall in production until a solution was found, but the fleet soon proved to be too small. By November 1914, the British had opened more fronts against the Ottoman Empire in the Middle East and against Germany colonies in Africa, which placed increasing demands on the fleet. There were not enough available merchant vessels to meet rising demands for shipping, and the resulting strain threatened to undermine the war effort. The arrival of U-boats in the North Atlantic starting in early 1915 only made the situation worse because neutral nations feared trading with Britain. With the loss of its merchant shipping and without the support of neutrals, Great Britain’s situation appeared dire.

By 1916 the U-boats had become a great concern for the British. The Germans had constructed U-boat pens in the harbour at Zeebrugge, that allowed U-boats unfettered access to the English Channel and to the shipping lanes off of the West coast of France and Britain. According to Indiana Neidell, “By February 1916 the German Navy had 111 operational U-boats [in the North Atlantic or English Channel] though this was only half of what German naval officers estimated they would have needed to starve Britain into submission”.49 The shortfall in U-boat production did not matter because, in January 1916, “The German Kaiser laid out a comprehensive plan for the U-boat war against the British. Minelayers would operate close to Britain itself, while attack subs would disrupt shipping far off at the approaches to the British Isles”.50 This change in tactics resulted in an increase of 29% in destruction of Entente shipping in 1916 (over the number of ships sunk in 1915) despite the fact the Admiralty had instituted the convoy system which had already proven effective in deterring U-boats attacks.

48 Bailey, Maritime Trade
49 Neidell, Indiana, The Great War Project, Mediakraft Networks, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0c5szJBCYw&t=365s
50 Neidell, The Great War Project
While the Admiralty was still struggling to counter the U-boats, the War Cabinet was still searching for a solution to the dire economic situation. One suggestion raised by several ministers (although it is not clear who first made the suggestion) was to increase production of domestic resources in order to reduce imports of selected materials. This would in turn free up precious space onboard merchant ships, allowing for the increased import of military and civilian supplies.

Timber was one of the first resources targeted because it was bulky and took up considerable space on board ships, and because of the amounts imported by Britain each year. Prior to the war, Britain’s largest suppliers of timber products - Norway, Sweden and Russia (Grand Duchy of Finland) - were on the Baltic Sea. Sweden was the largest supplier of the three. Their combined timber exports may have supplied Britain with roughly 80% of its timber imports (roughly equal to about four million FBM (Feet Board Measure of timber)).

Canada was Britain’s next largest supplier of timber products, with a much more modest contribution, estimated at 20% of Britain’s pre-war timber imports or roughly 1.8 million tons of lumber a year. Britain had to rely on timber imports because its domestic production only amounted to 900,000 tons a year, a level that could not satisfy domestic demand. Britain had been dependant on the Baltic and Canadian timber trade for about three centuries before the war because it had exhausted its most valuable stocks of domestic timber building wooden sailing ships and fueling its industrial growth. However, with the outbreak of the war, Britain found itself cut off from two of its main suppliers - Sweden

---

and Russia because Germany controlled the Baltic sea. This deprived the Russians of access to their ice free ports in the Gulf of Finland and deprived Sweden of its quickest shipping route.

This made it imperative that the British utilize their remaining domestic timber resources to cover the shortfall in imports from the Baltic trade and from Canada. Despite the fact that Canada produced and exported far less than the Baltic states, Canadian lumber became more important once the war had begun. As noted above, the problem was not the suppliers, but the transport from suppliers to market. With U-boats actively disrupting Britain’s trade network, there was no guarantee the product would reach the market. The problem was further exacerbated by the acute shipping shortage.

Therefore, the War Cabinet proceeded with a plan to reduce their import of timber products by 60% by exploiting domestic stocks. This was essential because, in the span of two months from August to October 1915, the British Army had seen its estimated monthly timber requirements rise from 8,000 tons a month to 50,000 tons. The ongoing Battle of Loos (September 23rd to October 3rd) could have been the reason for the sudden rise in timber requirements, but the more likely reason was the BEF’s ongoing need for a steady supply of lumber. By the autumn of 1915, the Western Front had been locked in static trench warfare for over a year, forcing the soldiers into the subterranean hellscape of the trenches.

Timber products were necessary for the construction and maintenance of the trenches. Timber was used for reinforcing trench walls, for building pardos (sandbag walls on the tops of trenches), firing steps and bunkers, and for creating the all important duckboards, a priceless commodity used to construct the walkways that kept the soldier’s feet out of the deep mud that often filled the bottom of the trenches. Timber was also needed to carry out daily repairs as German artillery and adverse weather conditions took their toll on the front-line trenches, sometimes destroying entire sections or causing other sections to collapse under the weight of rotten boards or sustained artillery barrages. Outside of the trenches, timber was in demand for constructing and repairing railways, roads and bridges, as well as numerous other uses to be discussed below.

It was important to ensure that the needs of the domestic economy were met as well because certain sectors, such as the mining and railway industries required large quantities of timber products to properly function. The coal mines in Wales, for example, used an estimated 100,000 pit props (wooden reinforcements used to prop up the mining pits) each year, and the railway companies required large stocks of timber rail ties to repair the thousands of

---

53 Maclean, Murray, Farming and Forestry
miles of tracks in Britain. The demands placed on these industries were greater than ever before experienced as rapid expansion of mines operations was ordered to ensure a steady supply of coal to the railways, which would in turn ensure there would be no coal shortages to impede the transport of war materials to the front. By 1916, for example, it took an average of two 50-car trains to supply a single British division each day of the war; that number increased to perhaps to half a dozen such trains during a larger offensive. The Germans used a total of ten 100-car trains just to transport artillery shells in a two-week period during Passchendaele in 1917.

The British had attempted to meet these demands in France by establishing several companies of foresters to work in forests leased to them by French authorities. By the autumn of 1915, however, the six companies of the Royal Engineers and Cold Stream Guards in France were only producing a total of 10,000 tons a month. It was estimated that 10,000 men were needed to produce the 54,600 tons a month needed to supply British and Imperial divisions. Though do Britain’s shortage of skilled foresters, it would have been impossible for the British to have met this target without great difficulty. Therefore, the logical conclusion, according to Ivor Lee and John Starling, was to request the service of Canadian lumberjacks to produce timber for military purposes.

**Inception of the Canadian Forestry Corps**

From the archival records and the few existing published sources, it can be determined that the decision to formally request that Canada provide the services of a forestry unit was made in late January or early February 1916. Available documents merely state that the request was made on February 15th, 1916 by Colonial Secretary Andrew Bonar Law, likely after consultation with Lord Kitchener. The request was sent to the Governor General of Canada Prince Andrew and then forwarded to Minister of Militia Sam Hughes and Prime Minister Robert Borden. It stated: “H.M. Government would be grateful if the Canadian Government would assist in the production of timber for War purposes. Owing to the very serious shortage of freight for munitions, food, forage and other essentials, which is a matter of the gravest concern to H.M. Government, it is impossible to continue to import Canadian timber of a sufficiently large scale to meet war requirements, and arrangements must therefore be made for felling and converting English forests.

54 Neidell, Indiana, *The Great War Project*, Mediakraft Networks, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6Wvijm9Pks](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W6Wvijm9Pks)
56 Murray, *Farming and Forestry*
57 Starling & Ivor, *No Labour, No Battle*, pg. 97
Chief difficulty is finding sufficient skilled labour… 1500 men are urgently needed, and H.M. Government would suggest that a Battalion of lumbermen might be formed of specially enlisted men to undertake exploitation of forests of this country”. 58

The Canadian Government responded positively to the request by the 1st of March 1916, agreeing to provide a battalion of skilled foresters for service in Britain. It also agreed that recruitment would begin in earnest that month. Recruitment of the newly created 224th Canadian Forestry Battalion began days later in the Ottawa Region, drawing from amongst the logging camps that still populated the area. The government also set about recruiting staff officers for the battalion, choosing Alexander McDougal, a prominent local engineer in the government service as the 224th Battalion’s first command officer. The Militia Department also granted the unit 250,000 Dollars to purchase the necessary equipment for service overseas. While recruitment progressed smoothly through the month, recruiters were encountering a problem; men who had previously been deemed unfit for service in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) were showing up to volunteer for the CFC.

As stated in an article written by Oliver A. Minns, an unknown number of men presented themselves to the battalion’s recruiters after having already been deemed unfit for service during previous attempts to enlist for service overseas. Although Minns does not state the reason for their previous rejections (other than old age), he says that their disabilities - for lack of a better term - did not hinder their ability to perform hard manual labour for twelve or more hours a day. 59 Aside from this problem (which was apparently compounded by the difficulty in finding enough qualified doctors to carry out physical examinations), the recruitment of qualified lumberjacks and officers progressed quickly. 60

In just six weeks, the entire complement of the Battalion had been filled and mustered at Valcartier military base, with the first advanced party of two officers and 15 enlisted men arriving in Britain on April 12th, 1916. The remainder of the battalion started to ship out in April, with the full complement arriving by the second week of May. In total, it took no more than twelve weeks from the date of the first request for the entire Battalion to be raised.

58 Bird and Davies. Forestry Corps, pg. 5
59 The medical fitness of soldiers will be discussed in more detail in a later chapter. It was a very important concern for the CEF because, by 1916, Canada had begun to relax its strict medical qualifications to allow men not considered fit for service with the infantry to serve in non-combatant positions. This allowed Category A soldiers (those soldiers considered medically fit for front line service) to be freed from non-combatant jobs and to be sent to the front where they were badly needed.
60 Clarke, Nic, Unwanted Warriors, pg. 55
mobilized and shipped with all its equipment to Britain. The mobilization occurred so quickly that the first sawn lumber passed through the 224th Battalion’s newly erected sawmill in Virginia Waters, Surry County on May 13th, 1916.

It should also be noted that Canada was not the only member of the British Empire that responded to the British request for support units to provide general and specialized labour. Similar requests were sent to all corners of the British Empire, including the Dominion of South Africa and India. In response to this call, the South African government mobilized a civilian labour brigade, the South African NativeLabour Corps (SANLC), while the British colonial government in India mobilized the Indian Labour Corps (ILC). While the SANLC and ILC were primarily used for general labour purposes, a few companies from each unit worked as forestry companies in some areas in France and worked alongside the Canadians after their deployment to France in September 1916.

To conclude this section, by May 1916, the 224th Battalion had been raised and mobilized, and had commenced logging operations in Britain in accordance with the initial request made by the British government. However, the day before operations began, Secretary of State for War Lord Kitchener made a request for an additional battalion for service in France, where they would work with those British forestry units already present. The request for additional men was made because the Minister for Agriculture (and by default head of the Home Grown Timber committee) Lord Selborne refused to allow Kitchener to ship any of the recently arrived Canadians to France.

Selborne refused Kitchener’s request because there were not yet enough forestry soldiers available for service in both Britain and France; splitting the ranks of the 224th Battalion would have seriously compromised its productivity at a time when the British government needed as much sawn lumber as the Battalion could produce. The impending arrival of the SNLC and the ILC likely contributed to Selborne’s refusal as well, because with several thousand labourers scheduled to arrive on the front in the coming months, there was no immediate need to split the 224th battalion apart. 61

---

61 Ivor and Starling, No Labour, No Battle, pg. 95-96
Chapter 2: Hatchet, Axe and Saw: The Operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps May – December 1916

“More-More-and More”62, was how Brig. Gen. John Burton White summarized the history of the CFC after May 1916. Though short, Burton’s pithy statement aptly summarizes the Corps’ history after its arrival in Britain - at a time when Britain had recently instituted conscription in order to maintain troop levels on the Western Front. Human and material resources were at a premium in the spring of 1916 as the British and French were beginning their long build up to the Somme Offensive. The French were also trying desperately to fend off a massive German offensive against the fortress city of Verdun, which had begun on February 2163. The Year of Battles, as 1916 came to be known, was the key year in the development of the CFC. Once landed in Britain, it was quickly evident that a single battalion would not be enough to satisfy the War Cabinet’s timber requirements.

Lord Kitchener had already come to this conclusion after his request to transfer half of the 224th Battalion to France had been rejected by Lord Selborne in April.64 Kitchener personally ordered 300 additional Forestry soldiers on May 12th, 1916. A week later on May 19th, this request was increased to 2,000 extra soldiers by the War Cabinet. After receiving the requests from Kitchener, Minister Sam Hughes authorized the raising of two more forestry battalions, the 238th and the 242nd; by the end of June, 2,500 more foresters were being recruited for service in Britain and in France, as Kitchener had suggested. Without having said a word about the status of the war, Lord Kitchener’s demand for additional forestry battalions revealed Britain’s precarious situation in the war and highlighted the insatiable demand for resources.

Therefore, the purpose of this chapter will be to discuss in greater detail the operations of the CFC and the expansion of the Corps from a battalion-sized formation to that of a division by the end of 1916. This expansion was a response to the steep increase in demand for timber products, both domestically in Britain and on the front lines in France and Belgium from June 1916 onwards. The factors leading to increased demand included the sheer scale of

62 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 8
63 For more on the Battle of Verdun, see *The Price of Glory* by Alistair Horne.
64 Selborne was Minister of Agriculture
battles fought on the Somme River and at Verdun, as well as the need to better fortify Britain against aerial bombing. In addition, the latter part of the chapter will discuss several important factors in the Corps’ eventual expansion into France, including the difficulties the corps experienced recruiting enough experienced soldiers to meet its needs.

**Virginia Waters**

Members of the War Cabinet must have felt some sense of relief when, on May 13th, the first sawn lumber passed through the 224th Battalion’s newly erected sawmill (a temporary Scotch mill because their Canadian mill was still in transit from Canada). The Battalion’s sawmill was constructed on the outskirts of Virginia Waters, a small town on the edge of Windsor Great Forest, not far from Windsor Great Palace. The land had in fact been donated by George V on behalf of the Royal Family as a personal contribution towards the war effort. An advanced party of men (one officer and 13 ordinary ranks or ORs) had arrived in mid-April to prepare the site for the arrival of the rest of the Battalion later that month. The work required to prepare the ground for logging was immense. They had to organize construction of enough barracks to house a thousand soldiers, along with administration, supply and equipment buildings; not to mention the cookhouses and soldiers’ messes for the officers and ordinary ranks. A spur line running from the camp to the local railway station also had to be built in order to transport the finished timber from the camp to its desired location.65

By mid-May, the camp facilities were ready and operating. There were an estimated two hundred soldiers working at the Virginia Waters site by the end of May, the majority of whom were Ordinary Ranks. The ORs - soldiers who held the rank of Private (Pte.) - were primarily employed in general labour - either cutting and hauling timber in the forests or assisting with the sawing of timber in the sawmill. ORs were also employed in a variety of other positions around the camp; they worked as cooks, administrative assistants and guards. Above them were the Junior Non-Commissioned-Officers (NCOs), drawn mostly from the ranks of the semi-skilled foresters. These men were mechanics, assistant engineers and clerks who occupied the more technically skilled positions such as operators of the ubiquitous donkey engines (small steam engines) and brakemen on the narrow-gauge railways.

The last group of NCOs were the Sergeants (Sgts.); they were the highest-ranking NCOs and were primarily drawn from the more experienced and skilled foresters. Their jobs usually involved supervising timber felling, hauling and sawing as teamsters, engineers and millwrights. The Sgts. were also responsible for overseeing

65 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 7
the daily operations of the camp and ensuring that discipline was enforced. Finally, the last group of soldiers present were the officers, the most senior authority figures found in the camps. Drawn from amongst the most experienced and senior figures in the logging industry (administrators, company clerks and mechanical engineers), they were responsible for overseeing the operations of their respective departments rather than being directly involved in the production process.66

As to the physical layout of the entire operation, the sawmill stood out as the central fixture, and the rest of the operation was built out around it. The sawmill was described as “a stoutly built structure, made of timber cut and prepared on the spot…it is…a raised platform covered by an iron roof, but open at the sides”. 67 Running parallel to the mill were great piles of sawn timber stacked against the rail spur waiting for transport. Built up on the opposite side of the mill were the administration buildings, supply warehouses and machinist shops that housed the camp’s mechanical repair facility. Farther away were the barracks where the soldiers were quartered, along with the mess hall, medical building and, later on, a mess building for the Officers and NCOs. As well, there was a canteen and performance hall where the ORs could enjoy their particular brand of relaxation away from the judgmental gaze of their superiors.68 The canteens were usually operated by local branches of the Y.M.C.A., which raised the funds and supplied the staff to operate the facilities at the camp. The canteens were not only meant to provide the men with a place of relaxation; they were also intended to be an alternative to vices such as alcohol.

The last part of the operation and the furthest from the sawmill was “the cut”. This term was used by bushmen to describe that part of the forest where timber was actively being logged. This area in the forest would have echoed with the sound of axes striking trees and the crack/thud made when a tree was felled. Those sounds would have been mixed with the sharp bark of sergeant’s voices telling the men to “hurry it up” and “get that load of logs going boys”.69 Once encouraged, the soldiers would move the logs out of the forest - usually by dragging them out with oxen or horse teams. This entailed loading the logs onto a wooden cart and pulling them out along a dirt road or, in certain cases, pulling a cart along a narrow-gauge rail track out of the bush and up to the sawmill.

67 Bird and Davies, Forestry Corps, pg. 19
68 There were of course other minor structures such as stables for the oxen and horses and bath houses, as well as farms later in 1917.
69 The sergeants likely employed a fair bit of foul language as well.
powered overhead yarding systems were also employed to pull the logs out of the forest along a track, although these pulley systems were very dangerous and caused several accidents.

Illus. 3. Horse team hauling logs at Virginia Waters Camp, 1916, *Foresters of Canada At Work in Britain.*

Once the load had reached the mill, it was unloaded and the logs were lined up on the ramp outside the mill for appraisal by the head sawyer, who decided what purpose each log was best suited for. Once the decision had been made, the logs were attached to a belt and hauled up into the mill where the chief sawyer aligned the blades before allowing his millwrights to make the cut. After the cut was made, he examined the timber again to verify it had been cut to the client’s specifications and to his satisfaction. This process required the utmost caution - as indicated by the medical records of several dozen forestry companies - because of the dangerous nature of the work the men were required to carry out.70

For example, Pvt. Borley of the 32nd Company suffered an “Incised wound of the right foot” when, by his admission, “my axe caught in a twig coming down and glanced onto my foot” resulting in the amputation of two toes.71 In another example, a Pvt. Whelan suffered a fractured left tibia when the load of logs he was transporting came loose and spooked his horses. As they charged down the road without any control, Whelan was forced to jump onto the steep bank where he was then run over by the rear wheels of the wagon. Another unlucky soldier, Pvt.

70 Report on Accidental or Self-Inflicted Injury, 18th Sept 1918, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4502 HQ Central Group CFC France File 1, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
71 Report on Accidental or Self-Inflicted Injury, 18th Sept 1918, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4502 HQ Central Group CFC France File 1, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
O’Neill, was injured after he attempted to pet a dog; he was bitten and suffered a half inch puncture wound to the right hand.\textsuperscript{72}

**London Headquarters**

Far away from the dangers of steam driven machinery (and untrustworthy animals), Lt. Col. Alexander McDougall and Major William Hepburn were hard at work establishing the Battalion’s headquarters in London. The Battalion’s first headquarters was established in the same building that housed the Home-Grown Timber Committee at No. 4 The Sanctuary in Westminster on May 5\textsuperscript{th}, 1916. It was relocated to No. 2 Millbank, Westminster on the 15\textsuperscript{th} of May, presumably because there was not enough space at the first location to house the Battalion’s equipment when it arrived. The equipment consisted of two Canadian sawmills (as noted above, the Battalion had been forced to use an unfamiliar Scotch mill, so called because of its Scottish origins, upon arrival in Britain), steam engines and a small electrical generator, as well as other large pieces of logging equipment.\textsuperscript{73} Much of the equipment that travelled with the 224\textsuperscript{th} was generously supplied by the Canadian Pacific Railway Company.\textsuperscript{74}

In order to accommodate all of the Battalion’s equipment, Maj. McDougall and the Battalion’s chief technical officer Lt. David Campbell set about acquiring ample space in local warehouses for equipment storage. Lt. Campbell also suggested that space be acquired for a mechanical workshop where new equipment could be manufactured and repaired in line with Canadian specifications.\textsuperscript{75} That space was acquired in the form of a four-story warehouse at No. 18 Marshalsea Road, but it was quickly deemed inadequate, forcing Campbell to seek a new location. Additional space was found a few days later behind the National Art Gallery in Trafalgar Square. The technical warehouse expanded further during the summer as more space was needed to accommodate the equipment that was already arriving and the additional equipment that would arrive with the 238\textsuperscript{th} and 242\textsuperscript{nd} Battalions later in the summer. Campbell was able to secure space in a warehouse near Bricklayer’s Station then owned by South Eastern and Chatham Railway Company.\textsuperscript{76}

\textsuperscript{72}Report on Accidental or Self-Inflicted Injury, August 3\textsuperscript{rd}, RG 9 III C8 Vol. 4502 HQ Central Group CFC France File 1 1918, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
\textsuperscript{73}Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 26
\textsuperscript{74}Letter to George Perley regarding purchase of forestry equipment, Dec 22\textsuperscript{nd}, RG 25 A-2 Vol. 1265, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
\textsuperscript{75}Canadian equipment was employed because it was far easier for the soldiers to use equipment with which they were already familiar, instead of taking time to retrain on British equipment. Furthermore, most considered the British equipment inferior to that transported from Canada.
\textsuperscript{76}Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 27
A machine and repair shop was also opened under the command of 2Lt. D.T. Cameron at the Bricklayer’s Station warehouse during the summer. Prior to the appointment of 2Lt. Cameron, Lt. Campbell had already noted that they needed facilities to repair the Battalion’s equipment. He appointed 2Lt. Cameron to run the Workshop after hearing that Cameron had rigged up a “Pony” mill (a temporary mill) out of extra equipment and parts manufactured at a local blacksmith’s shop. Impressed by Cameron’s ingenuity, Lt. Campbell promoted him (from Pvt to 2Lt.) and, as noted above, placed him in charge of the workshop and tasked him with expanding the facilities so the battalions could manufacture spare parts and equipment in Britain.

The need for self-sufficiency grew with the pending arrival of two thousand more forestry soldiers so it only made sense to manufacture the equipment needed by the battalions in England, rather than waiting months for equipment to arrive from Canada. The drive for self-sufficiency also extended to food, and soldiers at several camps began planting vegetable gardens and keeping pigs. Soon enough, these informal garden plots were formalized into large scale farming operations, some as large as fifty-five acres of crops that, in the right conditions, provided enough food to feed the entire camp for several months out of each year. This was an ideal situation because, as discussed in the first chapter, the creation of the CFC was intended to free up additional shipping tonnage in order to increase food imports; by growing their own food, the CFC battalions were re-doubling the intended efficiencies at the core of their creation.

To return to the CFC logging operations, the Corps had established several logging camps throughout England since the commencement of logging operations on May 13th and had begun to establish a few camps in Scotland as well. A camp established by the 103rd Company outside the town of Norley Wood began operations in late May, while the 104th Company under the command of Captain H. W. Racey began operating near Stover, Devonshire in early June. By the end of June, there were a total of five logging camps operating in Britain. The last two were located at Rapley Lake in Bagshot, Surrey and in Dumfriesshire, Scotland.

---

77 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 28
78 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 28
79 It also allowed the soldiers to modify their equipment on the spot in order to adapt it to local conditions.
80 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 31
81 In addition, surplus food from the farms could be sold to local villagers, netting a profit for the regimental fund.
82 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 7
Between May 13th, and June 30th, several hundred thousand FBM (Foot Board Measure) of sawn timber were produced for domestic use by railways, coal mines and munitions factories. It is hard to say if any of the timber was being shipped at that time to France for military purposes. That is not to say, however, that the timber being cut and sawn did not have a military application. The need for timber on the Home Front was immense. By June, preparations for the forthcoming Somme Offensive had stretched Britain’s logistical capacity to its absolute limit. Two of the industries disproportionately affected were the railways and the coal mines, both of which were crucial to the war effort.

Rail traffic had increased significantly since the beginning of the war; hundreds of supply and troop trains thundered between Britain’s major cities and channel ports every hour of the day. The increased traffic resulted in increased wear on the tracks and rolling stock, and the tracks had to be repaired constantly to mitigate the risk of a major accident. Of equal importance was maintaining a steady supply of coal from the mines to factories and the railway. Without a steady supply of coal - the primary source of fuel for the economy - the entire war effort would have suffered from massive slow downs. It was, therefore, essential to ensure a steady supply of wooden railway ties for repairing tracks and delivery of wooden pit props to the mines so new veins of coal could be tapped and the supply increased.

This was the reason why the British government had made the first request for a battalion of forestry soldiers and why they valued so highly the Canadians’ logging operations in Britain. The uninterrupted flow of much need timber products to important sectors of the economy ensured their continued operations at a point in time when the British and Commonwealth Armies could ill afford any delays in the supply chain. Any disruption in the flow of supplies to France in May and June 1916 would have had major repercussions on the preparations for the planned summer offensive on the Somme River in Northern France.

Military Situation

By 1916, the Western Front had been locked in a seemingly unending stalemate for almost eighteen months; neither the British and Imperial forces nor the French forces were able to make any headway against ever strengthening German defensive fortifications. For that reason, the British and French Generals - Sir Dougal Haig and Joseph Joffre respectively - placed much faith on their forthcoming combined offensive against the German defensive lines along the Somme. According to Hugh Sebag Montefiore, the objective of the Somme Offensive was
to achieve a rapid breakthrough of the German defensive lines, which breakthrough could be exploited by the
cavalry, allowing the infantry to roll up the German defences and liberate Northern France.83

Just as the planning for the Somme offensive was being finalized, the French were taken by surprise as the
Germans launched a massive offensive against the fortress city of Verdun. Facing the prospect of being overrun, the
French began shifting divisions (previously slated to take part in the Somme offensive) to the south to reinforce their
battered army at Verdun. This effectively made the British responsible for carrying the brunt of the offensive,
although they would still receive some assistance from the French. While it was not an ideal situation, the British
nevertheless pushed ahead with preparations for the battle, now scheduled to begin on the morning of July 1st.

Military Logistics

While the preparations for the Somme Offensive were already nearing completion by the time the 224th
Battalion arrived, the build up warrants discussion because it is illustrative of the work that the 224th, the SANLC
and ILC had been called on to perform.

By the time preparations for the Somme Offensive had begun in February 1916, the BEF had grown to
almost a million men (973,000 in total) and was holding roughly 140 Km of front-line trenches in Northern France
and Belgium. Each section of the line was held by a corps (four divisions) and, for the duration of its stay in its
assigned sector, each corps functioned as if it were a small city with a city’s corresponding needs. Everything the
men needed had to be shipped from Britain across the channel and then shipped to a supply depot before being
brought to the front lines. New roads and railways had to be built to accommodate the military’s increasing supply
requirements because the existing infrastructure was often found to be inadequate or in need of repair after being
damaged by shell fire. Pumping stations, communications lines, billets and stables also had to be built in order for
the army to properly function, not to mention the daily maintenance requirements arising from German shell fire and
inclement weather. While the construction and maintenance of infrastructure prior to the battle of the Somme was
certainly a massive undertaking, its true scale is best demonstrated by the construction and expansion of British
railways in France throughout the spring of 1916.

Railways were the primary means by which the British armies were supplied during the Great War. They
were also the primary means of moving soldiers, horses, untold numbers of sick and injured, as well as the massive

9- and 12-inch siege guns mounted on railed carriages. Operations were overseen by the Railway Operating Division (ROD), whose soldiers were responsible for maintaining several hundred kilometres of track and constructing spur lines when the need arose. A large quantity of lumber was required in order to accomplish daily tasks such as repairing sections of blasted track or laying new track with required 2000 standard gauge sleepers per 1.6 kilometres of track. Before lumber was used to perform these repairs, it was used to build the huts in which the men slept, ate and worked.

As well, lumber was used to build the depot in which they worked and the water tower and coal storage from which fuel for the locomotives was drawn. At the work site, fresh wooden rail ties were needed to effect repairs, as was stone ballast drawn from local quarries that relied upon lumber for construction material. If the ROD had to repair a bridge, even greater quantities of lumber were needed to complete the necessary repairs. As demand from the Fourth Army grew through the spring, so did the strain on the already overburdened French railways. These railways were nearing the point of complete collapse by the early summer of 1916 due in large part to the hundreds of trains travelling the network each day. The French were running trains night and day as they frantically cycled out one exhausted division after another at Verdun, while the British ran dozens, if not hundreds, of trains to and from Somme daily. In response the British decided to import rolling stock from Britain but in order to run it, the ROD first had to build an independent rail network because British and French trains had a different gauge, which meant British trains could not run on French tracks. The resulting rail network ended up being several thousand kilometres long by the time the armistice was signed in November 1918.

Although Lord Kitchener did not specifically mention it as one of the reasons, he had initially proposed sending half of the 224th Battalion to France, it was likely his intention that the Battalion would support the clearly beleaguered British forestry companies by assisting them to produce, among other items, timber supplies for the ROD and the British and Imperial Armies. As stated in the original written request dispatched in late February, the CFC’s other primary purpose was to supply pioneer and labour battalions with the construction material they needed to carry out repairs near the front lines. Repairing the damage to roads, lines of communication and trenches was a

---


85 Aves, Operating Division

86 The shortage of rolling stock became so severe that by 1917, the French reported they would have needed an extra 22,000 goods wagons if they were to continue to provide transport services to the British/Imperial forces.
daily ritual for those men serving in labour battalions near the front; their days mostly consisting of repairing collapsed sections of trench line or laying plank roads to prevent vehicles from floundering in the thick mud. In order to accomplish their goals, these battalions required tens of thousands of tons of sawn defence timber every week just to keep up with the damage caused each day by road traffic and the unceasing German artillery barrages.

For example, the 1st, 2nd, 3rd and 4th Canadian Battalions spent the majority of December 7th and 8th working with the 1st Canadian Pioneer Battalion to dig out new underground bunkers for the infantry to use as shelters. This sort of maintenance work was vital to the survival of the infantry because they were routinely subjected to deadly German artillery fire. They could not easily find shelter, even in their trenches. Bunkers gave the men an extra layer of protection against the heavier caliber guns that often-destroyed large sections of the trenches. The bunkers were always built several metres underground so wooden pit props were needed to support the ceilings and wooden planking was needed to cover the ceilings and floors, as well as to build the stairs, beds and tables needed by the men taking shelter.87

Additionally, these labour companies were also responsible to assist in the maintenance of the gun emplacements located just behind the trenches. Again, the work involved digging out pits for the artillery guns and bunkers for the gun crews, as well as laying down plank roads and repairing light railways. More importantly, the soldiers were sometimes tasked with constructing timber platforms on which the guns would rest, so as to prevent them from sinking into the muddy ground. CFC records suggest that demand for “artillery timber” was high amongst the Entente armies, especially the French who received 23 shipments between April and May 1918. Those shipments totaled several hundred thousand cubic meters of “artillery timber”.88

While the timber supplied by the CFC was primarily classified as sawn defence timber, some of the timber cut was destined to be used for an offensive purpose. Perhaps the most notable such use of the timber was in the construction of large underground mines. Due to the strength of the German defences, any attack made against them had thus far ended in the slaughter of hundreds of thousands of soldiers. Faulty British munitions and poor tactics combined with the devastating effect of German machine guns and artillery were largely to blame for the high casualties so, in an effort to destroy the German lines without using artillery, Gen. Haig ordered the formation of

87 Report on work carried out by 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade’s Labour Battalions on Dec 8th, 1916, RG 9 III C 3 Vol. 4039 File 3, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
88 Report on shipments of artillery timber to French Army, May 1918, RG 9 III C8 Vol. 4514 HQ Central Group File 29-9, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
tunneling companies whose purpose it was to dig mines under German lines and then detonate them, destroying the trenches above ground.

This tactic, known as undermining, was resource intensive because each mine was dug a minimum 15-25 metres underground and at least 50-250 metres in length, depending on the distance of No-Man’s-Land that had to be covered. Digging a tunnel of that length required thousands of wooden pit props (one of the principal items made by the CFC) to hold up the tunnel and entrance shaft, as well as the wooden wheelbarrows used to carry the hundreds of tons of earth removed from the ground. One consequence of using mines (such as the 39 mines detonated at the Battle of St. Eloi) was to so thoroughly destroy the old German trench system that new trenches had to be built in order to properly consolidate the captured ground. That is to say that there was no, and never would be, a shortage of work for the CFC to perform while overseas.89

**Expansion June – August 1916**

Almost six weeks before the Somme offensive began, Lord Kitchener presciently concluded that an even greater need for timber products would arise in the near future. Circumventing Selborne, Kitchener had cabled the Militia Department in Ottawa on the 12th of May to request that Minister Hughes authorize the immediate recruitment of 2,000 more forestry soldiers for service in France.90 Within a week, Minister Hughes had approved the recruitment of the 2,000 additional soldiers, and he also gave his approval for the recruitment of two new forestry battalions.91

The first battalion authorized was the 238th Forestry Battalion, incorporated on June 2nd, 1916 with Maj. W.R. Smyth as the Officer Commanding (O.C). The 238th was to be raised in Ontario, but was given permission to send recruiters to Alberta and British Columbia to recruit experienced loggers from those regions as well.92 The 242nd Forestry Battalion was the second battalion authorized by the Militia Department in response to Lord Kitchener’s request. Command of the 242nd was given to the recently returned Lt. Col. John Burton White, previously a Major with the 224th Battalion before he was promoted and ordered to return to Canada and oversee the recruitment of the 242nd.93

89 Cook, Tim. *At the Sharp End*, pp. 323-324
90 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 8
91 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 8
93 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 16
Recruitment continued for the better part of June and July; by early August, enough men had been enlisted for the first drafts to be sent overseas to the newly established base depot at Sunningdale near Virginia Waters. The first drafts of soldiers to leave for Britain were drawn from amongst the 2,000 men requested by the War Cabinet. Minister Hughes made the decision to send them over in small drafts of 20 men because of the urgent need in Britain. Those soldiers who had enlisted in either the 238th or 242nd, however, had to wait until their recruitment quota had been met, so it was not until August 20th that the first batch of soldiers from the 238th Battalion embarked for Britain.\footnote{The 242nd Battalion did not leave Canada until November 1st.}

News of the impending arrival of reinforcements was welcomed by the British War Cabinet because, in the period since Lord Kitchener’s request for additional soldiers, the military situation on the Western Front had turned from hopeful optimism to abject terror as Field Marshal Haig’s Somme Offensive failed to achieve a breakthrough. Instead, it quickly devolved into a battle of attrition in which 250,000 British and Imperial soldiers had been killed or injured by September. Only a few miles of blasted ground had been captured, ground that was so thoroughly destroyed by artillery that almost nothing - not even trees - was left standing. Meanwhile over London, German Zeppelins continued to carry out their campaign of terror bombing against the British capital with impunity because the fledgling Royal Flying Corps (RFC) lacked the necessary resources needed to combat such a threat.

\textbf{Airfield Construction September 1916}

The Germans had been using Zeppelins to bomb London since January 15, 1915. Although the raids happened infrequently (only a quarter of the 396 Zeppelin sorties made against Britain targeted London) and caused only minor damage, they were still seen as a threat that had to be countered. That, however, was easier said than done because Zeppelins could fly higher than the RFC’s existing complement of biplanes could, leaving them out of range. The Zeppelins were also far more durable than expected; when they were engaged by British aircraft, the rounds striking the Zeppelin would only punch holes in one or two of the numerous gas tanks that kept it afloat. In most cases that damage was not severe enough to bring down a Zeppelin.

It was not until September 2nd, 1916 that the first Zeppelin was brought down by Lt. William Leefe Robinson using newly invented incendiary bullets that burned when fired, igniting the Zeppelins upon impact with their gas bags. This success also coincided with the arrival of a new generation of improved fighter aircraft, including the Bristol F.2B and the Sopwith 1 ½ Strutter. Building on their success against the German Zeppelins, the
War Cabinet approved plans for the RFC to expand the existing home defence infrastructure in order to widen the defensive ring around the capital and the Channel coast. In order to accomplish the construction of the airfields - several dozen were required - the RFC first had to recruit several thousand skilled labourers, a resource that Britain could ill afford to allocate to the RFC in late 1916.

Luckily for the RFC, their labour shortage lasted no more than a week at most because, on Sept. 16th, a telegram arrived on the desk of the newly promoted Lieutenant Colonel (Lt. Col.) MacDougall requesting the service of a company of foresters to aid in the construction of the airfields.95 Lt Col. MacDougall agreed and, within twelve days, had supplied a company of soldiers to assist in the construction of airfields across southwestern England. The work undertaken by the CFC soldiers involved the preparation of a selected site for use as an airfield; they cleared the site of any natural obstacles, and then levelled, graded and ploughed the land and built drains so the runway could be kept as dry as possible.96

Despite the fact that Bird and Davies did not elaborate on the airfield construction in 1916, it can be inferred from the letter of thanks that Lt. Col. MacDougall received from the RFC that the program was successful. In the letter, the O.C. of the RFC Home Establishment expressed his thanks for the services that the CFC had rendered in the defence of Britain against German Zeppelins. As a result of their success, MacDougall permanently assigned several more companies to the task of constructing airfields in Britain and later in France where these units would form the 56th -established Sept. 1917- and 11th -established June 1918-operating districts respectively.97

In addition to the construction of airfields, the CFC was also indirectly engaged in the construction of aircraft, although their role was strictly limited to gathering the required kind of timber needed for their construction. According to production and shipping records from 1918, ash wood was one of the preferred timbers because it was a softwood ideal for building aircraft. Demand for ash wood was high, as indicated by shipping records that state several dozen logs (each log was 10 to 12 feet in length) were being shipped from a logging camp in Rouen, France. Given that attrition rates in the RFC/RAF were extremely high during the entire war and that a pilot’s life span was often measured in days and sometimes hours, it is no surprise that aviation timber was in such high demand.98

95 Bird and Davies, Forestry Corps, pg. 14
96 Bird and Davies, Forestry Corps, pg. 14
97 Bird and Davies, Forestry Corps, pg. 14
98 Report on shipments of aviation timber, dated August 13th, 1918, RG 9 III Vol. 4514 HQ Central Group File 29-11, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
Expansion in September 1916 in Britain

The first batch of soldiers from the 238th Battalion began arriving in early September at the depot in Sunningdale, where they were grouped into larger drafts while awaiting their deployment orders. There they joined the draft of reinforcements that had been arriving over the summer, raising the total number of forestry soldiers serving in Britain or awaiting deployment to France to roughly 5,000 - 6,000. MacDougall also began organizing the men under his command into five operating districts covering the entirety of England, Scotland and Wales. In order, the districts were: No. 51 established on May 15th, 1916 and covered the Highlands of Scotland from its headquarters in Edinburgh; No. 52 established on November 6th and covered Northern England from its headquarters in Carlisle; No. 53 covered south western England from its headquarters in London; No. 54 district covered south eastern England and all of Wales from its headquarters in Southampton; and, lastly, No. 55 covered the Scottish Lowlands from its headquarters in Stirling.

Lt. Col. MacDougall and Capt. Campbell also had to respond to the increased logistical demands that came with the arrival of the much-needed reinforcements. MacDougall had to request assistance from Sir James B. Ball - Controller of Timber Supplies - to secure additional storage space for the technical warehouse. The Timber Committee leased from the S.E. and C. Railway space in a larger warehouse at Stewart’s Lane Station in Battersea. The new premises were more than sufficient to house the Technical Warehouse, leading Campbell to order that all supplies and operations be moved to Stewart’s Lane from Marshalsea Road and the National Gallery.99 Campbell was also able to standardize a list of necessary equipment that each company would need to operate, including “Material for construction, operating supplies, steam power plant, tools and supplies, blacksmith’s outfit and construction tools”100.

The 224th Battalion was also called upon during the summer to expand its operations in order to increase its output. Due to the soldiers’ expertise, the Battalion was increasingly called upon to carry on logging operations in inaccessible areas such as Knockando in the Scottish Highlands, where the 106th Company was stationed. The Company faced serious difficulties operating in that area because the site of the Company’s sawmill was far removed from the cut. The Company found that the shortest route to move the logs from the cut to the sawmill was across a river, so a wire transport system was erected to carry the logs over the river, but not without great difficulty.

99 Bird and Davies, Forestry Corps, pg. 26
100 Bird and Davies, Forestry Corps, pg. 26
There were several near fatalities when one of the steel cables broke and snapped back, barely missing several nearby soldiers.\textsuperscript{101} Despite the difficulties, the logging camps established in May were operating at close to maximum capacity by the beginning of November and each was producing on average 25,000 FMB of timber a day. This equated to several dozen tons of timber rolling out of the Canadian sawmills each week in Britain alone since logging operations in France would not commence until the spring of 1917, after French authorities had granted their approval.

**Expansion between September 1916 and November 1916 in France**

With the CFC’s logistics running smoothly, plans for the deployment of the 238\textsuperscript{th} Battalion to the Army Area in France began taking shape.\textsuperscript{102} In June, Lt. Col. MacDougall visited the Western Front to survey the working conditions that his men would inevitably have to endure. While there, he observed the difficulties that the British were having with their forestry units, leading him to conclude that close co-operation would be necessary if and when the Canadians were deployed to France. In order to secure this co-operation, MacDougall and his subordinates were invited to attend a meeting of British and French officials to discuss the deployment of the CFC to France.\textsuperscript{103}

The September 29\textsuperscript{th} meeting was attended by representatives from several British ministries, including Mr. R.F.S. Balfour from the Home-Grown Timber Committee, by members of the CFC staff, including Col. MacDougall (promoted to full Colonel in mid-September) and his Deputy Maj. Hepburn, and by Gen. Chevalier-Directeur de Genie, Ministre de la Guerre (Minister of War) and his subordinates.\textsuperscript{104} At the meeting, the two sides discussed the conditions under which the Canadians would operate in France. The French forests were “worked on scientific principles, according to which thinning to a definite extent only is permitted”\textsuperscript{105}, thus limiting the total tonnage of lumber that could be sawn from one location.

This did not sit well with the Canadians because they were more familiar with clear cutting methods; they would have preferred permission to clear cut several hundred hectares of forest rather than abide by French regulations. Despite his obvious displeasure, Col. MacDougall agreed to abide by French regulations and agreed to

\textsuperscript{101} Report on equipment failure, 1917, RG 9 III D 3 Vol. 5019 File 765-766 No. 55 District CFC, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
\textsuperscript{102} Report on deployment of 238\textsuperscript{th} battalion, dated Sept 7\textsuperscript{th}, 1916, RG 24 Vol. 4599 DND Military District 10 File 20-10-45, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
\textsuperscript{103} It should be noted that prior to the meeting, a single company of the CFC was deployed to France in order to assist with the later stages of the Somme Offensive.
\textsuperscript{104} Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 35
\textsuperscript{105} Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 35
begin organizing several companies of men for service in France. It was also agreed that the CFC would supply several companies to the French because the French wanted to free up men engaged in forestry work so they could join the army or work in munitions factories. Terms were agreed to quickly and the Canadians were able to establish their headquarters in Paris at 59 Rue de Mathurins by the 21st of November with Col. J.B. White taking command as Director of Timber Operations France. Arrangements were also made for the establishment of a technical warehouse in Le Havre that would encompass a storage facility for the CFC’s equipment and a workshop similar to the one Capt. Campbell had established in London.

Although operations would not get underway in France until January 1917, a few companies had been dispatched to assist the British in the final phase of the Somme offensive (as noted above). This was likely done to help relieve the burden on the British forestry battalions already operating at the Somme because the military’s demand for timber had already exceeded the 54,000 tons a month quoted by Ivor and Lee. The Forestry Corps arrival in France also coincided with the arrival of the first companies of the SANLC, that arrived on November 20th. As a consequence of the near total destruction caused by British and German artillery during the battle, a final message was sent by the War Cabinet to Minister Hughes asking for another draft forestry soldiers to serve in France.

**Expansion in November-December 1916**

Although the cable was sent to Minister Hughes, it is unlikely he received it because he was dismissed from the cabinet on Nov 9th. The cable requested an additional 2,000 foresters - specifically French-Canadian foresters - for service in France. The request was approved, this time by newly appointed Militia Minister Albert Edward Kemp, although he must have done so with reservations because enlistment numbers were falling far short of the monthly targets needed to keep the CEF flush with reinforcements. Willing volunteers were becoming harder to find the longer the war went on, especially in the wake of the Somme, where an estimated 400,000 British and Imperial fighters were involved.

---

106 The French military was desperate for reinforcements for their battered army at Verdun, where casualties had exceeded 500,000, and for supplies of timber railway ties to repair their crumbling rail network which was, by the end of the year, approaching complete collapse.
108 As director of timber operations, White was responsible for the general policy of the CFC in France and for surveying forests, among other duties.
109 Report on establishment of Technical Warehouse in Le Havre, June 1917 RG 9 III D-3 Vol. 5017 File 761, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
110 Ivor and Starling, *No Labour, No Battle*, pg. 96
soldiers had been killed, injured or listed as missing in action. In order to fulfill the request, Kemp authorized re-designation of the 230th Battalion from North Battleford, Saskatchewan as a forestry battalion; Kemp also ordered General Turner-O.C. of Canadian Forces in Britain- to comb the ranks of the base depots for soldiers with forestry experience and have them transferred to the CFC.111

Turner took this order very seriously, sending numerous telegrams to the base depots and ordering them to send him lists of every man who had ever touched an axe, as well as those men who could be spared for service in a non-forestry related job in the Corps. Turner was successful in acquiring several lists from the base depots of men in Great Britain who possessed the necessary skills, as well as other men that could be spared from the front lines. Turner then dispatched officers to the base depots, where the selected men were paraded and interviewed to determine their skill sets. Those recruits who were found to possess the skills needed for forestry work could apply for transfer to the CFC.

Upon close examination, however, it is clear that the base depot OCs were not just offering up skilled foresters but were also using Turner’s recruiting drive as an opportunity to rid their battalions of men considered unsuitable for front line service.112 In most cases, they were men who had managed to slip pass the medical exams and make their way overseas, only to be found medically unfit for service upon arrival in Britain. These men were classified as B and C category men and considered fit for service in Britain or behind the lines in France and Belgium as long as the work was not strenuous.113 While some of the medically unfit men were found to be suitable for employment with the CFC, others were far too injured or sick even to serve as clerks. In one case, a Pvt. McKenzie was discharged because of a foot injury that left him disabled. Pte. Ross. D. and Pte. William. H.J. were also discharged because of injuries suffered on the front lines that left them unable to perform any work at all.114

Other groups of men being weeded out for reasons other than work experience were minority groups such as Indigenous men and immigrants from Eastern Europe. According to a telegram sent to the Canadian base depot in Shorncliffe, Indigenous men and immigrants were authorized for transfer to the CFC because “they are unable to

111 Lieutenant General Richard Turner V.C., previously the Officer Commanding the 2nd Canadian Division, had recently been re-assigned to command all Canadian soldiers in Great Britain.
112 Report on unwanted ethnicities, dated March 7th, 1917 RG 9 III C8 Vol. 4505 Shornecliff 224th Battalion, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
113 Clarke, Unwanted Warriors
114 Report on rejected volunteers, dated Feb 25th, RG 9 III C8 Vol. 4508 Central Group France File 73, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
speak and understand English [well enough] to make efficient Infantry men.” At first glance, this would appear to be a somewhat valid reason to not allow these men into combat right away, but not all of these men had problems speaking and understanding English. For example, Sgt. Kronwall V.C. was a Ukrainian who understood enough English to serve in the infantry and act as a translator for his officer.

Taking a closer look at the issue, it becomes clear that this purge had less to do with a recruit’s poor English skills and more to do with the systemic racism that permeated Canadian society in the early Twentieth Century. As discussed in more detail in chapter three, the CFC would gain an interesting reputation as a repository for unwanted soldiers from maligned sections of the Canadian population. The CFC was often the only avenue open to members of those marginalized populations - Indigenous, Black Canadians and Ukrainians - to serve in the military.

Returning to Gen. Turner’s efforts, they were quite successful in the long run, providing several hundred recruits to the CFC by December 1916, at which point the number of forestry soldiers in Britain and France was approaching 6,000. The Corps ranks had been bolstered by the recent arrival of 242nd Battalion at the beginning of November, and talks were under way to see if any soldiers from two infantry battalions “on the point of being broken up [for] reinforcements” could be recruited for the CFC.

Talks were also ongoing between Sir George Perley (Minister of Overseas Military Forces) and Militia Minister Kemp regarding further recruitment of lumbermen in Canada. Correspondence among Perley, Kemp and Brig. Gen. Thacker (Adjutant-General, Canadian Overseas Ministry) discussed a request from Lord Derby for an additional 5,000 lumbermen. Derby made the request based on estimates of the number of soldiers required for the forthcoming expansion of operations into France. A letter to Gen. Thacker stated that 5,000 more men were needed to make up half of the estimated total of 10,000 men needed for service in France. Perley forwarded this request to Ottawa, hoping to recruit the lumbermen when they came out of the bush in the spring. Perley and Kemp

115 Letter to HQ Shorncliffe from Intelligence Department, dated Aug 13th, 1917, RG 9 III C8 Vol. 4505 File 26 224th Battalion, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
116 Kronwall was awarded a Victoria Cross for his bravery in battle and served for a short period of time with the CFC after being wounded in battle.
also discussed the possibility of recruiting 1,000 Indigenous men for service in the CFC. Including the three additional drafts of soldiers that followed the 224th Battalion, the total number of soldiers serving in the CFC was 141 officers and 3,568 ORs in December 1916, with another 5,000 authorized for recruitment (up to a total of 12,000 personnel).

In response to the growing number of men under his command, Col. MacDougall applied to formally incorporate the three existing battalions - 224th, 238th, the recently arrived 242nd and the expected 230th - as an army corps; permission was granted by Kemp in November. MacDougall was promoted to Brigadier General in December and made the Director of Timber Operations Overseas, while his deputy Hepburn was promoted to the rank of Colonel and made Director of Timber Operations in Britain and J.B. White (also promoted to Colonel) was tasked with overseeing operations in France.

The fact that MacDougall was authorized to recruit over 10,000 soldiers illustrates how important a role the CFC was already playing after less than a year of existence and only six and a half months of service. The importance of the CFC’s role would continue to grow into 1917 as it was increasingly called upon to support the large-scale offensives that were being planned for the early spring of that year. Late in 1916, however, the CFC was still occupied filling the stream of orders coming in from the Somme front, where the British and Imperial forces were just beginning the process of digging in for the winter. In order to prepare for winter, they had to rebuild hundreds of kilometres of blasted German trenches that had been captured since July and were now occupied by British and Imperial troops. In addition, hundreds of kilometres of roads and railways needed repair and there were numerous other construction projects that had to be finished after the front had shifted forward.

---

120 Letter to Andrew Kemp from Sir George Perley, date unknown, RG 25 A-2 Vol 1265, image 1951, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
122 The fourth battalion, the 230th, had yet to arrive, but talks were then underway for its conversion to a forestry battalion. It would arrive in the late spring of 1917.
Chapter 3: Unwanted Warriors: Examining the service of Afro-Canadians, Indigenous, Ukrainians and Medically Unfit soldiers in the Canadians Forestry Corps.

Amongst the hundreds of thousands of young men who attempted to enlist, there were several tens of thousands who were accepted but never saw active service on the Western Front or any other. For the purposes of this chapter, I will focus on those soldiers who were actively prevented from serving with the infantry because of their ethnic/racial status or because they had been declared medically unfit for front line duty. It was from this pool
of “Unwanted Warriors” that the Canadian Forestry Corps drew the bulk of their reinforcements. It is estimated that 12,000 of the CFC’s 25,000 soldiers were from an immigrant background or were classified as a visible minority.\(^\text{123}\)

While the study of the Forestry Corps operations is the central purpose of my thesis, the Corps’ true importance cannot be properly understood without examining in detail the soldiers and attached labourers who served with it. For a portion of the soldiers who served in the CEF, the CFC was the only branch that allowed them to participate in active service, rather than languish in Britain. Being accepted for military service gave these soldiers a feeling of usefulness and a sense of pride that they had initially been denied. This was important because it gave soldiers from a minority or immigrant background some sense of acceptance by their fellow Canadians – an important goal for the Afro-Canadian community. At the same time, the medically unfit soldiers assigned to the CFC were able to prove their worth to a society that often discriminated against those with physical impairments.\(^\text{124}\)

Therefore, this chapter will examine, in as much detail as possible, the service of these “Unwanted Warriors” in the CFC. The first section will focus on the service of soldiers from communities of visible minorities, including Afro-Canadians, Indigenous men and some immigrants. The aim is to briefly examine the difficulties they encountered prior to enlisting, and then discuss their service with the CFC over the course of the war. As well, there will be a brief discussion of the difficulties encountered by each of these groups. The second section will focus on the service of the medically unfit soldiers and the difficulties they experienced when trying to enlist, as well as the toll of rejection. Again, it must be noted that there is a limited amount of information about the service of these medically unfit soldiers.

**Minority Recruitment**

The decline in volunteer recruitment began to restrict the flow of potential recruits to the CFC because every able-bodied man was needed at the front, leaving only those soldiers deemed expendable by Base Depot commanders in Britain available for transfer to the CFC. Tens of thousands of volunteers had enlisted at the beginning of the war, but as the public became more aware of the true horrors of the battlefield, enlistments dropped off quickly. According to Patrick Dennis, “The nine months beginning in April 1916 saw a steady drop in total

\(^{123}\) Le Goic, Bordenes, Leconte & Martin, *Battle Axes*, pg. 12

\(^{124}\) Clarke, *Unwanted Warriors*
enlistments, which by December had fallen to a low of just 4,930 men…bottoming out at 2,902 in August [1917].”

As noted briefly at the end of chapter two, Gen. Turner was quite successful in his efforts to recruit soldiers for the CFC from the Base Depots. Turner was able to find several thousand potential recruits. A significant portion of those soldiers named as possible candidates for transfer to the CFC, however, were singled out because of their ethnicity or race. For example, many immigrant men were officially designated unfit for service with the infantry because, it was alleged, they could not speak English, while Afro-Canadian men were considered unqualified to serve because they were “socially and intellectually challenged”.

Biased by common racial theories of the early 20th century, Canadians often acted dismissively towards certain immigrant communities - such as Eastern Europeans - and responded with outright hostility towards other groups - such as the Chinese. The Chinese in particular were-as W. Peter Ward described- the victims of west coast racialism, as the White Canadian population of British Columbia regarded them disease ridden, unassailable foreigners bent on stealing the Canadian working man’s job. Much was made of the presence of Chinese immigrants in places like Vancouver, that weathered several waves of intense Sinophobia throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the most intense expressions of Sinophobia came on September 7th, 1907 when public outrage over school segregation burst forth into an hours long rampage of violence against the Chinese community that left several businesses damaged or destroyed and several injured.

Similar yet varied treatment was directed against other visible minorities within Canada including Afro-Canadians, Indigenous peoples and Immigrants. Frequently portrayed as inferior, these groups experienced constant racial harassment, that in part segregated them the rest of White Canadian society because as unassimilated foreigners and racial minorities, there was simply no place for them in White Canada. So, it should come as no surprise that upon the outbreak of war in August 1914, when men from these communities tried to enlist, they were almost always rejected on the spot by the recruiting officers, because their services were unwanted and unwelcome.

125 Dennis, Patrick, Reluctant Warriors: Canadian Conscripts and The Great War, (Vancouver, UBC Press 2017) pg. 19
According to James Walker, several hundred Afro-Canadians presented themselves to recruiting offices across Canada in the weeks after war was declared; however, recruiting officers were quick to dismiss the services of the Afro-Canadians; one officer even declared that “Canada did not want a chequer-board army”128. Their rejections owed more to racial prejudice then physical fitness because as a whole, the Afro-Canadian community was considered feeble minded and thus it was unlikely that the men possessed the necessary martial qualities needed for soldiering. It would not be until June 1916 that the Militia Department finally intervened and allowed Afro-Canadians to enlist into a segregated labour battalion, No. 2 Construction Battalion.

Indigenous men were more readily accepted for service at first, because their perceived skills as hunters, trappers and guides were highly valued by the military; Indigenous men often served as scouts and snipers as a result.129 However, due to miscommunication between Hughes and his future deputy Hodgins, recruiters were informed that Indigenous men were to be barred from enlisting from September 1914 onwards.130 Hodgins had misinterpreted Hughes’ Heavy handed paternalism as a blanket ban on Indigenous men enlisting and so enforced the “ban” for a year before Hughes corrected Hodgins’ mistake.

Compared to Afro-Canadians and Indigenous men, certain immigrant populations had a somewhat easier time enlisting during the initial fervour following the declaration of war. British-born immigrants were the largest group to enlist; several thousand or tens of thousands of young immigrant men - including an estimated 10-12,000 Ukrainian men - also enlisted in the CEF.131 However, the Ukrainians were subjected to similar treatment by Canadian authorities as Afro-Canadian and Indigenous men because certain portions of that population were thought to be disloyal to the British Crown and/or Canadian Government.132

---


129 This was not always the reality since not all Indigenous men possessed the martial talents that the Canadian public believed them to have. Most of these stereotypes were rooted in the belief that the Indigenous peoples retained their warrior spirit - despite having been forced onto reservations and having been forced in some cases to give up their traditional way of life. Most Indigenous men who enlisted likely had some experience hunting but it is likely they bore little resemblance to Xavier and Elijah, the main characters in Joseph Boyden’s Three Day Rood.


131 The majority of whom served with the CFC because they were born in Austria-Hungary. Only Russian born Ukrainians were accepted into the CEF at first.

132 Canadian authorities questioned the loyalty of the Ukrainians because many of them had originated from the Austrian Province of Gallica. Therefore, after Britain declared war on Austria on August 12th, 1914, un-naturalized Ukrainians living in Canada were considered enemy aliens.
were arrested and detained in labour camps in Canada for five years, while those who managed to enlist were forced to identify as Russians in order to make their service acceptable.

While common beliefs in the poor combat ability of Afro-Canadians kept them out of the front lines, several thousand Indigenous men and thousands of Immigrants (Including Russian born Ukrainians) were allowed to serve in the infantry. However, a similar number of Immigrant and Indigenous men were declared unfit for combat, sometimes for medical reasons but more often because of their poor English language skills and because they had practical knowledge of forestry work. As will be discussed in this section, the decision to send Afro-Canadian, immigrant and Indigenous soldiers to serve in the CFC was certainly influenced by the racial theories of the day but was also a pragmatic solution to the CEF’s crippling shortage of reinforcements during the latter half of 1917.

Background to Manpower Crisis

By 1916, political interference and poor organization had thrown the CEF’s support network in Britain into what can only be described as complete chaos. There were no fewer than six men - High Commissioner George Perley, PM Borden’s personal representative Max Aitken, Special Representative Maj. Gen. Carson, GOC Southeastern Maj. Gen. Steele, GOC Shorncliffe Maj. Gen. MacDougall and GOC Maj. Gen. Watson - who claimed to be the sole authority over the CEF in Britain. To say that there were too many hands on the wheel would be a serious understatement.133

Not only was Sam Hughes’ political interference causing trouble with everything from supplies to training, the constant squabbling between the different heads in Britain was seriously hampering the flow of trained reinforcements to all elements of the CEF, including the Forestry Corps. After much deliberation with Borden, High Commissioner George Perley was given permission to interview Maj. Gen. Arthur Currie (GOC 1st Division) and Maj. Gen. Richard Turner (GOC 2nd Division) for the position of GOC - Canadian Forces England. Each was considered an ideal candidate for the job, but Turner was chosen after Currie rejected the offer, preferring to remain at the front.

Arriving in late November, Turner was immediately saddled with the unpleasant task of resolving a chaotic situation in time for the spring offensives in April. Turner’s responsibilities included reforming and streamlining the existing system by altering the command structure; he appointed new subordinates to fill important positions such as

133 General Officer Commanding
Adjutant General and, most importantly, he improved the flow of reinforcement drafts to the CEF. This is where Turner is most clearly connected to the CFC because, according to William Stewart, “Turner estimated in July 1917 that the rail and forestry troops would require an additional 12,700 men to expand and replace losses from disease, accident and enemy fire”.

In order to accomplish this task, as will be discussed in the remainder of this chapter, Gen. Turner started to scour the Base Depots - a responsibility he delegated to his Adjutant General, Col. P.E. Thacker - for soldiers of a suitable medical category who possessed the necessary skills required to work in the Forestry Corps. To aid in his search, the commanders of the Base Depots were ordered to present Turner’s office with lists of all soldiers who met the necessary requirements. This included soldiers who had been deemed unfit for service at the front for either medical reasons or in the case of immigrant and some Indigenous men, because of their poor English language skills and questionable loyalty.

One such memo circulated amongst the Base Depots in Britain contained a list of the aforementioned proscribed ethnicities (so proscribed because their English language skills were limited), including but not limited to, “Indians, Half-Breeds, Icelanders, French, Italians, Hungarians, Serbians, Danes, Norwegians and Swedes”. Not included in the list were Ukrainians and Russians, who were two of the largest ethnic groups that Gen. Turner drew upon for CFC reinforcements.

It will be made clear that, although the memo seems to imply that these groups were singled out - as was the case with Afro-Canadians - because of their status as minority/immigrant groups, racism was not as much a factor as it might seem. While these men most certainly experienced racist treatment at the hands of individual officers and soldiers, most were chosen to serve in the CFC because they could not speak English well enough to communicate efficiently and were therefore deemed a liability at the front. Furthermore, many Indigenous men and immigrants had been employed before the war in the forestry industry in Canada, making them a perfect demographic from which to form reinforcement drafts for the Forestry Corps.

135 Letter from Canadian Training Headquarters to CFC Headquarters, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4505 File 26 224th Battalion, Forestry Corps Collection, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
136 Letter from Officer Commanding Second Canadian Reserve Brigade, March 1917, RG 9 III Vol. 680 HQ Shorncliffe, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
137 Syrians, Cypriots and Macedonians were also included in the list, although ethnicity was sometimes difficult to identify because some assumed English names upon their arrival in Canada. A recruit’s ethnicity was never recorded but can generally be determined by his place of birth.
No. 2 Construction Battalion

Prior to the Revolutionary War in 1775-1783, the majority of people of African descent residing in British North America were slaves. After the conclusion of that war, there was an influx of Black settlers, who had fled the newly created United States for the Canadian colonies. Known as Black Loyalists, most were former soldiers who had fought for the British Army in exchange for their freedom from slavery in the United States. The majority of the settlers moved to Halifax, Nova Scotia, where they founded the town of Preston and the settlement of Africville; some years later, a large group of Black Loyalists, known as the Maroons, left Halifax to sail to the settlement of Freetown on the West Coast of Africa. Those Black Loyalists who remained created one of the first large settlements of Afro-Canadians in pre-confederation Canada, although there were other settlements in Upper Canada by the mid-19th century. Afro-Canadians also continued their tradition of military service with the British Empire, helping to fight of the U.S. invasion in 1812 and even overseas during the Indian Mutiny of 1857, where William Hall received a Victoria Cross during the Siege of Lucknow.

In the half century between the end of the American Civil War and the outbreak of the Great War, the population of Afro-Canadians increased significantly, reaching roughly 17,500 by 1901. By the turn of the 20th century, Afro-Canadians had established for themselves in several communities in Nova Scotia, including Preston and Africville with sizeable communities in Turo and Sydney. There were also several thousand residing in Ontario communities, including Toronto and Windsor. However, as the population increased - mostly through immigration from the United States - so did the xenophobic attitudes of Anglo Canadians who had adopted racist stereotypes similar to those found throughout Great Britain and the United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

A contributing factor to said xenophobia had to do with the manner in which Canadians-White Anglo Saxon Protestants- conceived of Canada’s national identity, especially the nation’s racial identity; that being society dominated by hardy agrarian yeomen drawn from amongst the ranks of the English, Welsh and Protestant Irish, races that Richard Wicksteed-editor of The Anglo-Saxon believed possessed a superior intellect far beyond that of

---

139 Hall refused to abandon his gun during the siege and continued to load and fire it even after the rest of his crew had been killed or wounded.
other races. Wicksteed believed made the Anglo-Saxon race superior to all other races—especially French Catholics and Catholics in general. While not all Canadians were as fervent in their belief about Anglo-Saxon superiority as were Wicksteed and his compatriots who wrote for the *Anglo Saxon*, there was still a general consensus among Canadians that British immigrants were preferred over immigrants from Eastern Europe and, in this case, Afro-American immigrants from the United States and Afro-Caribbean immigrants from the West Indies.

In accordance with Wicksteed’s theories, allowing Black Immigrants from the United States and from the West Indies clashed with ideal of Canada as a white settlers’ paradise, populated by white yeomen farmers of British descent. While no formal measures - such as exclusionary laws - were taken to discourage the arrival of Black immigrants, Robin Winks notes that the constitution of newly arrived Black immigrants was routinely questioned as was their intelligence. According to Winks, Afro-Canadians were routinely mocked and degraded by travelling minstrel shows that characterized them as weak-minded, subservient and of inferior racial stock. Winks also says that Canadians continually questioned whether “Negroes could stand so cold a climate they should be barred [from Canada] for their own good”. This rise in xenophobia led to repeated attempts by the government to discourage African-Americans from immigrating to Canada, especially to Western Canada. As a result, by 1914 there were just under 1200 Afro-Canadians in Western Canada.

Marginalized and pushed to the fringes of society, Afro-Canadians sought acceptance and integration. The outbreak of war in August 1914 presented the Afro-Canadian community with a unique opportunity to challenge society’s pre-conceptions because if young Afro-Canadians could enlist and fight overseas, they could prove to their detractors that they were just as capable and intelligent as any ordinary white Canadians. However, upon presenting themselves to recruiters, several hundred young Afro-Canadians, were rejected outright, told by the recruiting officers their help was neither needed nor wanted. According the James Walker and Melissa Shaw, Afro-Canadian men were rejected on the grounds that they were racially inferior and could never be able to serve in the military in

140 Richard Wicksteed was an assistant law clerk and English translator in the House of Commons. Wicksteed founded the *Anglo Saxon* in 1887 as a means to promote the superiority of Anglo Saxon Protestants and their lifestyle over that of French Canadians, minorities such as Afro-Canadians and especially immigrants.


any capacity. This was a societal judgement rather than an official government policy because, as Walker and Shaw point out, recruitment was the purview of a battalion’s OC; therefore, the OC decided whether a potential recruit would be accepted or rejected. 143

Thus, owing to the strong racial prejudices of the day, recruiting officers routinely rejected Afro-Canadian men. For example, a group of fifty Afro-Canadian men who attempted to enlist in Sydney, Nova Scotia were told by the recruiting officer, “This is not for you fellows, this is a white man’s war”.144 Unfortunately, there was little that could be done to rectify the situation because Sam Hughes’ only avenue of intervention was to reinforce the messaging to the recruiting officers that there were no racial barriers in the Canadian Military.

Other militia officers were equally unhelpful; in particular, Gen. Willoughby Gwatkin-Chief of the General Staff Canadian Militia- was at best dismissive and at worst clearly racist towards Afro-Canadians serving in the military. Gwatkin stated: “The civilized Negro is vain and imitative; in Canada he is not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty; in the trenches he is not likely to make a good fighter; and the average white man will not associate with him on terms of equality. Not a single commanding officer in Military District No. 2 is willing to accept a coloured platoon as part of his battalion; and it would be humiliating to the coloured men themselves to serve in a battalion where they were not wanted.” In France, in the firing line, there would be no place for a black battalion. It would be eyed askance; it would crowd out a white battalion; it would be difficult to reinforce. “Nor could it be left in England and used as a draft-giving depot; for there would be trouble if negroes were sent to the front for the purpose of reinforcing white battalions; and if they are good men at all, they would resent being kept in Canada for the purpose of finding guards.” 145 Gwatkin’s report, however, reflected his belief that Afro-Canadians could serve adequately in a labour or construction battalion. As a result, authorization was issued in early 1916 to form No. 2 Construction Battalion, and the Battalion was raised in Digby, Nova Scotia under the command of Lt. Col. Daniel Hugh Sutherland.

It was hoped that enough men could be recruited to form a full-strength battalion, but because of the pervasive racial prejudices demonstrated by recruiting officers earlier in the war, many Afro-Canadian men had

become discouraged and had abandoned any hope of enlisting. In one case, Capt. A.J. Cayfer a recruiter for No. 2 Battalion reported that during a medical inspection for a potential recruit H.N. Greening, one of the doctors present remarked “he was glad that the other man was examining the nigger”. Despite the best efforts of the Battalion’s recruiters, only 665 soldiers were enlisted by the time the Battalion was mobilized for service overseas in early 1917. After spending several months in Britain, the Battalion was again mobilized for service with the CFC in the Jura District.

The decision was made to send No. 2 Battalion to the CFC because the Battalion would go a long way towards supplying the CFC with the reinforcements it so badly needed in mid 1917. The decision was also motivated by the racial prejudices of some officers, including Maj. Bristol, Secretary to the Overseas Military Forces (position occupied by George Perley); Maj. Bristol remarked, “These Niggers do well in a Forestry Corps and other Labour units [but] the prospects of maintaining [the] battalion are not very bright”.

Efforts were made, however, to protect the Battalion from some of the military’s harsh racial regulations; the OMFC deployed No. 2 Battalion to the French area of operations in order to prevent the Battalion from being

---

147 Much of the battalion’s enlistment came from Nova Scotia and Ontario. The rest was made up of volunteers from either the United States or from British Colonies in the West Indies.
148 Winegard, For King and Kanata, pg. 81
segeregated as it would have been in the British area of operations. Col. J.B. White (OC CFC France) even rejected a direct request from British Army HQ to conform to Imperial regulations on segregating “coloured” labour units. However, despite the best efforts of a few decent individuals, No. 2 Battalion was still subjected to racially motivated mistreatment for the duration of their service in the CFC.

The Battalion’s second class status was made painfully apparent on its arrival in the Jura District, where it was discovered that almost no preparations had been made for the arrival of the soldiers. No billets (housing) had been built for them so they were forced to construct their own billets; as well, they arrived without extra stores of clothing, blankets, utensils and even field kitchens. Despite the obvious lack of support and preparation for the soldiers of No. 2 Company, they were expected to provide support for the district’s operations within days of their arrival.149

Although they were a part of the CFC, the Afro-Canadian soldiers of No. 2 Company were not always involved in the logging operations. Instead, they were often assigned to perform general maintenance on roads and local infrastructure, as well as cleaning up the logging sites once operations had been completed. The clean up operations included heavy and difficult tasks such as stumping, which involved the removal of thousands of tree stumps from the site so the ground could readied for replanting by French authorities at a later date. This work could take days or weeks to complete and was often carried out in difficult conditions due to the wet climate in the Jura Mountains. This back-breaking and time-consuming work was performed without much reward, recognition or honours.

The hard labour led to high rates of serious illness, especially amongst those soldiers who had recently immigrated to Canada from the British West Indies and the Southern United States, because they were not used to working in tough climatic conditions. Their medical conditions often went untreated for several days because white soldiers were prioritized when it came to receiving medical treatment. The Black Canadians were almost always last in line for medical treatment. They were last in line for supplies as well; as a result, they often went without rations and new clothing for long periods of time.150

149 Letter of Complaint from Col. Sutherland to No. 6 District HQ, October 1917, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4516 HQ Jura Group File 11/12, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
150 Letter regarding Tuberculosis patients, December 1917, Jura Group HQ, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4516 HQ Jura Group File 11/12, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
CFC officers were not the only individuals who demonstrated racist attitudes in relation to Afro-Canadian soldiers. There were racists among the local French populations. In one case, an Afro-Canadian private in the No. 2 Company (Pte. F.L. Berry) became secretly involved in a relationship with a local French girl. When it was discovered that she was pregnant, her father was outraged that his daughter had been sleeping with a Black soldier. According to the documents, the elder daughter stated that her father demanded that the soldier be immediately sent to the front lines to die because he felt his youngest daughter had been defiled even though the relationship was consensual (although there could be some question as to consent since the girl was only 15 years old).

If the soldier in question had been white, the farmer likely would have still been outraged that his daughter had become pregnant but would likely have demanded that the soldier involved marry the girl to avoid the shame of having a child out of wedlock. It is likely the significant factor driving the girl’s father’s demand that Pte. Berry be put in harm’s way was his race. An illegitimate mixed-race child would likely have been a significant embarrassment for the family.151 Although the CFC records do not indicate what happened to the child (the child could have been given up for adoption), Col. Sutherland transferred Pte. Berry away from the district to avoid any further complications with the family.152

The soldiers of No. 2 Company were not even trusted to act in defence of their camps and their persons during air raids; according to instructions from District HQ, “In the case of coloured units, only [Canadian] personnel will be utilised for gun teams”.153 The unwillingness of the local officers to allow the Afro-Canadian soldiers to assist in defending the camps was rooted in the idea that “coloured” soldiers were racially inferior and thus should not be entrusted to wield weapons in combat.

Indigenous Foresters

Just as with Afro-Canadians, the Indigenous peoples of Canada had a track record of military service with the British military that stretched back to the Seven Years War, Revolutionary War and, perhaps most famously during the War of 1812, where Indigenous warriors - including Tecumseh, the leader of the Iroquois Confederacy - served with distinction. Several decades later, Indigenous men served as guides and scouts for the Canadian Militia.

151 It is unknown what happened to the family afterwards as no further documentation exists.
152 Letter describing Pte. Berry’s situation, HQ Jura Group, November 1917, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4516 HQ Jura Group File 11/12, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada
153 Instruction of anti-aircraft defence, No. 2 District CFC, 1918, RG 9 III C 8 HQ Central France File 23, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
during the Red River and Northwest Rebellions. Although few served during the Boer War, there were still several thousand young Indigenous men in cadet training programs - an extension of the Residential School System - and several hundred more serving in the Militia, especially amongst the units stationed near the Six Nations Confederacy in Ontario.154

Although their service as warriors was valued by the Canadian Government, not much value was placed on their status as persons; in 1914, the Indigenous peoples were considered wards of the state in Canada. As such, the relationship between the Indigenous peoples and the government was paternalistic, with the government claiming to act in the best interests of the Indigenous peoples; in reality, this was an excuse for the Department of Indian Affairs to carry out a program of cultural assimilation against the Indigenous peoples, the end goal being to rid Canada of the “Indian problem”. Government ministers like Duncan Campbell Scott, Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, were enthusiastic supporters of forced assimilation, especially through military service.

However, these same paternalistic attitudes also stood in the way of Indigenous men when they attempted to enlist at the outbreak of the war. According to Timothy Winegard, when the war broke out in 1914, Sam Hughes received a letter from Col. W.E. Hodgins (OC No. 1 Military District) inquiring whether Indigenous men were to be accepted for service. In his reply, Hughes wrote, “While British troops would be proud to be associated with their fellow subjects [Indians], yet Germans might refuse to extend to them the privileges of civilized warfare, therefore it is considered…that they had better remain in Canada to share in the protection of the Dominion”155.

Far from constituting an official ban, this was in actuality a paternalistic gesture meant to protect the Indigenous peoples from the possible savagery of the German soldiers; Hughes feared the Germans would inflict acts of cruelty against Indigenous soldiers if they were captured. In his new role as adjutant general of the militia, however, Col. Hodgins interpreted this reply as an official ban, and that lead the Department of Militia to dissuade Indigenous men from enlisting until the “policy” was corrected in December 1915. After the reversal, recruiters intensified their efforts to recruit more Indigenous men into the military, but there was one final barrier to enlistment that had to be overcome, that being the language barrier.

According to Winegard, a sizeable number of Indigenous recruits spoke neither English nor French; according to military regulations, that was enough to bar a soldier from serving in any position near the front lines.

154 Winegard, For King and Kanata, pg. 39
155 Winegard, For King and Kanata, pg. 45
Effective communication was key to success in battle so soldiers (often immigrants and Indigenous men) who spoke poor English were often kept in Britain, where they were reassigned to serve with support units like the Forestry Corps. It was surmised by Militia officers that those soldiers lacking an understanding of English would be better off serving in a support unit where their poor language skills would not cause undue harm.156

Rates of Indigenous recruitment rose throughout 1916, but there was still considerable push back by some Indigenous bands against recruiters like Charles A. Cooke, an Objibwa-Mohawk who worked for the DIA as a clerk. Cooke reported on numerous occasions that band elders refused his offers to enlist young men from their bands, stating that they preferred to be left in peace and not have their young men taken away. Other bands were more accepting; several hundred Indigenous men enlisted from the Six Nation Confederacy in Ontario alone. Once in the military, Indigenous men with previous experience working as civilian hunters and trappers were assigned to work as snipers and scouts, as their prior experiences made them ideally suited to stalking the enemy while remaining unobserved.157 While the martial talents of the selected Indigenous soldiers was highly valued, Winegard says their forestry skills were also highly valued. By 1917, the demand for reinforcements for the CEF’s support units had risen considerably. It was suggested by Campbell Scott and other militia officers that Indigenous foresters be recruited for the CFC, where they could fulfill their promise of military service to the king without risking their lives in combat.158

This proved to be an acceptable alternative to some of the band elders who had previously rejected the advances of recruiters for fear of losing their young men in combat. An Indian Forestry Draft was authorized by Prime Minister Borden soon after; the target was to recruit 1,000 Indigenous men. According to Winegard, the draft was quite successful as Indigenous soldiers were well represented in the ranks of the CFC and in other support units like the Canadian Railway Troops. The service of Indigenous soldiers in the CFC was highly valued and was praised by Campbell Scott, who said, “You have been doing good work with the Construction Battalion[s]. The willingness of the Indians to serve the Empire is very much appreciated and they have indeed credit to themselves in the present crisis…there have been also quite a number of enlistments in the new Forestry and Construction Battalions”159.

156 Winegard, *For King and Kanata*
157 The majority of Indigenous men who enlisted just served as infantrymen because as previously mentioned, not all were skilled hunters, trappers or guides.
158 Winegard, *For King and Kanata*, pg. 43
159 Winegard, *For King and Kanata*, pg. 108
While some scholars, including James Dempsey, claim that the service of Indigenous soldiers in support units was influenced by the racist attitudes of the era, Winegard states that the decision to recruit Indigenous men for the CFC should be viewed as pragmatic rather than racist. Winegard considers the decision to be pragmatic because it was a “decision based on the immediate requirements of the Canadian Corps and the larger conglomerate of [Entente] formations”\textsuperscript{160}. Specialized labour was badly needed overseas so it made sense for the Militia Department to exploit all possible sources of skilled labour that could be found in Canada; the rigours of modern war demanded nothing less than the total commitment of Canada’s material and human resources to the war effort. Winegard estimates that based on existing records, that roughly 4,000 status Indigenous men served in the CEF during the Great War. While the exact number of Indigenous men who served in the Forestry Corps is unknown, it can be reasonably estimated that between 1,000 and 2,000 Status and non-status Indigenous men served with the CFC during the course of the Great War.\textsuperscript{161}

**Ukrainian Canadians**

Until 1918, the majority of soldiers enlisted in the CEF were immigrants; although the majority of those immigrants were from Britain, many were from Central and Eastern Europe. Of the latter group, the men who had enlisted were primarily drawn from the large communities of migrant labourers who began arriving in Canada in the

\textsuperscript{160} Winegard, *For King and Kanata*, pg. 106

\textsuperscript{161} Winegard, *For King and Kanata*
early twentieth century. According to Donald Avery, tens of thousands of young men were arriving in Canada each year, drawn by promises of fair wages and opportunities to start a new life. Arriving from Italy, Germany, Scandinavia and the Eastern Provinces of Austria and Russia, the young men formed a pool of migrant labour that could be tapped to fill shortages in the mining, timber and farming industries.162 Immigrant men were often targeted by European recruiters, such as the Italian labour recruiting agency Antonio Cordasco; these agencies had licences to recruit labourers for Canadian companies such as the Dominion Mining Company and the CPR.163 However, conditions in Canada were not accurately represented by the recruiting agents; much of the work was physically demanding and often entailed working in less than acceptable conditions. For example, the camps built along the Grand Trunk Railway were often described as filthy, with a stench so bad it could knock a man out.164 The railway and mining companies were also known to skirt safety regulations, which cost many an immigrant life or livelihood.165

With roughly 400,000 immigrant labourers arriving in Canada by 1914, native-born Canadians viewed their arrival as an invasion of dirty and uneducated Slavic peasants. Resentment was especially high amongst industrial labourers because companies often resorted to importing foreign labour to help make up for the shortfall in labour, especially during strikes. Many Italian and Ukrainian labourers were brought in as strike-breakers. It did not take very long before groups like the Ukrainians were viewed with suspicion and were discriminated against by Anglo-Canadians.166

When war broke out in August 1914, Ukrainian communities across Canada came under increased suspicion because of their supposed divided loyalties, especially those Ukrainians born in Austria. According to Peter Melnycky, it was Russophile Ukrainians who initially stoked the rumors that several prominent Austrian-born Ukrainians- Ukrainians born in the Austrian Provinces of Galicia and Bukovina- were acting as spies and enemy agents. These fears were fanned in part by the pastoral letter issued by Ukrainian Bishop Nykyta Budka-Ukrainian Bishop of Canada- that encouraged all men still registered as reservists in the Austrian Army to return home to fight

162 Avery, Donald. Dangerous Foreigners: European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932, (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Ltd. 1979)
163 Agencies worked on a contract basis, but there were some agencies that did target particular groups of labourers though their general focus was on importing unskilled labour for the mining, track laying and logging.
164 Avery, Dangerous Foreigners
165 Avery, Dangerous Foreigners, pg. 37
166 Avery, Dangerous Foreigners, pg. 37
in the forthcoming war. Viewed as harmless at first, Budka’s letter suddenly ignited a firestorm of protest two weeks later after Great Britain issued its formal declaration of war against Austria-Hungary, thereby in retrospect, making Budka’s letter appear to be a call to arms in support of an enemy nation. Budka quickly retracted his initial letter issuing a follow up letter on August 8th, 1914 four days before Britain declared war on Austria- in which he admonished his congregation to ignore his first letter and to refrain from returning to Austria; instead any naturalized Ukrainian citizens should throw their support behind their adopted homeland.

Despite Budka’s attempt at damage control, members of the public and government officials- especially the members of the Manitoba Liberal Party- quickly interpreted the Bishop’s actions and by extension the Ukrainian community at large as treasonous. Rumours abounded of spy networks operating amongst the masses of migrant Ukrainian labourers and of hordes of Ukrainian men crossing the border into the United States on their way home to Austria. While these fears were unfounded- the majority of Ukrainian men crossing the border were doing so in search of work- the mere presence of unemployed and unnaturalized Ukrainian citizens such as the 2000 labourers who marched on Winnipeg’s city hall in May, caused considerable discomfort where-ever they were. With tolerance for the hordes of unemployed Ukrainians waning quickly, the public- in some cases whipped into a frenzy by provincial officials such as in Manitoba- began lobbying the government for a means to curb the apparent threat.

As mentioned the Liberal Party of Manitoba was one such group that eagerly went on the attack against the non-existent Ukrainian threat. Most of the party’s attacks were directed against Bishop Budka as Budka operated out of Manitoba. Budka had also run afoul of the Liberals over his support for bi-lingual education of Ukrainian children as his ideals clashed with the Liberal party’s assimilationist platform. In an attempt to discredit the Bishop, the Liberal Party published on August 5th an editorial in the Manitoba Free Press that accused Budka of treason: “This episcopal proclamation by Bishop Budka is a striking manifestation of the danger that this country may become a land inhabited by different peoples speaking foreign tongues and cherishing divergent national ideals, instead of a land peopled by Canadians cherishing a [unified Canadian] ideal”.

167 Budka was writing in response to an official call to arms issued by the Austrian government in Mid-July. It was considered the priests responsibility to inform his congregation of important events.
169 Martynowych, Orest T. Ukrainians in Canada: The Formative Period, (Edmonton, University of Alberta, 1991), pg. 325
170 Stella Hyrniuk, The Budka Controversy, pg. 159
While the Federal Government was quick to investigate and clear Budka of any wrongdoing - Prime Minister Borden received a personal assurance from Budka that the Ukrainian community was loyal to Canada - the calls from the public for a solution were too loud to ignore. After attempts at a national registration system failed - since most Ukrainian men never bothered to register - the government used its powers under the newly passed War Measures Act to begin interning unnaturalized Ukrainian citizens indefinitely.\footnote{Melnycky, Peter, “The Internment of Ukrainians in Canada”, in Loyalties in Conflict: Ukrainians in Canada during the Great War, ed. Frances Swyripa and John Herd Thompson, (Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1983), pg. 6} While those arrested and detained were mostly single men - a portion were married and had families - suspicion still fell upon the Ukrainian community as a whole. Attempts were made by Budka as well as Alberta MLA Andrew Shandro, to demonstrate to the Canadian public that the Ukrainian people were loyal to Canada. Budka collected for the Red Cross and donated generous sums of money to war bond drives, while Shandro used his position in the Alberta legislature to vehemently protest the loyalty and innocence of the interned Ukrainians.\footnote{Melnycky, Loyalties in Conflict: Ukrainians in Canada during the Great War, pg. 6}

This intense suspicion of Ukrainians spilled over into the military, because as Andrew Horrall states, Ukrainian men born in Russia who enlisted in the CEF, were recorded as Russians in order to avoid suspicions regarding their loyalty to Canada. The opposite was true of Ukrainian men born in the Austro-Hungarian empire, as unnaturalized men had to lie about their place of origin in order to enlist, while naturalized citizens according to Orest T. Martynowych “could not enlist in the Canadian Expeditionary Force or were discouraged from doing so between 1915 and 1917”.\footnote{Martynowych, Ukrainians in Canada, pg. 420} Some naturalized Ukrainian men were able to enlist during this period by giving their place of birth as outside of Austria, though it was not until 1917 that the majority (likely 10,000 men if estimates are correct) of Ukrainian men enlisted in the CEF, after the government lifted its ban on enlisting immigrant from enemy nations.

In total 12,000 Ukrainian men were estimated to have been accepted into service with the CEF by 1918. However, of the 12,000 Ukrainian soldiers, only a few hundred to 2000 every severed at the front lines, because according to Martynowych, “military reluctance to send them [Ukrainians] to the front meant that most Ukrainians were used in non-combatant forestry units”.\footnote{Martynowych, Ukrainians in Canada, pg. 420} Officially, the Militia Department stated that it was the soldiers poor...
English language skills that kept them from being deployed to the trenches but this was just an excuse given to cover up the ever present prejudice the government and military had against the Ukrainian population.

The Ukrainians likely provided the Forestry Corps with the reinforcements that Brig. Gen MacDougall so desperately needed in early 1917. The lifting of the ban against naturalized Ukrainian citizens serving in the CEF coincided with the expansion of the Forestry into France starting in January 1917. MacDougall had just been authorized to recruit up to 10,000 for the expansion of the CFC’s operations in France but as was mentioned previously, recruitment had fallen off sharply during 1916, leaving Gen. Turner to scrounge amongst the base depots for suitable- or at least partly suitable- reinforcements for the CFC. So, the sudden influx of Ukrainian reinforcements must have been a welcome surprise to MacDougall and his staff, especially so because most had at least some degree of experience working as foresters back in Canada. Due to the nature of seasonal employment in Canada, Ukrainian men routinely worked in the mining, timber and railroad construction industries for at least three or four months each year. These industries employed tens of thousands of Ukrainian labourers and as such, many of the potential recruits that Gen. Turner found in the base depots possessed the necessary skills for forestry work. As such, by the end of the war, Ukrainian soldiers likely constituted the second largest ethnic group in the CFC after native born Canadians.175

Attached labour

While Gen. Turner’s efforts supplied the CFC with several thousand reinforcements, further labour was contracted by Sir James Ball of the Home Grown Timber Commission through the newly created Office of Attached Labour (OAL). Several thousand foreign labourers, including Portuguese, Finnish and Swedish, were hired through the OAL to work in Britain. In France, the French government assigned several companies of Russian labourers, in addition to several companies from the Chinese Labour Corps (CLC). A few thousand German Prisoners of War were also assigned to assist the CFC both in Britain and in France.

The Portuguese, Finnish and Swedish labourers were the largest contingent of labourers. Each group numbered 2,000 men, although the number of Portuguese fluctuated as some companies were shipped home after

---

175 Letter from Intelligence Department HQ Canadians, Shorncliffe to Q.M.G. HQ Canadians Shorncliffe, August 13th, 1917 RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4505 File 26 224th Battalion, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
Those problems arose because some of the Portuguese felt they were not being adequately supplied or compensated for their work, so they went on strike until their demands were met. Their work was no different from that of other attached labour groups, but they found it more difficult to work in Britain’s unfamiliar climate. Those Portuguese who refused to work had their contracts revoked and were shipped back to Portugal.

On the other hand, the Canadians had nothing but praise for the Finns and Swedes. These two groups were made up entirely from the crews of stranded merchant ships unable to return home after the outbreak of the war. Wanting to assist in the war effort and earn a living, the Swedes and Finns signed on to work for with the CFC and likely continued in that role until the end of the war, when they were able to safely return home. CFC records state their work was of the highest quality because there were a number of experienced foresters amongst their ranks. The French also made available to the Canadians several companies of Russian labourers made up of the remaining soldiers of what had once been the Russian Expeditionary Corps, 20,000 Russian soldiers that had been sent to serve in France in April 1916. After suffering heavy in the failed Nivelle Offensive in the spring of 1917, the Russians were released from duty, only for the remaining soldiers to split off into Loyalist-to the Kerensky government-and Bolshevik-supporters of Vladimir Lenin- factions. The Loyalist faction was with French assistance able to convince the Bolsheviks to surrender, after which the French arrested them and offered them the choice of hard labour in North Africa or “voluntary” labour in France. It was from the ranks of the Russian volunteers that the French found the soldiers for the labour companies that they sent to serve with the CFC.

Several thousand German Prisoners of War (POWs) were also used by the CFC as attached labour. The CFC began employing POWs in large numbers towards the end of 1916, and increasingly relied on their labour throughout 1917 as they grappled with a shortage of reinforcements (despite the best efforts of Gen. Turner’s recruitment drive). The German POWs performed many kinds of jobs for the CFC, including sawyer, blacksmith and general labourer. For example, the German soldiers of the 75th POW Company were employed in the bush.

176 The Portuguese worked as contracted labour as Portugal was part of the Entente. Several Portuguese divisions fought on the Western Front as part of the BEF from 1915-1918.
178 Bird and Davies, Foresty Corps, pg. 23
179 Le Goic, Bordenes, Leconte & Martin, Haches de Guerre, pg. 109
180 The CFC always suffered from a shortage of labour because of the significant manpower required to operate their camps.
cutting timber, on the skidways moving felled timber to the mill and in the woodyard loading sawn timber onto trucks and trains. 181

By October 1918, the Central Group was employing 15 companies of German POWs; there were roughly 4,000 POWs, although their numbers varied due to disease outbreaks. 182 Overall, the Canadians were quite satisfied with the service of their POW labourers, but some of the Germans tried to escape, forcing the Canadians to increase the armed escorts that accompanied the Germans to work everyday. 183 Despite those difficulties, the Canadians found the POWs performed satisfactorily in their roles.

Although the Chinese Labour Corps was a part of the CFC’s attached labour force, the South African Native Labour Corps and the Indian Labour Corps were not. However, the Canadians also worked alongside men from the South African and the Indian Labour Corps from November 1916 onwards. As mentioned in chapter two, the British government had requested labour battalions from both South Africa and India in early 1916 to help with labour shortages on the Western Front. While the CFC was created as a specialized labour unit, the SANLC and the ILC were created with the intention of using them as general labour battalions that could, if necessary, perform specialized labour such as forestry. Upon their arrival in France, several companies of the SANLC found themselves working in the same woods as the Canadians because even the combined efforts of the Canadians - as of November 1916 - and the 2,700 British foresters could supply enough timber for the BEF. 184

In stark contrast to No. 2 Battalion, the SANLC was subjected to unjust and harsh restrictions on their movements. As stated by B.P. Willan, the soldiers of the SANLC were restricted to their camps - which camps were enclosed by six-foot high barbed wire topped fences - and were not allowed to associate with any British or Dominion units (made up of white soldiers). When they were allowed into local towns, they were not allowed to enter shops unless accompanied by a white officer. South African authorities wanted to prevent their Black soldiers from associating with other British and Dominion soldiers because they feared that if they did so the Black soldiers would gain a sense of equality, which would disrupt the balance of power in South Africa after the war. 185

181 Record of POW companies employed by the Central Group, November 1918, RG 9 III Series 9 P-5-9 to P-13-9 File pp. 7-9, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
182 Report on POW labour in Central Group, October 1918, RG 9 III C 8 HQ Central Group CFC France File 28, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
183 A total of 6,286 German POWs were employed by the CFC by November 1918.
184 1300 were civilians and 1400 were ASC soldiers.
For the most part, the Canadians got along very well with their attached labour. After November 1917, however, they treated the Russians with particular caution because of the Communist coup in St. Petersburg. Instructions were circulated amongst the CFC’s District HQs outlining the actions to take in the event Communist propaganda were discovered in a camp. Not all officers took a hard line against the Russians; according to a series of letters from the Jura District HQ, several Russians requested asylum with the CFC because other Russians in their ranks were threatening them with bodily harm if they refused to openly support Vladimir Lenin’s Bolsheviks.186

By the end of the war, an estimated 12,579 of the 25,000 soldiers (50.3%) who served with the CFC were immigrants, Afro-Canadians or Indigenous.187 These soldiers enlisted in the CEF because they wanted to demonstrate their loyalty to Canada, and despite the fact they never saw the front lines or heard a shot fired in anger, they gave several years of their lives to honourable service overseas in support of the nation they considered their home. Through their service, the soldiers proved their worth, persevering in spite of racist attitudes and actions that followed them wherever they went. As noted in Senator Calvin Rusk’s book, *The Black Battalion*, most of the surviving members of No. 2 Construction Battalion remained proud of their wartime service and felt they had achieved some vindication.

**Medical Fitness**

When the war began in 1914, the Canadian Military was completely unprepared to handle the massive numbers of volunteers who streamed into recruiting stations across the country. A necessary element of processing volunteers was the medical examination; each recruit had to undergo a thorough medical exam to ensure he was healthy enough to serve overseas. Among numerous other qualifications, a recruit had to have average intelligence, unimpaired vision, good hearing and be free from physical impairments caused by injury or illness. If a recruit did not meet these standards, he could be rejected on the spot, declared medically unfit for service by the Medical Officer (MO).188

However, in the initial rush to enlist, few doctors were qualified to perform these medical exams, so several thousand young men and some older men who did not meet the required physical standards were able to avoid

---

186 Letter regarding transfer of Russia soldiers to CFC, March 1918, Jura Group HQ, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4517 HQ Jura Group File 42, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4516 HQ Jura Group File 11/12, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
188 Clarke, Nic. *Unwanted* Warriors, pg. 19
detection by the MO. Some were weeded out during basic training, where it was more difficult to conceal their physical conditions, but thousands more continued to avoid detection and were able to make it overseas. However, this was where their military careers often came to a halt because each soldier had to undergo a proper medical exam before proceeding to France. Only those soldiers with easily concealable physical impairments were able to avoid detection by the MO and move on to France, while thousands of their comrades were held back in Britain, where they were confined to the CEF’s network of Base Depots.

Upon arrival in Britain, the soldiers were subjected to a second round of medical exams, the purpose being to classify them based on their physical fitness. The Canadian Military classified soldiers into four different categories of medical fitness: A category was the highest standard and meant a soldier was fit for service in France; B category meant a soldier was fit for service overseas in Britain but not France; C category meant a soldier was fit for service in Canada but not overseas; and D category meant a soldier was barely fit for service and should be immediately discharged. While D category soldiers were unqualified for continued service, some C category and most B category soldiers were fit enough to serve in non-combat positions in the CEF.

However, months before Gen. Turner even began his recruiting drive, there were already several hundred soldiers serving in the CFC with pre-existing physical impairments. Logging was a dangerous business, and it was not uncommon for a forester to have lost a finger or suffered other serious injuries. Despite the high rate of injury, most foresters went straight back to work once they had recovered; if the injury did not impair their ability to work, they simply kept on working. As long as a forestry recruit’s physical impairments were not severe, there were no regulations to prevent him from serving in the CFC.\footnote{The medical staff did draw the line at missing limbs, as Frank Claridge found out. Claridge somehow managed to enlist in the 238th Battalion despite the fact that he had been born without his left hand! Claridge made it to Ontario before he was immediately discharged and returned to Vancouver.} In order to assess the medical fitness of forestry recruits - and that of potential forestry recruits in Canada - the Militia Department authorized several amendments to the CFC medical examinations to reflect the fact that some forestry recruits would have arrived missing a few fingers or toes. As stated in the medical records of the 238th Battalion’s medical officer: “The absence of a finger on either or both hands provided it is not the thumb or forefinger which is missing, will not be cause for a rejection…[ the] absence of
one or two toes on either or both feet, provided it be not the great toe, will [not] be a cause for rejection [with the] age limit to be 48 years, provided such men are specially qualified as Millwright [or] Saw Filers”.

The recruitment of medically unfit soldiers began in November 1916, forming part of Lt. Gen. Turner’s first recruitment drive on the behalf of the CFC. According to letters exchanged with the OCs of several of the reserve battalions, Turner began increasing his efforts to recruit B and C category soldiers in February 1917, after restrictions were placed on the transfer of A category soldiers to the CFC. The transfer of A category soldiers had to be approved by HQ staff, while the transfer of B and C category soldiers did not.

Turner did not seek to enlist every available B category soldier, as he did with soldiers from minority backgrounds. Instead, he sought out any medically unfit soldier who had specialist forestry experience. These soldiers were considered far more useful to the CFC than the other untrained B category soldiers, at least until the spring of 1917 when a training camp was established at Sunningdale to instruct soldiers in proper forestry techniques. Turner’s efforts eventually turned up a few thousand recruits from amongst the ranks of B category soldiers in the reserve depots, but the depots were not the only source of B category recruits Turner was able to draw upon. He found many willing recruits amongst the ranks of wounded soldiers who were convalescing in Britain.

Depending on the severity of their wounds, some soldiers were declared medically unfit - with good reason in most cases - and were not allowed to rejoin their units in France. They were, however, still considered healthy enough to serve elsewhere in the military. While the percentage of wounded soldiers who possessed forestry skills was likely low (there were at most 100-200,000 lumberjacks in Canada at the outbreak of the war), those soldiers who volunteered for service with the CFC were eager to continue serving in the CEF and were willing to learn the forestry trade. As such, Turner was able to recruit roughly 2,000 wounded soldiers for the CFC in 1916-1918.

---

192 Restrictions were placed on the transfer of A category soldiers in June 1917.
194 This includes seasonal loggers and those permanently employed in the forestry industry in Canada in 1914.
195 This number is only an estimate based upon available records.
At times, these soldiers made up more than half the complement of some forestry companies. For example, the 35th Company OC stated, “60 per cent [of the battalion’s O.R.] have seen active service in the trenches, and for causes were rejected for further trench work”. However, the recruitment of wounded soldiers was not always successful because some soldiers disguised the severity of their wound(s) in order to avoid being discharged from the CEF.

Capt. Alan R. Wilson, OC of the 125th Company CFC, reported that he was forced to S.O.S. (struck off strength) several dozen soldiers due to their unsuitability for hard labour. These were often soldiers who had suffered wounds to their arms, legs or backs, and could not work long hours at a physically demanding job.

While the demands of forestry work were often too much for some wounded and physically impaired soldiers to handle, what work they did perform gave them a sense of purpose and worth they had previously felt denied. The physically impaired were often ignored and discriminated against by a society that considered them burdensome. According to Nic Clarke, a number of young disabled men like George Baker felt the sting of societal rejection so severely after failing the CEF medical exam that they chose to commit suicide rather than continue to endure the vocal judgements of their peers.

For those soldiers who served despite their disability, service meant something more than the pride of service experienced by an average soldier. They must have felt a sense of purpose, that even though they did not serve at the front lines, they still had the ability to make an important and meaningful contribution to the war effort. It also gave many wounded soldiers the opportunity to continue serving overseas, instead of being invalidated back home.

Despite the fact the soldiers of No. 2 Construction Battalion never took part in any fighting during the war, they reported afterwards that they felt proud of their wartime service. They were, however, still deeply dissatisfied with the treatment they and their fellow Afro-Canadians had received at the beginning of the war and were still receiving at home after the war had ended. It was quite clear that, come the end of the war, the Afro-Canadian soldiers had achieved no significant societal victory because white Canadians were still reluctant to treat Afro-

---

196 Historical record of No. 35 Company CFC, 1918, O.C. No. 35 Company CFC, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4499 File 27-40, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
197 Historical record of No. 125 Company CFC, 1918, O.C. Capt. Alan R. Wilson, No. 125 Company CFC, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4499 File 27-40, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
198 Clarke, Unwanted Warriors, pg. 113
Canadians equally despite their shared status as British subjects. Not content to endure the racist attitudes then common in Canada, the returning Afro-Canadian soldiers leveraged their wartime service into community activism aimed at combating the evils of racial prejudice. The returning soldiers joined forces with men such as Joseph Whitney, editor of The Canadian Observer, a newspaper Whitney had founded in 1915 to advocate on behalf of rejected Afro-Canadian volunteers.200

Initially founded in 1915, the Observer soon became an important means of communicating the need for further advocacy for the rights of Afro-Canadians. As Shaw states, the war served as a rude awakening to Whitney and the Afro-Canadian community that Canada was far from the egalitarian society that had been imagined in decades past. The rejection of Afro-Canadians, the fight for No. 2 Battalion and the eventual conscription of Afro-Canadians all served to highlight the racial prejudices that had infested Canadian society during the war, and the need to advocate for more rights and protections against racial discrimination and violence. Consequently, Whitney and others such as R.W. Coleman, the first president of the Toronto branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People, worked tirelessly to educate the Afro-Canadian community on issues such as race consciousness, social activism and inter-racial cooperation.201 The example of Ada Kelly, a school teacher from Windsor, Ontario, is useful when trying to understand the important nature of the work undertaken by Whitney and Coleman during the war to highlight the numerous ways in which racial prejudice degraded the Afro-Canadian community. In 1915, Kelly had written a response to an editorial Whitney had printed in the Observer; she claimed that white Canadians’ racial prejudice was not damaging because it was only expressed “along social lines…[because we live] in an age…where the best man wins…if we are efficient enough to make the necessary progress, no man’s prejudice will be strong enough to keep us down. We will be bound to be recognized”.202

Three years later, however, Kelly took to the stage at the fourth anniversary party of the Observer and delivered a short speech illustrating how her wartime experiences had drastically altered her perception of race relations in Canada. Kelly stated, “Mothers, fathers, sons and daughters of our race; take heart, push on and achieve. I say our race because the other race need not that command surrounded as they are with every advantage there is nothing to stop them from pushing on and achieving…so I say to our Afro-Canadian race…we do not [yet] know the

201 Shaw, Most Anxious, pg. 574
202 Shaw, Most Anxious, pg. 574
depths of the hidden powers within us…we as a race of people cannot and must not be satisfied just to exist”. 203 Clearly Whitney’s wartime activism in support of rejected Afro-Canadian Volunteers - in conjunction with the lived experiences of Afro-Canadians during the war - had sparked widespread protest against the conditions under which the Afro-Canadian community were then living.

In this regard, Whitney was especially concerned for the returning Afro-Canadian soldiers, whom he felt would “be compelled to continue at the same drudging work they had before leaving their homes [on] behalf of their country, or will they be given equal opportunities with other returned men?” 204 Whitney’s writing is reflective of the lessons that the Afro-Canadian community had learned during the war. Gone were the days where individuals like Ada Kelly believed that hard work and perseverance were all that one needed to prove one’s worth to society. Instead, there emerged a new era of activism and struggle in which every member of the Afro-Canadian community would have to do their part to sustain the momentum that Whitney, Coleman and others had created during the war, and use it to push for equality with other Canadians.

As for the Indigenous men who served in the FCF and on the front lines, their experiences during the war motivated some bands and individuals such as Lieutenant Frederick O. Loft - one of only 17 Indigenous officers commissioned into the CEF during the war - of the Six Nations to organize formal protests against the Department of Indian Affairs’ treatment the Indigenous peoples of Canada. Loft described the goal of organizations such as the League of Indians of Canada as follows: “The principal aim of the league is… equality for the Indian as a citizen - equality that is in the two fold meaning of privilege and responsibility; and to achieve this objective, our first emphasis must be up[on improved educational and health programs”. 205

Prior to the formation of the League in 1918, band councils from across Canada had been inquiring of Prime Minister Borden what concessions he was willing to make on the issue of increased rights for the Indigenous peoples. One such letter sent by the Ontario Committee of Allied Tribes said, “We cannot say that we are fighting for our liberty, freedom, and other privileges dear to all nations, for we have none.” 206 Reports also arrived from W.M. Halliday, an Indian agent in British Columbia, that the Indigenous peoples of Kwawkewlth refused to support the war effort because they “were not voters and as they had not been consulted either with regard to the taking

203 Shaw, Most Anxious, pg. 574
204 Shaw, Most Anxious, pg. 575
205 Winegard, For King and Kanata, pg. 164
206 Winegard, For King and Kanata, pg. 132
away of their original heritage, or in the formation of any of our laws they did not feel called upon to take up arms for the flag”. 207 Both statements are expressions of the disenfranchisement felt by the Indigenous peoples during the war and into the post-war era.

Several Indigenous soldiers even wrote directly to Campbell Scott asking whether, in the words of Pte. M.E. Steinhauer, “we are going to get anything out of our country that we are going to fight for…what I want to find out is, is there a possible chance of us getting our franchise…after the war is over? I do not think it would be fair not to get anything out of a country that we are fighting for”. 208 However, neither Campbell Scott, nor Borden, nor Indian Affairs Superintendent General Arthur Meighen had any plans to extend the franchise to the Indigenous peoples. In his reply to G.B. Nicholson on the question of extending the franchise to the Indigenous peoples, Campbell Scott stated “They [Indigenous soldiers] have exactly the same rights as other soldiers, they have already their share in the Indian reserve lands… if you mean enfranchisement under the terms of the Indian Act, any Indian who can qualify has now the right to be enfranchised [by relinquishing his status as Indigenous]”. 209 Giving up one’s status as Indigenous was, however, almost unthinkable to most Indigenous peoples because, not only did it entail loss of benefits from the DIA, it also meant the individual had to leave their home and family on the reservation and give up forever the right to reside on the reservation.

While Campbell Scott strongly desired the Indigenous peoples to give up their status, thus hurrying the process of assimilation, men like Lt. Loft saw in this attitude as a complete disregard for what rights the Indigenous peoples possessed. Loft formed the League of Indians in Canada to protest such attitudes; to that end, the League’s constitution included a denouncement of the resident school system, a clause calling for equal treatment of Indigenous veterans and a plan for the creation of a political forum where amendments to the Indian Act could be discussed. 210 This was, according to Winegard, a significant act of self-determination and, at the same time, one of defiance. This is demonstrated in Loft’s choice to take a stance that asserted the rights of the Indigenous peoples to determine for themselves their future in Canada, a future in which the Indigenous peoples would be free of the overweening paternalism of men like Duncan Campbell Scott and Arthur Meighen.

207 Winegard, For King and Kanata, pg. 132
208 Winegard, For King and Kanata, pg. 133
209 Winegard, For King and Kanata, pg. 133
210 Winegard, For King and Kanata, pg. 164
To this end, Loft would dedicate himself to the fight for the rights of Indigenous peoples, especially Indigenous veterans who were routinely denied access to the benefits available to other Canadian Soldiers. This was one transgression that Loft and his fellow league members could not abide because it reinforced the fact that, despite having made exactly the same sacrifice as their fellow Canadians, the government still considered Indigenous veterans second class citizens. Indigenous veterans could not benefit from the sale of Dominion land - only 160 Indigenous veterans had received grants by 1920 - and they were routinely denied proper medical care. If they were given pensions or benefits, the payments were always issued to and controlled by the reserve’s Indian agent. While Loft and the League faced an uphill battle (for example, Campbell Scott routinely tried to deny them funding by proposing amendments to the Indian Act), they persevered for roughly a decade during which Loft and the League laid the groundwork for post-war Indigenous advocacy.

While the war provided opportunities for the Ukrainian community to engage in activism and patriotic war work, their deeds went largely unnoticed, being subsumed by the continued hostility demonstrated by the majority of Canadians. Even before the war ended, Ukrainian business were attacked by mobs of returned veterans who looted and destroyed restaurants, shops and community organizations in Winnipeg and Toronto in 1917. The soldiers also led mob attacks against factories that employed enemy or radical aliens, demanding that the owners fire all enemy aliens, regardless of their naturalization status. The authorities refused to protect the Ukrainians or their property during the three days of attacks in Toronto. Veterans also advocated for the confiscation of all property held by Ukrainians; they also advocated for deportation or disenfranchisement of Ukrainian immigrants. In a cruel twist of fate, the Ukrainian community was disenfranchised in September 1917; this was part of Robert Borden’s re-election scheme, which involved rigging the vote to sacrifice the rights of naturalized Ukrainians.

These attacks continued into the post-war period as returning veterans continued to harass the Ukrainian community and to lobby the federal government to seize all Ukrainian-owned property and to deport all Ukrainian immigrants. The increasingly anti-Ukrainian rhetoric can be partially attributed to the rising fears of Bolshevism, especially after the Bolshevik seizure of power in Russia in November 1917. Fears were already rife that Bolshevik propaganda was being smuggled through Germany and Holland to Western Europe during the last year of the war,

211 Melnycky, *Loyalties in Conflict*
212 Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada*, pg. 421
213 Martynowych, *Ukrainians in Canada*, pg. 423
so much so that warnings were distributed to all Canadians units, including the CFC, listing instructions on how to deal with communist propaganda if found.

The fears surrounding communism severely impacted the Ukrainian community in part because many Ukrainian men were involved in trade unionism and in socialist parties, both of which were viewed by the federal and provincial governments as subversive. Their members were labelled as communist sympathizers (a few were genuine supporters of Lenin) and were routinely threatened with arrest and deportation.\footnote{Martynowych, \textit{Ukrainians in Canada}, pg. 430} The military treated the Ukrainian soldiers who had served with the CFC as potential communist agents, especially in the wake of the riots at Kinmel Park, where Pte. Valentina Miculka, an Austro-Ukrainian, was sentenced to 10 years imprisonment for his part in the riots. As will be discussed in the final chapter, suspicion fell heavily upon the ranks of the CFC because so many of its soldiers had either been affiliated with or were members of trade unions - including unions such as the Industrial Workers of the World, which espoused socialist goals.\footnote{Desmond Morton, “Kicking and Complaining: Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-1919”, \textit{The Canadian Historical Review}, Vol. 61, No. 3 Sept. 1980, pp. 334-360.} The most Injurious action taken against the Ukrainian community was a complete ban on immigration from Eastern Europe in 1919 until 1924; the reasoning for the ban was that communist agents could easily infiltrate Canada if immigration from Eastern Europe were allowed to continue.\footnote{Martynowych, \textit{Ukrainians in Canada}, pg. 441}

Although the Ukrainian community demonstrated its loyalty to Canada during the war by volunteering to make the ultimate sacrifice for their new country, the community’s patriotic war work had little impact on the opinions of the majority of Canadians. Ukrainians were still viewed as politically subversive and as foreigners stealing jobs from Canadians. Ultimately, the Ukrainian community was not as successful as the Afro-Canadian and Indigenous communities at sustaining their wartime advocacy into the post-war period; nor was the service of an estimated ten thousand Ukrainian soldiers in the CFC enough to prove their loyalty to Canada.

Finally, as regards the service of the medically unfit, there is little to say about how they - as a group - were affected by their war service. Existing material on the subject of their war service is more focussed on the problems that were caused by the enlistment of medically unfit men, and on the post-war struggles of disabled veterans to obtain disability pensions. They often had to go to great lengths to prove their disability was the result of an injury suffered while serving in the military. What can be inferred about the service of medically unfit men in the CFC is...
that their service might have helped to counter some of society’s perceptions of the disabled. During the war, eugenicists such as Robert Dickie lamented that only the best men were lost; “It is the best of the nation that is lost in war”217 while the weak, disabled and cowardly were left behind in Canada. While some members of the Forestry Corps met some of the standard definitions of disability of the time, they were neither weak nor cowardly; their war service attested to their strength and courage. Even if they could not fight, they still demonstrated a great deal of courage to work in an industry where injury and death were considered an acceptable risk.

217 Clarke, Unwanted Warriors, pg. 119
Chapter 4: Shoring up the Supply Lines: The Operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps in Britain and France January 1917 - December 1917

1917 was a year of expansion and reorganization for the Canadian Forestry Corps, a year that witnessed their increasing importance to the Entente war effort. Over the course of that year, the CFC expanded its operations across the entirety of France, from Normandy to the Jura Mountains, all the way to the Spanish border. 1917 also saw the reorganization of the timber production in Britain and France as both nations sought to streamline the production and oversight of critical war materials. On the Western Front, the CFC played a critical role in three of the most important offensives that took place that year at Vimy Ridge in April, Hill 70 in May and Passchendaele in July. Without the direct assistance of the CFC, the massive infrastructure projects that were constructed to support these three offensives would likely have never been completed, which could very well have caused all of these offensives to fail. Using these three battles as examples, I will illustrate how the CFC contributed to the victories achieved by the CEF at Vimy Ridge and Hill 70, and to the partial victory achieved by the British at Passchendaele.

CFC Operations in France winter 1917

Starting in November 1916, the first CFC units began arriving in France, their arrival having been approved after Col. MacDougall’s initial discussions with Brig. Gen Chevalier in September. The decision had been made to expand the CFC’s operations into France for two reasons; firstly, the British wanted to shorten their supply lines by establishing logging camps closer to their front lines; and secondly, they wanted to more directly assist the French with producing timber for their military, much as they had been doing for Britain. The French government had

---

218 The decision was made to re-evaluate the war production after the Germans declared they would resume unrestricted submarine warfare starting in February 1917. More will be said regarding this issue later in the chapter.
requested the services of the CFC because extra labour was needed to help meet the ever-rising demand for timber products.219 While the French were not as desperate as the British were for timber, competition among the different branches of the military (including the British military) had created a scenario in which managing, as well as harvesting, the nation’s timber had become quite difficult. The CFC figured into the French government’s plan to reorganize the system by which timber was harvested; as well, the additional manpower was needed to help ensure a steady rate of production.

The War Timber Commission (WTC), established in October 1916, was the first joint organization under which the French, British/Imperials and Canadians agreed to cooperate and centralize their collective timber operations. Representatives from the Home Grown Timber Commission, the Ministere de Guerre (French Ministry of War) and the CFC were appointed to form a liaison council that would oversee the harvesting and production of timber in France. The council’s French representative Gen. Chevalier acted as the chair and was responsible for assigning coupes (cuts) to the various forestry units, including the CFC; Chevalier was also responsible for resolving any disputes and ensuring that each unit adhered to French forestry regulations. By the end of January, the WTC had assigned the CFC a total of eight districts in France where they could harvest timber. No. 9 and No. 10 Districts were located in northern France, forming the Army Areas Group; No. 5 and No. 6 Districts formed the Jura Group, located near the Swiss border in the Jura Mountains; No. 1 and No. 2 Districts formed the Central Group in Normandy; and lastly, No. 4 and No. 12 Districts formed the Bordeaux Group in Bordeaux near the border with Spain.220

Operations commenced relatively quickly, although a few problems were encountered along the way. For example, the rough terrain of the Jura Mountains required No. 22 Company’s soldiers (serving under Col. Johnson, O.C commanding Jura Group) to spend several weeks fixing the roads and building a water pipeline to the camp before the sawmill opened on March 22nd.221 The terrain also made transporting felled logs to the sawmills difficult because few methods of transport were suitable to such adverse conditions. Horse powered tramways and trucks were the safest and most reliable methods of transportation employed by the CFC in Britain and France.

219 France’s reserves of manpower were being stretched to their limit in the Spring of 1917, after 600,000 soldiers were lost at the Battle of Verdun.
220 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*, pg. 37
221 War Diary entry, HQ Jura Group, January 1917, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4517 HQ Jura Group File 43, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
The Canadians also began raising objections to the strict regulations under which they were required to work; French regulations prevented the Canadians from clear cutting the forests. The O.C. of No. 1 Company CFC noted, “Regulations are very severe in the French state forests; the destruction of new growth is reduced to a minimum [and] in some cases certain trees [must] be left for regeneration purposes”. The O.C. noted that French officials were quite apprehensive when the Canadians first started their operations, but after observing how the Canadian operated for two weeks, the officials were satisfied that the Canadians were operating within the French guidelines. By the end of February, roughly three thousand CFC soldiers were operating 15-20 sawmills spread out across France. By March, there were enough camps operating that Brig. MacDougall ordered Col. J.B. White to establish a separate Headquarters in France where White could oversee the operations of the CFC in France.

Prior to the arrival of Col. White, an alarming development underscored the importance of the CFC’s continued expansion into France, and that was the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare by Germany. Impatient with the lack of progress being made on the Western Front, the German Kaiser authorized the resumption of unrestricted submarine warfare in March 1917, effectively making every freighter and passenger liner a target for attack. Freed from the constraints of international law, U-boats began attacking British and French freighters much more often than they had over the previous year, sinking 464,599 tons of shipping in February, 507,001 tons in March and a staggering 834,549 tons in April. While the CFC could not intervene directly in the fight against the U-boats, they had been indirectly fighting the U-boats for the last nine months through their logging. As discussed in depth in the first chapter, timber was a bulky cargo that consumed space on board freighters, effectively restricting the import of essential foodstuffs and war materials into Britain. However, in the year since the CFC had begun operating, it had already reduced Britain’s total timber imports. Timber imports had already fallen by roughly 50%, from 11,500,000 tons in 1913 to 6,000,000 tons by January 1917 because of the German blockade of the Baltic Sea. While there are no firm statistics for exactly how much of a reduction the CFC was able to bring about after nine months, it can be estimated that production likely amounted to 1,000,000 tons. With an estimated one million tons of

---

222 War Diary entry, No.1 Company CFC, April 1916, RG 9 III D 3 Vol. 5017 File 761 No. Company CFC, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

cargo space freed up by the Forestry Corps work, the British - and allied - merchant fleets could load their hulls with valuable foodstuffs and war material instead of bulky shipments of timber.224

Alternatively, the Forestry Corps also worked towards reducing the amount of rations the corps drew from the Army Service Corps (ASC) - as a means of attaining greater self sufficiency - by starting a farm in the spring of 1917. According to Bird and Davies, the CFC received permission from Mr. A.J. Forrest, Deputy Surveyor H.M. Office of Woods and Forests, in the spring of 1917 to set up a farm near the Base Depot in Virginia Waters. The idea had been raised by several of CFC officers, who wondered whether the CFC could make a go of growing some of their own food rather than relying entirely on deliveries from the Army Service Corps. After the first farm proved to be a success, more farms were opened at camps all over Britain and, by the end of the year, there were 36 company farms with a total of 470 acres of farmland under cultivation, as well as a considerable herd of livestock, including 461 pigs.225 Interestingly, the farms were manned entirely by B2 category soldiers, likely to free other higher category soldiers for work elsewhere.226 The farms provided several tens of tons of food for the CFC, thereby reducing the amount of food the ASC had to send them. While the threat of U-boats persisted until the end of the war, the soldiers of the CFC had already reduced the U-boat threat to Britain without ever having fired a shot (or depth charge) in anger, proving that the Corps’ work on the Home Front had been just as valuable as that being performed by the CEF on the Western Front.

Home front

Having already mobilized four thousand foresters for service in France by March 1917, McDougall ordered the opening of base depot in Sunningdale near to Virginia Waters, in response to the rising demand for the services of the Forestry Corps in Britain and France. The base depot would serve two purposes, the first being as a mobilization centre where newly formed forestry companies could be established and dispatched from; and secondly it was to serve as a training centre for recruits lacking experience in forestry. While experienced foresters had made up the majority of recruits in the first three CFC drafts, most of the soldiers who began arriving as reinforcements in early 1917- products of Lt Gen. Watson’s recruitment efforts-had never worked in the forestry industry. Therefore, it was necessary to train the men before they were sent off to join a company, less they injure themselves or others. At

224 This is an estimate based upon available production records for the period.
225 Bird and Davies, Forestry Corps, pg. 31
226 A specialist NCO was also employed to oversee the curing of bacon, likely the most coveted job of the entire war.
its peak, 1500 men were passing through the camp each month, though not all were reinforcements; some were just being transferred while others were medically unfit men who had been Struck of Service (SOS).

While most of the men passing through Sunningdale in early 1917 were destined to serve in France, some were sent as reinforcements to the companies serving in Britain, because with the resumption of submarine warfare by Germany in March, the logistical support the CFC had thus far been providing was becoming more valuable by the day. By January 1917, British timber imports had dropped by 51.7% since 1913—a net loss of 5.6 million tons—a deficit which domestic production could not compensate for. For example, Welsh coal mines used a total of 120,000 tons of pit wood in 1913, while domestic timber production only amounted to 900,000 tons. The demands of war time would have pushed that amount up by a considerable margin—possibly to 150,000 tons—that goes without mentioning that the coal mines in Britain and Scotland would have experienced a similar demand for pit wood.

Supplies of timber were also needed for the railways, for ship builders and for the construction industry. Upon the outbreak of war, the needs of these industries rose quickly and considerably because, in order to meet the demands of fighting a modern industrial war, key industries such as arms and steel manufacturers had to increase their production. In order to increase production, the manufacturers had physically expand their factories or build new branches to accommodate the demands of the military.

Illus. 6. Dominion Coal Mine, Glace Bay, Nova Scotia, 1929. Library and Archives Canada, PA-014035

For example, at the beginning of the war, there were only two government operated manufacturers that supplied the British Army with arms and ammunition - the Royal Ordnance Factory and an explosives factory in
Waltham Abbey. There was also the Royal Arsenal in Woolwich, which was, according to R.J.Q. Adams, the sole manufacturer of artillery shells, gun mountings and gun carriages in 1914. Other manufacturers such as Vickers, Sons & Maxim LTD were also contracted to supply arms and ammunition to the army once the war began. However, these firms—both private and government owned—were small and lacked the production capacity to produce enough ammunition for the British armies. In 1915, Minister of Munitions Lloyd George ordered the immediate expansion of all government arms firms in order to increase production capacity. However, to do so required several hundred thousand tons of timber, at a time where timber imports had fallen off by an estimated 50%. Timber was necessary to build vital sections of the new factories including company offices, structural supports and branch lines to the new factories; without timber, British industry from mining and ship building to arms production and transportation would have struggled to carry on operations. Hundreds of thousands of tons of construction timber was felled and sawed by the CFC for domestic use, not only for construction and maintenance but also in the manufacturing processes as well. While the majority of the timber products that were used at the front line were manufactured by the CFC and shipped to the front, some products with wooden components were manufactured in Britain. Perhaps the most important product that should be mentioned is the Short Magazine Lee Enfield Mark III, the standard rifle of the British Army.

The Lee Enfield was an essential part of the soldier’s kit and, upon the outbreak of the war, the War Cabinet placed an order for over a million rifles to equip the millions of young men who had enlisted. The Lee Enfield was constructed primarily of wood and weighed 10.85 pounds, the majority of that weight being its wooden stock. It should also be mentioned that the limber and frame of the ubiquitous 18 pounder field gun were also made entirely of wood. Also, worth mentioning is how much the railways in Britain and France depended on regular deliveries of timber to continue functioning. Instead of discussing—as I already have—The railways’ need for timber for maintenance purposes in France has been addressed above. Here, I will discuss a problem the ROD experienced in the summer of 1917, a problem with which the CFC was uniquely suited to assist.

By the summer of 1917, the French national railway network was overworked; it simply could not handle the increased level of traffic it had taken on since the beginning of 1917. While the ROD had stepped in and

---

227 Adams, R.J.Q. *Arms and the Wizard, Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions 1915-1916*, (Collage Station, Texas A & M University, 1978), pg. 13
228 Adams, *Arms and the Wizard*
constructed a separate British gauge network, it did not have enough rolling stock to handle all its supply needs, leaving them reliant upon the French. By 1917, however, French authorities informed the BEF and ROD that, in order to continue transporting supplies for the British, they would need an extra 22,500 goods wagons. The connection here is that most rolling stock (save tanker cars and steam engines) were built entirely from wood in the early 20th century. While I have not found any records that indicate the CFC received a request to provide timber to build goods wagons, it is likely that, over the course of their service, they did, in fact, receive such a request.

**Vimy Ridge**

In the spring of 1917, the French Army was preparing for its grand offensive against the Aisne, despite the fact that the Germans were able to observe them from their newly occupied positions. As part of the French plan, the CEF was tasked with the capture of a strategic ridge - Vimy Ridge - that overlooked the large coal basin surrounding the city of Arras. Capturing the ridge would not be easy because the German Army had turned it into a fortress complete with machine gun bunkers, artillery emplacements and dozens of kilometres of hardened trenches and bunkers. The capture of the ridge required one of the largest logistical efforts of the war, that would see the Forestry Corps working in direct support of the Canadian Corps in the months leading up to the offensive.

To get a better understanding of the scale of the logistical difficulties the Forestry Corps was brought in to assist with at Vimy Ridge, picture the CEF as a small city of 170,000 soldiers rather than an army corps. While the needs of a Canadian city dweller and of a soldier serving on the Western Front in 1917 were certainly different in many regards, at a more basic level they were quite similar. Firstly, both needed a place to live, a shelter where they could eat, sleep and find protection from the elements; secondly, both needed a source of fresh drinking water and a sewage disposal system that would help prevent outbreaks of diseases such as cholera and dysentery; thirdly, both needed infrastructure, such as a transport system for people and goods, as well as power and phone lines. No city or, in this case, army could have functioned properly in the early twentieth century without these key pieces of infrastructure.

---

229 Aves, *R.O.D.*

230 German High Command had ordered a strategic retreat in the Aisne to newly prepared defensive positions in the months leading up to the French offensive.

231 The Canadian offensive at Vimy was part of the British Arras offensive, which was meant to act as a diversion for the French Aisne Offensive. Due to poor planning by the French, however, the Germans already knew where the main offensive was aimed and were not fooled by the British offensive.

232 In 1917, this would have constituted the third largest city in Canada by population after Montreal and Toronto.
Nor could any of the massive Canadian infrastructure projects at Vimy Ridge have been completed without the direct assistance of the CFC. Using the examples that I have listed above; I will illustrate how the CFC contributed to the victory achieved by the CEF at Vimy Ridge.

Starting with shelter, billets had to be provided for the 170,000 soldiers who occupied roughly 60 square kilometres of territory behind the front lines. Each branch of the service required either semi-permanent or permanent shelters, depending on their role in the upcoming battle. Officers were almost always given individual personal billets - in most cases a small wooden hut - as a reflection of their status within the army. As for the enlisted men, if they were lucky, they might have spent some of their time living in wooden barracks behind the lines when they were not in the trenches. When the soldiers were on the line, as most were prior to the attack, they resided in the front line and communication trenches. The soldiers also found shelter in the large underground caves carved out of the soft chalk earth around the ridge. These “subways”, as the Canadians called them, were dug as far as ten meters underground and they stretched for several kilometres under the Canadian lines. Several dozen tons of timber were needed to dig out the cave system and to construct interior supports to make it habitable because the caves functioned much like a military bunker, and not simply as a shelter.

Some battalions had their headquarters located in the caves so billets for several hundred men were also built into the caves, as were small medical offices and store rooms for several tons of small arms ammunition. Most importantly, the caves provided the attacking battalions with shelter from German artillery fire; instead of having to march over ground to the front, the subways allowed them to move underground directly to the front line. Prior to an attack, the battalions were grouped into the subways and marched forward before going over the top, thus giving them the best possible chance of success.

Aside from housing soldiers, more permanent quarters were required to house the headquarters for the corps divisions, regiments and battalions in addition to the other branches of the CEF that were not infantry. Each building had to have enough space for each senior officer to have a personal office and for a large central open workspace to house the clerks and other HQ staff. Smaller buildings were also needed to house telephone and telegraph offices and for general storage of supplies such as food, weapons and ammunition. The Canadian Artillery

234 Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, pg. 250
235 There were, on average, nine senior HQ staff and approximately twenty other staff members.
also used enormous amounts of lumber to construct their billets because the gun crews resided in underground
dugouts where they could find shelter in case the Germans targeted their battery with artillery. The gun crews also
had to place several layers of timber beneath the guns to prevent them from sinking into the mud. As well, the
Canadians had to build storage for their equipment and ammunition and duck board walkways to protect soldiers
from the ever-present mud.

Before proceeding further in my discussion of corps supply and communication systems, the source of the
CEF’s supply of timber from the CFC must be noted. Since late November 1916 (as discussed earlier), the CFC had
been making steady progress constructing and operating a network of sawmills across France, including three
sawmills set up in the rear area to the east of the ridge. On February 13th, the soldiers of No. 25 Company were the
first to start logging near the town of Blavincourt, followed by No. 27 Company on March 3rd near Toutencourt and
No. 26 Company on March 4th near Blavincourt.236

Each company was capable of sawing roughly 25,000 to 35,000 FBM of timber (equivalent to
approximately 8 tons of sawn material) each day for the Canadians at Vimy Ridge. According to the needs of the
CEF - as stated in each district’s monthly allotments - the CFC focused on producing sawn defence material for use
in the trenches, telegraph and power poles for use by the signal corps and 2 inch road slabs for the pioneer units
responsible for road repairs. The CFC also provided a great deal of the timber used for most other general purposes,
including the construction of billets, wooden boxes and handles for shovels, picks and axes. In January alone, the
Engineer in Chief of the BEF ordered 994,620 defence poles and 350,000 wooden pickets, while the Director of
Light Railways and Roads France ordered 100,000 pit props.237

236 Bird and Davies, Forestry Corps, pg. 49
237 Allotment record, H.Q. Jura Group, January 1917, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4517 HQ Jura Group France File 45,
Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
The three local sawmills also supplied telegraph and power poles to the CEF. Since most communications were wire-based, poles were needed to carry the communication and power lines above ground in the rear. There were 105.6 kilometres of above ground communications lines already in place by the time the Canadians arrived, to which they likely added several dozen kilometres and repaired dozens more. Supplying the (British) Army Signal Corps (ASC) or Canadian Army Signal Corps was no easy task; a B class pole had a minimum length of 14 feet and a maximum of 22 feet, while an A class pole had minimum of 22 feet and a maximum of 34 feet. A total of 7,500 A class and 12,000 B class poles were supplied to the ASC during the month of April. Timber was also needed for construction of a 72 Km water pipeline that helped supply an average of 2.3 million litres of water needed for the 170,000 soldiers and 50,000 horses. For all their other daily needs, the Corps relied on a network of roads and light railways to transport the 2,500 tons of supplies the CEF required each day.238

Returning to the subject of transport, everything from loaves of bread and rifles to boots and artillery shells had to be moved up from railheads situated upwards of 25 Km behind the front lines. Horse-drawn General Service (GS) wagons and three ton lorries were the principal means of transport early in the war, but they left much to be desired because their carrying capacity was limited, meaning dozens of wagons and lorries were needed to transport the supplies needed at the front. This was never an easy job because roads were almost always in very poor

238 Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, pg. 249
condition; the roads were often pitted with shell holes and littered with the remains of vehicles, horses and soldiers unlucky enough to have been caught in a German barrage. The weather also often reduced the roads into little more than long muddy tracks, impassable to man, beast and vehicle.

The easiest solution to this problem was to construct a double lane plank road that ran all the way through the Canadian sector, although to build one on the scale needed at Vimy, the pioneers needed approximately 20,000 metres of planks just to place one layer on the main road. Fortunately, the CFC was able to supply - by way of the three local sawmills - an average of 30,000 metres of road planking each day in the weeks leading up to the offensive.239 This allowed the CEF to maintain their supply lines during a critical period leading up to the offensive, a period when the Canadian Artillery was engaged in counter battery work against the German batteries situated on the reverse slope of the ridge.240

The CEF also employed light railways and tramways to transport supplies to the front lines. To properly understand just how effectively the light railways were used, we must pivot away from Vimy and look at the battle that occurred several weeks later outside of Lens at Hill 70. Hill 70 was the name given to another prominent ridge in the Arras sector not far from the site of the recently captured Vimy Ridge.241 Just as at Vimy, the area around the town of Lens, which Hill 70 overlooked, had been fortified by Germans who had built concrete bunkers armed with machine guns, deep bunkers and several kilometres of interconnected trench lines. In order to take Hill 70, Maj. Gen Arthur Currie, O.C. CEF, ordered Lt. Gen Andrew McNaughton, O.C. CEF Artillery, to prepare an extensive bombardment program that would hopefully demolish the German’s fortifications. In order for McNaughton’s program to succeed, each gun would have to be supplied with an average of two dozen tons of ammunition each day for weeks leading up to the battle.

---

239 This was important because plank roads were only used as a stop gap measure to reinforce the existing roads in the sector and to make them passable to vehicles. The constant weight of hundreds of trucks every day, combined with an almost constant level of rot, made it difficult to maintain the plank roads. German artillery regularly chewed up large sections of the road each day, leaving it deeply pitted. Regular deliveries of fresh road planking to the pioneers were needed in order to keep the road in a passable condition.
241 Vimy had been stormed by the Canadians on Easter morning, resulting in a resounding victory in what would prove to be an otherwise miserable failure to the start of the campaigning season.
In order to supply the weight of shells needed (the daily average was roughly 1,000 tons of shells) to complete McNaughton’s pre-battle bombardment, the Canadians used the 50 Km of light railway they inherited from the British. The British had begun using narrow gauge light railways in 1915/16 after coming into possession of tracks and rolling stock left behind at French coal mines during the retreat from Northern France in 1914. While the first networks were more of a point to point connections with one set of tracks laid down and running from supply dumps in the rear to the trenches, the networks became more complex as the months went by. In turn, the demand for narrow gauge (60 cm) railroad sleepers rose steadily because the existing stocks found in the French mines were soon exhausted. The demand was acknowledged by CFC HQ; in a letter from Lt. Col. John Burton White, OC commanding CFC France, to Col. Johnson, OC commanding Jura District, he ordered that production of 60 cm sleepers be prioritized. White also ordered that all trench sleepers be sawed in a such a manner that made them easily convertible into 60-cm sleepers if the need should arise. Similar orders were given in respect mining timber and road slabs so both items could be converted into standard gauge sleepers if shortages occurred.242

Demand rose because British logistics officers found the light railways to be an incredibly efficient means of transportation, more so than either the horse-drawn General Service Wagons (GS wagons) or lorries. The light railways were easy to construct because the Royal Engineers manufactured the tracks in pre-built sections so all that was required was to level the ground, place the tracks and connect them before laying a bed of ballast on top of the

---

sleepers. The trains were also faster and could be run in daylight, as opposed to trucks which risked drawing German artillery fire. Most importantly, the cargo capacity of each train was larger than that of a column of trucks or wagons.243

Enormous quantities of wood were required to build and maintain these networks in addition to the standard gauge network the British already operated. Timber was used to build several important pieces of infrastructure for British railways; those infrastructure elements included stations, water towers, engine sheds and, most importantly, sleepers. Standard gauge sleepers (preferably cut from oak) were 8ft 6in pieces of timber to which the steel tracks were bolted to hold them in place. However, roughly 1,000 oak trees (each tree yielding on average 2 or 3 sleepers) had to be cut down to lay one mile of track (1.6 km) because each mile of track required 2,000 sleepers. To understand this better, the distance by rail between the port of Dunkirk and the British logistical hub in Amiens is 203 kilometres; to cover this distance, the CFC would have had to fell 126,000 oak trees and saw them into 252,000 sleepers.244

Returning to the light railway at Hill 70, the network was 60 kilometres in length by May 1917 and served several important purposes. The most important being the movement of supplies from the railheads 20 kilometres to the rear up to the front lines. Gen. Currie estimated that “A single day’s narrow gauge traffic…relieved 2,640 men, 3,074 horses, 26 GS [General Service] limbered wagons, 495 GS wagons and 291 motor trucks for other duties”245. The light trains were far more efficient than several trucks or wagons because a single narrow gauge rail car could carry 800 rounds of 18-pounder shells. In comparison, a three-ton truck could only carry 224 rounds and a GS wagon could only carry 108 rounds. The carrying capacity was important because of the volume of shells (300,000 18-pounder, 150,000 4.5-inch and 250,000 howitzer rounds) that Currie planned to throw at the surrounding German defences. An astonishing 71,000,000 303-calibre rounds were also fired by 160 machine guns over the four weeks prior to the battle.246 At Vimy, the light railways moved a total of 800 tons (32%) of the 2,500 tons of daily supplies

243 Aves, R-O-D
244 This only accounts for one stretch of track that the British operated out of the several thousand miles they laid down during the war. As well, this only accounts for sleepers and not other timber structures the ROD would have constructed.
245 Durflinger, Douglas E. and Delaney, Serge Marc, Hill 70: Canada’s Forgotten Battle of the First World War, (Vancouver, UBC Press, 2016), pg. 149
246 The total estimate of 71,000,000 rounds is based on the allocation of 20,000 rounds per gun per day over a period of 28 days.
required by the CEF, as well as providing direct access to the “subways” because the engineers had built tracks into some of the larger caves.247

Another role served by the light railways was moving reinforcements forward and evacuating the wounded. One train could haul a company of soldiers (200 men) forward in one go, lessening the time they spent exposed to German artillery observers and German artillery. On the other hand, wounded men could be loaded onto specially designed wagons resembling bunk beds on rails that could accommodate four wounded soldiers each. Moving the wounded by light rail meant they were often seen by doctors far more quickly than if they were moved by road or carried by stretcher bearers. The Canadians used 300 push trucks for evacuating the wounded by light railways at Vimy.

Therefore, sleepers (standard, metre and 60-cm gauge) were often among the most requested items listed in each district’s allotment records. In September, for example, the Central Group sawed a total of 70,000 standard gauge sleepers, as well as 180,000 narrow gauge (60-cm) sleepers.248 Although this was four months after the battle had ended at Vimy and three months after the capture of Hill 70, the British/Imperial forces had become mired in another offensive that began in late July in the Ypres Salient. The Third Battle of Ypres, better known as Passchendaele, had quickly turned into a living horror show - hell on earth in the opinion of most soldiers - defined in large part by the unrelenting rain that turned the battlefield into a muddy hellscape.

Military Situation Summer 1917

The summer of 1917 was a worrisome time for the Entente as sections of the French Army mutinied after a disastrous series of offensives in the spring, leaving the French Army paralyzed offensively for about six months. Unfortunately for the British, they were then left in the unenviable position of having to carry out their planned summer offensive without French support and against well prepared German defences. The British plan involved attacking northward from the Ypres Salient, with the final objective being the capture of Germany’s U-Boat bases at Zeebrugge. Field Marshal Haig declared the capture of the U-Boat pens to be imperative because Britain could not continue to sustain such massive shipping losses if it were to continue fighting.249 Losses had been so high that,

247 Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, pg. 250
248 Production record Central Group CFC, September 1917, RG 9, III C 8 Vol. 4504 HQ Central Group France File 31, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
249 Hart, The Great War
by May, Britain only had at best a five and a half week reserve of grain left, with total imports of food stuffs having fallen from 16.7 million tons in 1914 to 13.8 million in 1917.250

Additionally, starting in the late spring of 1917, German air raids against British cities resumed, though instead of Zeppelins, the Germans sent long range Gotha Heavy Bombers. The Gotha bomber threat proved difficult to combat because of a lack of pilots - hundreds of pilots became casualties during Bloody April - and a lack of suitable aerodromes to house Royal Flying Corps home defence squadrons. Consequently, the RFC once again turned to the CFC to provide foresters to do aerodrome construction work, as it had done in September 1916 at the height of the Zeppelin threat.

Aerodrome Construction

While the British and Canadians were successful in capturing Vimy Ridge and in other smaller offensives, the Royal Flying Corps suffered tremendous losses during the month of April. Losses totaled 245 planes shot down and 207 out of 400 aircrew killed in action. While the RFC was able to absorb the losses, it could not afford to sustain a rate of attrition that high without suffering a degradation of its combat efficiency. Compounding this was the dire need for new pilots not just on the Western Front but on the Home Front as well for defence against the new German Gotha Bombers that had begun to launch raids on London starting that spring. Though, just as had been the case against the Zeppelins in September 1916, the RFC lacked enough aerodromes to base their home defence squadrons out of; additionally, the RFC also needed new aerodromes where they could train new pilots, away from the chaos of the Western Front.

Consequently, the RFC once again turned to the Canadian Forestry for assistance in the matter of aerodrome construction because “the labour market had been effectively drained by the enlistments of the preceding months of [the] war, and such labour as there was available for Aerodrome construction work was of a very inferior calibre and entirely unfitted for rushing the heavy surface work required for preparing the land for [use by] Aircraft”.251 The RFC quickly negotiated a deal with the CFC for “several working parties”-Nos. 123 and 124 companies- to begin work on aerodrome construction in June/July 1917, under the command of Lt Col.

250 Stevenson, David, With our Backs to the Wall: Victory and Defeat in 1918, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2013), pg. 375
Featherstonehaugh. The foresters received high praise from the RFC, because in comparison to the available civilian and army labour, the forester proved they were the superior choice for the job at hand. No. 123 company commanded by Major Head began work at Andover in the county Hampshire while No. 124 company commanded by Major J.J. Bull began work in July 1917. Two additional companies-Nos. 142 and 143 were mobilized from Sunningdale in August at the request of the RFC who urgently wanted the CFC to mobilize additional labour, because of how rapidly the first two companies completed their work. With four hundred foresters working on aerodrome construction by September 1917, McDougall created No. 56 District to oversee the operations of the four companies for the remainder of the war.  

One such aerodrome constructed and or expanded by the Forestry Corps was Stow Maries. Situated along the Thames Estuary, Stow Maries had been built in 1916 as a base for a home defence squadron. Although work on the airfield did not commence until August 30th, 1918, the work undertaken by the Canadian foresters is representative of the work carried out between July 1917 and November 1918. The work mostly consisted of expanding the existing runway and laying drainage pipes as the area was likely prone to flooding due to its proximity to the Thames Estuary. Work was also done on parts of the runway to lengthen it and shore up some areas that may have been damaged by local flooding. The work required 63 days and 422 hours to complete at a cost of 672 British pounds and was finished one day after the armistice was signed on November 12th, 1918. By the time operations ceased in March 1919, the foresters of No. 56 District had constructed or improved 110 aerodromes throughout Britain. This should be considered a significant achievement because there were only 435 foresters employed in aerodrome construction during the 20 months of operations. On average, each working party consisted of about forty men per site so it is quite remarkable that so few men were able to accomplish so much. It should also be noted that several of the aerodromes constructed by the Canadian Forestry Corps during the Great War would continue to be used during the Second World War, including RAF Biggin Hill.

252 The District record for fastest job competition was 20 days, set by a party of 40 men in Feb/Mar 1918 when they completed 4,400 cubic yards of excavation and fill, 13,840 yards of grading and three acres of steam rolling, in addition to erecting several hutments.  
253 War Diary July 1917-March 1919, No. 56 District, RG 9 III D 3 Vol. 5019 File No. 766, Canadian Forestry Corps Archives, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.  
254 Two machine shops were established by the Corps for No. 56 District - one in Grantham and one at Reading - so that the Corps could manufacture and repair all the equipment used by the Aerodrome construction companies.
Passchendaele

Preparations for Haig’s summer offensive were completed by July; much as had happened at the Somme the previous summer, however, Haig’s offensive came to a grinding halt almost as soon as it began. Slated to begin on July 28th, heavy rains forced Haig to declare a three day delay. The delay did not help because the rain resumed mere hours after the offensive re-commenced on July 31st. After four days of heavy rain, the ground had become morass of mud stretching for kilometres in every direction. For some soldiers, the rain felt as though “some malevolent deity had opened a tap in the heavens…it rained as no man since Noah had ever remembered it raining before”\textsuperscript{255}. Further offensive operations were impossible for some time because neither man nor beast could make any progress in the face of such horrific conditions. The front lines were difficult if not impossible to reach in certain areas because, after almost a week of constant rain, the mud was waist deep. Supplies could not be brought up because horses often became stuck up to their bellies, while soldiers found the terrain equally impassable and exhausted soldiers were trapped at the front, hungry, low on ammunition and without relief. With the Fifth Army’s (Commanded by Gen. Hubert Gough) supply and logistics system thrown into chaos, a solution was badly needed to restore the flow of men and material to the front lines. The only practicable solution was to construct a network of wooden walkways across the battlefield, over which reinforcements and supplies could be moved towards the front lines. At first glance, this might seem like an easy task - just lay down wooden boards from point A to point B.

However, it was much more complicated than a simple point to point connection; instead, it should be visualized as a series of interconnecting pathways spreading out over the battlefield like a subway system map.

Within weeks, several hundred kilometres of duckboards were crisscrossing the battlefield, with long lines of infantry slowly shuffling over them on their way to the front. The only way to cross No-Man’s-Land was over the duckboard walkways because the mud had become so dense that it did not simply slow down the soldiers and their horses; in some cases, soldiers drowned in the mud after becoming stuck in it. The ground had become so saturated that it could not physically absorb any more water, causing it to pool across the entire Ypres region. According to Pte. Magnus McIntyre Hood of the 24th Battalion, 2nd Division, “For our infantry, the approach to the line had to be [made] along duckboards of slats laid on top of the mud. They provided fairly secure footing but to step off into the mud was fatal. Men fell into the morass and just disappeared”. An officer, Lt. Jim Annan, described in horrifying detail how the rain tormented his section of the Royal Scottish Regiment after they took shelter in a deserted German blockhouse: “There was a lull in the shelling and through the machine gun slit on the back wall of the pillbox we heard this terrible kind of gurgling noise. It was the wounded, lying there sinking, and this liquid mud burying them alive, running over their faces into their mouth and nose”.

---

256 The area also has a very high water table (1 meter below ground); after three years of shelling the last of the region’s drainage systems were destroyed so all the excess rainwater had nowhere to go.
257 Lloyd, Passchendaele, pg. 279.
258 Macdonald, Passchendaele, pg. 128
While the infantry certainly had the worst of it at Passchendaele, the BEF’s artillery gunners also endured their fair share of suffering as well. The gunners faced the same problems as the infantry because it was difficult to move up regular supplies of shells, replacement parts and food. More problematic was the difficulty the gunners faced when it came to keeping their guns in working order; the constant rain and mud was not conducive to the proper functioning of the guns. With the mud reaching a depth of a metre (just over three feet) or more across the entire battlefield, it was almost impossible to find any solid ground on which to mount the Fifth Army’s artillery. More often than not, the guns became mired in so much thick muck that their crews were forced to abandon them where they sat. To quote Pte. Hood again, “The whole countryside is a complete morass. It was impossible to move any artillery in the deep mud, because horses sank in it right up to their bellies and had to be abandoned [shot]”.259

Therefore, the gunners resorted to building large wooden platforms underneath their guns, so the guns would not sink (at least, not too much) into the ground. According to Nick Lloyd, “It was found that a raft of 3-inch planks spiked to sleepers and supported on piles driven deep into the earth worked as well as could be expected, although when no wood was available, batteries had to make do with laying down a bed of sandbags, covered with a sheet of corrugated iron”.260 Although this provided the relief the gunners needed, the mud still impeded the movement of the guns, unless they were moved along the 560 kilometres of plank roads that were built at Passchendaele.

In response to the dire circumstances at Ypres, the CFC worked to supply the Fifth Army with as much timber as could be humanly sawed by the men each week. Orders were given that each camp in Britain and France should run day and night shifts- 10-12 hours in length-each day from August onwards. Using the best available records from the Central Group (located in Normandy) during the height of the battle between September and November, the eight companies then working produced approximately 5,565,000 FBM of timber, accounting for 2% of total timber logged by the Central Group during the entire war. Production and allotment records for the Central Group indicate that, from September onwards, forest planking (used in the construction of duckboards), 2 ½ inch road slabs and railways sleepers (60-cm, standard and meter gauges) were to be prioritized above all else. Additionally, during the height of the battle in September, the Central Group produced a total of 59,000 road slabs, 13,500 forest planks, 82,000 60-cm sleepers and 79,500 standard French sleepers. The Central Group also produced

259 Lloyd, Passchendaele, pg. 279.
260 Lloyd, Passchendaele, pg. 279.
3,980,000 pieces of sawn defence timber, 840,000 pieces of forest planking, 120,000 standard gauge sleepers and 280,000 60-cm sleepers. The increases in production clearly show that, during the worst periods of the Third Battle of Ypres - especially September and November - the British relied heavily on the CFC to supply desperately needed timber products to their armies.

In appreciation for the CFC’s service, Brig. Gen. Lord Lovat, the British military’s Director of Forestry sent a personal letter of thanks to O.C. Central Group Lt. Col. C.H.L. Jones. The letter stated: “I wish to put on record my appreciation of the services rendered by the Central Canadian Group by their output of timber last month [September], which amounted to no less than 32,278 tons. This record of production reflects the greatest credit on the organising power of Col. Jones and his Group and District Headquarters and is a standing testimony to the hard work put in by Officer and men of the Canadian Forestry [Corps] Companies and the Transport Services. The “fighting material” shipped forward at a most critical time, and fully half the timber produced by the Group in September is now in the battle area [Flanders]. The successes won this month [October] have, on account of the adverse weather conditions, greatly depended on the facilities for rapid movement of personnel, guns and ammunition afforded by wood roads and railways (standard, metre and 60 c.m. gauge). The Central Canadian Group with 23,149 tons of sawn lumber produced can justly claim their full share of the credit.”

Field Marshal Sir Dougal Haig also passed along his personal thanks to the CFC and all other Imperial forestry units. The Field Marshal’s dispatch read as follows: “In the Spring of 1917 the activities of the Army were extended by the formation of a Forestry Directorate, controlling Royal Engineer and Canadian Forestry [Corps] Companies, to work certain forest areas in France and provide material for the use of our [armies] and the French Armies. By September 1917, the [British] Army had become practically self-supporting as far as regards timber, and during the active period of working from May to October, over three quarters of a million tons of timber were supplied for [use by] the British Army. Included in this timber was material sufficient to construct over 350 miles of plank roads and to provide sleepers for 1,500 miles of railway beside great quantities of sawn timber for hutting and defences and many thousands of tons of round timber fascines and fuel. The bulk of the fuelwood is being obtained

261 Production record Central Group CFC, September 1917, RG 9, III C 8 Vol. 4504 HQ Central Group France File 31, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
262 All sawn defence timber was to be at least 3 feet in length, and 1-3 inches thick.
263 Production record Central Group CFC, September 1917, RG 9, III C 8 Vol. 4504 HQ Central Group France File 31, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
from woods already devastated by artillery fire. These Forestry and Quarry Units have proved of great value and have been the source of very considerable economy. My special thanks are due to the French Forestry Authorities as well as to the Comite Inter-Allie des Bois de Guerre, for their assistance in our negotiations regarding the acquisition of woods and forest areas. ”

Taken together, Lovat and Haig’s letters both illustrate that, by the winter of 1917, the impact that the CFC was having on the conduct of the war on the Western Front must have been significant. For example, Haig stated that the CFC and Royal Engineers supplied enough railroad sleepers for 1,500 miles (2,400 Km) of track. This equates to 3 million railroad sleepers which would have required felling and sawing 1.5 million oak trees. This is an astonishingly large number of sleepers considering this likely accounts for only standard gauge track that the British laid and likely does not account for light rail track or French gauge track. What should also be considered is the fact that this is only the figure for railroad sleepers and does not take into account the other timber products the CFC was responsible for manufacturing. To properly understand exactly how many timber products and how much of them the CFC was actually manufacturing, we must take our focus off of the battlefield and refocus on the home front in both Britain and France.

Military situation fall/winter 1917

By the early winter of 1917, the Entente Armies had suffered what was perhaps their worst year by far. While gains had been made on the Western front, they were modest at best. The greatest success was the capture of Vimy Ridge. Elsewhere, the Italians continued to suffer the effects of their devastating defeats during the summer, while in Russia, the newly installed Communist government had signed a ceasefire with Germany, effectively removing the Entente’s largest partner from the war. Nevertheless, hopes remained high that the war could be ended in the next year because, after the entry of the United States into the war in April, the Entente felt a renewed sense of hope that victory might yet be achieved.

The arrival of the Americans also prompted changes to the War Timber Commission; in September, both the Americans and the Belgians were admitted to the commission, which was renamed the Allied Timber Commission. Changes also occurred within the CFC command structure as Col. MacDougall was promoted to the

264 War Diary HQ Jura Group, September 1917, RG 9 III D 3 Vol. 5016 File 751, HQ Jura Group CFC, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

265 Hart, *The Great War*
rank of Brig. Gen. in June and made the Director of Forestry Operations in Britain and France. In turn, MacDougall promoted his deputy William Hepburn to the rank of colonel and to the position of Assistant Director CFC. John White and Verner White were both promoted to colonel and made, respectively, Director of Forestry Operations France and Directory of Forestry Operations Britain. Operations in France had also expanded beyond expectations. By the end of the CFC’s first year in France, there were a total of 58 companies operating in France staffed by 10,386 O.R. and officers, 4,865 attached labourers and 3,600 horses and mules.266 A technical warehouse was established in Le Havre, as were a series of hospitals such as those established in La Joux and Champignole by Lt. Col. F.W.E. Wilson. This allowed the soldiers to receive treatment locally, sparing them an extended journey away from their district and it allowed the engineers to repair damaged equipment more efficiently.267

By December 1917, the CFC had established almost 100 logging camps throughout Britain and France and had contributed significantly to the military successes achieved by the British, Canadian and Imperial armies. On land, the CFC had helped the CEF twice achieve victory, first at Vimy Ridge and later at Hill 70, and had provided extensive assistance to the BEF during their Passchendaele offensive. The aerodrome construction companies had also finished building about a dozen aerodromes by the end of the year. The CFC had achieved even greater success at sea by helping to blunt the damage caused by the increase in U-Boat attacks. By cutting lumber in Britain and France, enough tonnage was freed up to import more food to feed several million British civilians, despite the increase in sinkings. The extra food imports helped the British government to restore the nation’s grain reserves to fourteen weeks by August and ensured that the average civilian’s daily calorie intake never fell more than three percent below the recommended daily average of 3,200 calories. However, with the Entente armies exhausted after a hard year of fighting for little gains and with Germany poised to make a potentially war ending move, the fighting and sawing both looked like they would continue far into 1918 and possibly into 1919.

Chapter 5: Keep the saws sharp and the timber flowing: The Operations of the Canadian Forestry Corps

January 1918 - March 1919

1918 was the year in which the Canadian Forestry Corps proved how critical it was to the continuation of the Entente war effort. During the course of the year, the CFC provided invaluable support to the British/Imperial and French armies as they struggled to cope with the damage caused first by the German Spring Offensive and later by the German retreat during the Hundred Days Offensive. The chaotic German attacks between March and June severed vital railway and road links all along the Western Front, which links had to be repaired or rerouted. Lines of communication and defence had to be rebuilt almost from scratch, as did supply depots and railheads, each project requiring several hundred to several thousands of tons of timber. Further support was rendered during the final Hundred Days Offensive in August and to the French in support of their ambitious aircraft construction program. It was also the year that saw the cementing of lasting friendships between CFC soldiers and local populations. British and French civilians were often enamoured by the arrival of Canadian lumberjacks to their rural villages and, as such, invited the soldiers into their homes and lives. In some cases, such as the towns of Ampthill in Britain and Alencon in France, the connections proved so strong that lasting bonds were formed between the locals and the Canadian foresters, which bonds have lasted for over a century and continue to be an important part of each community’s heritage.

Military Situation winter 1918

The start of 1918 was quite as usual, with both the Entente and German armies hunkered down in their winter quarters as both sides waited to resume offensive action come early spring. The situation still looked quite grim for the Entente, their men and morale having been worn down after months of fighting for no appreciable gains. The German army, on the other hand, had caught its second wind over the winter with the influx of 300,000 soldiers transferred from the Eastern Front. The transfer of reinforcements to the Western Front was part of Field Marshal Hindenburg’s and Gen. Ludendorff’s plan (known as Operation Michael) to launch a massive offensive against the Entente. The objective was to deliver a knock-out blow to the Entente by capturing Paris and then dictating peace terms to the Entente. While the Entente suspected that the Germans were planning an offensive,
there was little they could do to counter the German plans because their armies were still recovering from the previous year’s fighting. It looked as though the Entente was running out of time because, by mid-March, intelligence reports indicated that the German offensive could happen at any given time. Until the spring campaign season started, however, the soldiers continued on with the mind numbing routines that accompanied extended periods of inactivity in the trenches.268

**Outside the cut**

Boredom and winter weather affected the foresters as much as they did the soldiers serving in the trenches; while there was always work to do in the logging camps, 12 hour shifts cutting trees in knee-deep snow took its toll on the men. The soldiers serving in the Jura Mountains (Jura Group) had to contend with freezing temperatures that routinely reached below zero Celsius between December and early March. Those soldiers serving in No. 2 Construction Company who had enlisted from the Southern United States found the cold particularly unbearable.269 Eventually, a transfer to the Central Group in Normandy was authorized in the early spring, after the Battalion O.C.’s initial request had been denied in November 1917.270 Besides the protest from No. 2 Company, there were few other official complaints from O.C. in the district, although it is likely that some private complaints made by the foresters were never formally recorded.

Fortunately, the soldiers were well provided for in terms of entertainment and recreational activities by branches of the local Red Cross and, in Britain, by the CFC troupe of amateur performers known as the Woodpeckers. As seen in the image below the Woodpeckers were members of the CFC who travelled around Britain putting on shows for the soldiers. They performed a variety of comedic acts, musical numbers and patriotic songs. Sports competitions between the various companies were also held when time permitted, for example, on Dominion Day (Canada Day). King George V and Queen Mary often made an appearance at the sporting events held in Sunningdale near the Royal Palace in Windsor, while Princess Anne became an informal patron to the soldiers, ensuring they never lacked for recreational material in the Y.M.C.A. huts.271 In an expression of their

---

268 Hart, *The Great War*
269 Letter regarding health of soldiers, HQ Jura Group, November 1917, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4516 HQ Jura Group File 11/12, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
270 Letter requesting transfer of No. 2 Construction Battalion, HQ Jura Group, November 1917, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4516 HQ Jura Group File 11/12, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
271 Bird and Davies, *Forestry Corps*
gratitude, the soldiers constructed a beautiful log cabin on the grounds of Windsor Palace for the Royal Family in 1917.

The Canadians were also known for inviting the local townspeople to their sports competitions, which helped foster close relationships with the locals in the towns near their camps. The relationships established between the soldiers of the 126th Company CFC and the townspeople of Ampthill were very close and remain so to this day. According to Sgt. Herman L. Porter, the relationship between the Canadians and townspeople was hostile at first, for the locals were quite distressed about the forthcoming destruction of Ampthill’s natural beauty. Porter stated, “In all of Bedfordshire no place had been better known for centuries as an ideal spot for picnics and for lovers’ walks than was the noted Ampthill Pines.” However, in the weeks following the company’s arrival on August 25th, 1917, the locals acknowledged the necessity of the Canadian logging operations and soon grew to respect and admire the Canadian lumberjacks.

---

272 Former town councilman Stephen Hartley led a campaign to restore the grave of Pte. Avard Dimock in time for the centenary of the Armistice.  
273 Porter, Herman L. A Review of Activities of the 126th Company Canadian Forestry Corps While Stationed at Ampthill Bedfordshire (Bedfordshire, Bedfordshire Times Publishing Company Ltd. 1919)  
274 In regard to any episodes of racism or discrimination in Britain, my research has not revealed evidence of such episodes. It is likely that racist incidents occurred but went undocumented by camp authorities for one reason or another.
Soon enough, the locals became captivated with the Canadians’ forestry work. This fascination caused some safety problems, and the town council had to order four policemen to chase away onlookers who got too close to the sites where the Canadians were felling trees. The bond between the townspeople and the Canadians grew steadily deeper as the months passed, to the point where Canadians were a welcome sight in town and were often invited into local homes, an act that provided the soldiers with a sense of home that helped to combat homesickness. This bond inevitably lead to romantic relationships between a few of the local women and some of the Canadians. One soldier, Avard Dimock of Mount Uniacke, Nova Scotia, began a relationship with Rose Ellen in the spring of 1918. They were married on June 27th but, in a cruel twist of fate, the marriage only lasted five months, after Dimock contracted the Spanish Flu and died on the 31st of October 1918. While the majority of the interactions between the Canadians and the local civilian populations were often quite positive (for example, Pte. Ferdinand Michiels rescued an elderly French civilian who almost fell underneath a moving train), there were also many negative interactions as well.

Inevitably, there was also a dark side to some of the Canadian soldiers’ interactions with the locals; soldiers were often accused of stealing from nearby homes. Most often, the stolen items were money, food, drink and clothing but, in other cases, it was livestock, as was the case when several soldiers of the 55th Company CFC were accused of stealing a local French farmer’s chickens. Soldiers also engaged in the age old practice of selling army kit and supplies on the black market for profit to local villagers who were happy to acquire extra boots or blankets. While petty theft and black marketeering were the most common crimes committed by soldiers serving in the CFC, there were some incidents of serious violent crime as well. Perhaps the most serious crime known to involve soldiers of the Forestry Corps was the rape of Mme. Barillard in October 1917 by Pte. Allen and Pte. Johnson, two members of No. 2 Construction Company. The court martial initially sentenced them to death for their crime, but they were

---

275 Porter, L. Herman, *A Review of Activities with the 126th Company Canadian Forestry Corps while stationed at Ampthill, Bedfordshire, Eng.* Ampthill, The Bedfordshire Times Publishing Company Ltd. 1919
276 The Spanish Flu would claim the lives of several dozen members of the CFC, along with the lives of tens of thousands of other soldiers during the last year of the war.
277 Letter of thanks from “The Engineer” to O.C. CFC Evreux, HQ Central Group, November 2nd, 1918, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4502 HQ Central Group CFC France File 12, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
278 War Diary entry regarding chicken theft, HQ Bordeaux Group, May 9th, 1918, RG 9 III D 3 Vol. 5017 File 755, HQ No. 4 District, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
granted clemency by Field Marshal Haig who commuted their sentences to life imprisonment with hard labour.

There was also the case of Pte. Naim and Pte. Stewart, who were assaulted by Pte. Savechuk; he repeatedly struck the other two men with a billy club, severely injuring them. Pte. Savechuk was subsequently sentenced to several years of hard labour for his crime.

**Military Situation Spring 1918**

The Germans launched Operation Michael on March 21st, striking a hammer blow against the British as the Germans advanced almost ten kilometres the first day and took several thousand British soldiers prisoner. Over the next few days, the British continued retreating in the face of intense German pressure, leading some British officers to fear that the Germans might cut the BEF off by driving towards the English Channel. Panic momentarily gripped the British High Command because, by the end of March, Albert and Arras had been captured and the British had been driven back to the outskirts of Amiens. The panic began to subside once reinforcements arrived from the Second Army in Flanders (200,000 men over two weeks); their arrival helped stabilize the front line.

Even the CFC was caught up in fighting during the offensive when No. 75 Company (part of No. 9 District) was forced to withdraw from their positions behind the British lines. According to the Company war diary, “Owing to the rapid enemy advance to our north, the O.C. had made tentative plans for destruction of mill and concealment of machinery in a deep unused well in the yard, should circumstances necessitate a forced withdrawal.”

Fortunately, the Company was able to secure transport for the sawmill and the members were evacuated on April 8th. Overall, Operation Michael briefly disrupted the operations of No. 9 and No. 10 Districts, although this did almost nothing to disrupt the work being carried out by the rest of the CFC elsewhere in France. Precautions did have to be heightened in the Army Areas group against German bomber attacks that periodically struck the camps during the spring offensive, although reports indicate that the damage caused by the raids was insignificant.

---

279 Letter in regard to situation with Pte. Allen and Pte. Johnson, HQ Jura Group, November 1917, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4516 HQ Jura Group File 11/12, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

280 Medical/incident report, HQ Central Group, June 1918, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4502 HQ Central Group CFC France File 1, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

281 Historical record of No. 75 company CFC, April 1918, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4499 File 27-40, Canadian Forestry Corps Records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.

282 War Diary, No. 6 District CFC, August 1917, RG 9 III D 3 Vol. 5017, File No. 575, Canadian Forestry Corps Records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
Three more German offensives followed Operation Michael, but each one met with ever decreasing success because the Germans wasted more of their reserves with each attack. The British were forced to concede ground in Flanders, while the French and Americans were pushed back to the Muse River. For all the effort the Germans expended, however, their armies were never able to achieve a breakthrough. By June, British lines had stabilized along the entire front as the last German offensives were called off due to mounting losses. Further south, the German army launched one last desperate attack against the Franco-American armies along the Muse River, but these attacks also failed for lack of reserves, supplies and overall coordination.

**Logistical damage**

While the consequences of the German spring offensive were severe (British casualties were estimated at 300,000), British lines had bent but had never broken. Equally severe - although only temporarily - was the loss of the Third and Fifth Armies’ forward railheads in March when they were overrun by the advancing German armies. As Ian Malcolm Brown states, the loss of the forward railheads impeded the operations of the BEF during the retreat because supplies had to be delivered from distances of 30 kilometres until the railheads could be rebuilt.283 Another impediment to the BEF’s operations was the loss of the critical rail junction that ran Arras, Albert and Amiens. According to William Aves, all lateral rail traffic flowing between British positions in Flanders and Northern France passed through the junction in Arras.284 Severing the connection meant delays that stretched several hours or more as trains moving along the front lines had to detour along alternate routes, snarling traffic all along the network.285 The capture of the rail junction only added to the strain on the BEF’s lines of communication because, by 1918, the British had to supply the five armies that constituted the BEF as well as the American Expeditionary Force (AEF).

By April, the stress had become so acute that the Director General Transport P.A.M. Nash and the Quartermaster General Lt. Gen. Sir Travers E. Clarke began making alternative plans for supplying the Second Army in Flanders in case the transport network broke down. This was, according to a post war report written by a British Major Henniker, a very real possibility because so much of the infrastructure on which the British relied for transporting men and material had been captured, damaged or destroyed during the German spring offensive (for example, the Third Army used dispatch riders to relay movement orders between stations when communications

---

284 80 percent of all British Army rail traffic passed through Amiens in 1918.
285 German shelling also inhibited the normal flow of traffic along the main lines, through the physical destruction of the tracks and also through severing telephone/telegraph lines along the network.
were knocked out). Not only did this slow down the movement of all rail traffic, it also increased the potential of a serious collision because, once an order was sent, it was impossible to countermand. Although few serious collisions did occur, the fact that any occurred illustrates the dangers of operating a rail system without operational communications and safety measures.286

![Illus. 12. Canadian Railway Troops carrying out repairs, 1917, Library and Archives Canada, PA-001767](image)

Faced with serious consequences if the transport network were not quickly restored to operational capacity, Field Marshal Haig ordered Lt. Gen. Travers to start immediate construction of a bypass of the severed rail line between Albert and Amiens. The bypass would reroute the main line around the captured sections of track with the intention of restoring the normal flow of traffic from the southernmost ports like Calais to the Second Army further north in Flanders. This was crucial because the section of track that ran through the junction in Albert comprised the southern portion of the BEF’s main lateral rail line running from Ypres to Amiens. The capture prevented the British from moving supplies and reinforcements quickly behind the front lines. At 55 miles (88 Km) in length, the bypass would require a considerable amount of resources to construct, including several thousand tons of wooden sleepers, as well as thousands more tons of timber construction material to build all the accompanying coal/water towers, telegraph poles and unloading stations. The BEF also required a considerable tonnage of general construction material to help rebuild their trench lines, logistical sites and communication network.

**CFC Operations March to July 1918**

---

286 Henniker, A.M. Colonel, *Transport of the Western Front 1914-1918*, (London, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, 1937), pg. 376
In his book *British Logistics on the Western Front 1914-1919*, Ian Malcolm Brown claims that, despite suffering severe damage and dislocation resulting from the losses of the forward rail heads, the British logistic system ably weathered the German onslaught during the spring of 1918. Brown states that the system “continued to function adequately”\(^\text{287}\), suffering only a few serious disruptions that were mostly corrected by the end of June. However, Brown fails to offer an explanation(s) as to exactly how the British were able to cope with their losses, including the loss of every forward rail head in the Third Army’s area of operation, several hundred pieces of rolling stock and the destruction of the BEF’s entire front line along a 100 mile (160 Km) front. If we take Brown’s account at face value, it would appear that the British were able to shrug off these losses and, through sheer determination, continue supplying their armies without any serious difficulties. As Brown admits, the damage was so great that plans were made to potentially abandon the Second Army in Flanders because it could no longer be easily supplied from the channel ports, while the French were forced to take responsibility for supplying the Fifth Army because the capture of the rail junction at Albert made supplying the Fifth Army too difficult for the British.

While the BEF’s lines of communication never approached a point of collapse, months of repair work was necessary to restore the shattered railways and roads to working order. Although, as Brown notes, the physical work of repairing the damage was undertaken by the Royal Engineers, the reason the Royal Engineers worked so efficiently was the timely production of timber by the foresters of the CFC. Records indicate that, during the period between March and June, the CFC increased its production to meet the demands of the British for timber construction material. For example, during the months of May and June, No. 2 District was allotted production orders for 2,500 and 3,125 tons of standard gauge railway sleepers; the district exceed its allotment by a margin of 150% each month producing 4,922 tons in June and 4,284 tons in May\(^\text{288}\). While this only amounted to 9,206 tons of sleepers, it was enough to lay 52 miles (83.2 Km) of track, just three miles short of the total distance of the bypass needed to restore the flow of main line lateral traffic between Amiens and Ypres. In total, 172,460 tons of wooden sleepers was produced by the CEF between March 21\textsuperscript{st} and August 31\textsuperscript{st}, enough to maintain or construct 1,000 kilometres of track.\(^\text{289}\) Additionally, No. 2 District produced and shipped 9,086 tons of wooden pickets and 11,497

\(^{287}\) Brown, Ian Malcom *British Logistics*, pg. 195
\(^{288}\) Production records, HQ Central Group France, May-June 1918, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4502 HQ Central Group France File 64, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
\(^{289}\) Production records, HQ Central Group France, April-Aug 1918, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4502 HQ Central Group France File 31, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
tons of sawn defence timber to the BEF. These materials were the key to keeping the BEF’s lines of communication in working order during the spring of 1918.

While the movement of supplies and reinforcements was hindered for a period of four months while the Amiens bypass was constructed (construction finished just days before the British launched their first counter attack at Amiens in August), the CFC’s hard work allowed the British to keep their supply corridors open, despite the damage inflicted by the German offensives. In fact, the CFC’s work allowed the British to shift a total of 658,248 tons of ammunition from their supply depots to the armies on the front line, where it was used to help wear down the German Army’s last desperate attempts to capture Amiens.290 The deliveries of sawn defence timber also helped the British to rebuild a recent defensive line along the frontage to which the BEF had been pushed back in late March.

In July, the 75th company (No. 1 District, Central Group) was called on to fill several rush orders from the French and Americans for bridging material. The French and Americans had recently checked the Germans’ last attempt at forcing the Marne River, and had in turn counter-attacked the Germans; however, there were not enough crossing points along the Marne River for the Franco-American armies. According to the historical record of the 75th Company, “When the enemy advance was checked at the Second Battle of the Marne in July a special ‘rush’ order was received for timbers to bridge the Marne and hasten the now advancing Allied troops. Special attention was given to this order which was completed and shipped well ahead of scheduled time”.291 The historical record indicates that, to keep pace with the special orders arriving throughout July, the foresters had to complete them within 12 hours of receiving them.

The Canadians had also been hard at work filling another special order by the French government earlier in the spring of 1918 for enough Epicea spruce to construct 5,000 aircraft for the French Armee de L’Air (Army of the Air).292 According to the historical record of Jura Group, which was tasked with the production order, it was part of a larger and very ambitious plan by the French government to construct a total of 25,000 aircraft for the military. By 1918, aircraft were playing an increasingly important role in the war, being incorporated into what was referred to as combined arms tactics involving close cooperation between air force and infantry.293 Aircraft were used to conduct

291 Historical record of No. 75 Company CFC, July 1918, RG 9 III C 8, Vol. 4499 File 41-60, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
292 Production order for aviation timber, Jura Group CFC, April 1918, RG 9 III C 8 4517, Jura Group France File 45, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
293 Combined arms tactics were used to tremendous success during the Hundred Days Offensive.
reconnaissance flights to observe enemy positions and, in the later days of the war, to provide ground attack support to the infantry during combat; there were even attempts made to re-supply the infantry from the air during the final weeks of the war.

While the war diary does not indicate when or if the order was filled, there is a strong possibility it was finished as by my best estimates, roughly 1250 tons of Epicea spruce had to cut and sawn to complete the order. There is the possibility that the Canadians would have encountered some difficulty filling the order because of competition with the AEF forestry service for the remaining prime coupes. French authorities had allowed the newly established American Forestry Corps (AFC) to encroach upon the CFC’s operations in La Joux, and that lead to a series of conflicts that threatened to destabilize their current and future operations. According to an August 31, 1918 letter from Col. J.B. White, Director Timber Operations France, to Major General MacDougall, “Owing to the aggressive attitude of the AEF in this area it is essential that early and adequate steps be taken to guarantee a sufficient supply for the eleven companies of [the 5th] district operating for the French. The situation has now reached a point where unless further areas are allotted at an early date, all those available will have been allocated to the American Forces”. While records indicate that the CFC was eventually provided with the coupes it required, there is little evidence that it did anything to reduce the competition between the CFC and the AEF.

Military situation Summer 1918

By the middle of July, with the entire front more or less stabilized, the Entente High Command (Field Marshal Haig, Gen. Philip Petain and Gen. John Pershing) met at Ferdinand Foch’s headquarters, where they began to make preparations for a series of counter-attacks aimed at retaking the ground lost to the Germans during the spring. It was agreed that the British would lead the counter-attacks, starting on August 8th at Amiens, while the French would launch their portion of the counter-attack 12 days later at Aisne. The next three weeks saw a flurry of activity as the Entente armies hurried to prepare for the forthcoming offensive. Gen. Sir Henry Rawlinson’s Fourth Army, which was tasked with leading the attack at Amiens, gathered together 257,000 soldiers, 1,488 artillery guns and 98,000 horses, as well as enough supplies for at least five days of heavy fighting. A total of 8,362.5 tons of artillery ammunition (enough to supply each field gun with 600 rounds (5 tons) and the larger howitzers with 500

rounds (8.75 tons)) was brought up from newly constructed railheads in the weeks leading up to August 8th. So great was the amount of ammunition and supplies that the Royal Engineers had to construct extra railroad sidings to accommodate the increased volume of traffic. No doubt the extra trackage was constructed thanks in part to the hard work of the CFC, which had supplied 176,000 tons of railway sleepers to the British prior to August 8th.

The initial attack spearheaded by the Canadian Corps on the morning of August 8th devastated the German divisions in front of the Canadians; preceded by a swift yet violent hurricane bombardment, the Canadians swiftly blew through the German front lines until they had penetrated up to six miles (9.6 Km) from their forward trenches. Rawlinson and Haig were both stunned by the news because, up to that point, the BEF had not advanced that far in a single day of fighting since October 1914. By the time the advance was finally halted three days later, the Canadians and British had advanced well over 10 miles (26 Km) from where they had started on the 8th. While the battle of Amiens was considered a resounding success, the suddenness of the advance created some logistical difficulties for the British. The advance had not only extended the Anglo-Canadians supply lines but had done so across broken ground littered with shell holes and trenches, ground that could only be crossed on foot. Roads were damaged or obliterated by shelling, while road and rail bridges were destroyed by the retreating Germans. There was simply no easy way for the British and Canadians to move supplies to their forward battalions.

The destruction, caused not only by battle but also by the retreating Germans who sabotaged roads, railways and bridges (often with delayed action mines), threatened the momentum the British and Canadians had created at Amiens. As Nick Lloyd states, maintaining the momentum generated by the breakthrough at Amiens was the key to defeating the German Army; if the Entente as a whole could continue pressuring the German Army while it retreated, the Entente could wear it down by forcing it to stage rear-guard actions to prevent its remaining divisions from being overrun. However, faced with the inability to provision its forward battalions, contact with the Germans would be difficult to maintain, allowing them the time they needed to escape to the fortified Hindenburg line. If the advance were to be maintained at a rapid pace, then damaged or destroyed roads, railways and bridges had to be repaired and quickly because the time frame between battles had shrunk from months to less than 10 days. Generals had almost no time in which to redeploy their forces or bring up supplies, so it was vital to

296 Lloyd, *Hundred Days*, pg. 61
have at least one open supply route within reach of the front lines to maintain the ongoing success of the Hundred Days campaign.

As Ian Brown states, “In spite of [the] devastation the transport services continued to get supplies forward so that the advance could be maintained”. Brown’s statement is accurate - the transport system had been reorganized by Lord Geddes two years prior, and it was his reforms that gave the BEF’s transport system the flexibility it needed to weather the German onslaught - but he again fails to provide any explanation as to how the BEF’s transport network continued to function despite the adversity it faced. He does not mention the numerous cases where entire corps, such as the ANZAC, were held up for days by a destroyed bridge; nor does he mention the difficulties experienced by transport divers when they tried driving along shell blasted roads. Despite its flexibility, the BEF’s transport system simply would not have been able to function during the Hundred Days Offensive without support from the CFC. Between August 8th and November 11th, the CFC felled and shipped several hundred thousand tons of timber construction material to the advancing Entente armies. That timber was in turn used to repair the damaged and destroyed bridges, lay plank roads and, most importantly, repair the hundreds of miles of destroyed railway track crisscrossing the battlefields of Northern France and Belgium.

**Restoring roads and Railways**

Restoring the roadways across Northern France was the first focus of the Entente advance because, as long as the roads were open, the forward battalions could be supplied by Horse and Motor transport. As noted above, most of the roadways that had once run between the villages and towns of Northern France had been destroyed by four years of shelling or had been obliterated at the push of a button by a German demolition squad. The Germans destroyed hundreds of kilometres of roadways during their advance, often blocking them with trees laid across the roads. All too often, however, they would bury delayed action bombs that exploded after a few hours or days. The shell and bomb craters pitting the roads posed a serious threat to the transport lorries that drove along them each day. Clifford Johnston, a Canadian lorry driver, reported that driving at night was especially dangerous because the driver could not see where the shell holes were located. Clifford said he or a fellow driver accidentally ditched their lorry in a shell hole on many occasions, causing serious damage to the lorry. However, repairing the roads in the BEF’s

---

297 Brown, *British Logistics*, pg. 198
298 Maj. Henniker stated in his report that Horse and Motor transport was to be used to fill the gaps between the forward railheads and the front lines.
sector proved difficult because the British were experiencing a severe shortage of crushed road stone in August and September. The Royal Engineers therefore had to fill in the holes and then lay plank roads overtop in order to keep them open for Horse and Motor transport. The CFC produced on average 5,000 tons of road slabs a week between September 1st and November 11th. Their total production of road slabs for the Entente Armies in July through November was 89,188 tons.299

Motor transport not only filled the gap between forward railheads and the front line; it also helped to bridge the gap between severed sections of track. For example, when the ANZAC under the command of Lt. Gen. John Monash arrived at Peronne in September, they found that the local rail bridge over the Somme River had been completely destroyed by the retreating Germans. Informed that it would take at least two months to rebuild, Monash ordered his engineers to move the forward railhead as close to Somme as possible; from there, he ordered that the road bridges be rebuilt post haste in order to connect with a separate railhead on the opposite bank of the river.300 Bridge building was a particular concern for the British because, unlike their French counterparts, the Royal Engineers did not use prefabricated bridges, opting instead to build each bridge from ground up. This kept bridging units like the 3rd Canadian Pontooning/Bridging Transport Unit very busy, as indicated by the unit war diary records showing they were called upon to transport and construct several bridges during the battle of Amiens.

299 Production records July-Nov 1918 Central Group CFC, RG 9 III C 8 Vol. 4502 HQ Central Group France File 31, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
300 While this system was adequate, it is representative of the transport difficulties that were experienced by the Entente during their advances.
Bridge building units proved to be the key to victory several times during the Hundred Days. That was the case when the Canadian Corps attacked to capture the Canal du Nord on September 27th. Wooden foot bridges, buoyed by cork to keep them afloat, were used by the advancing Canadian soldiers to storm the partially flooded sections of the canal, while combat engineers followed behind to shore up the bridges for the reinforcements. Bridges were often the initial means by which an advance over a river or canal could be sustained; the construction of a crossing point often marked the difference between supplies and reinforcements arriving as needed or arriving too late to sustain the forward momentum. Since the CFC’s production records do not record the Corps’ total production of bridging material during the Hundred Days, it is difficult to estimate the total production; if bridging timber were produced at a rate similar to that of road slabs (48,000 tons), then production likely exceeded 50,000 tons between September and November.

While not used as much during the final months of the war, light railways were still used to great effect during the Hundred Days offensive because, like Motor and Horse transport, light railways were used to help bridge the gap in the lines of communication. As mentioned above, light railways were very easy to build, taking only a couple of hours to lay as long as the ground was not too badly churned up. According to Maj. Henniker’s post war report, however, British transport authorities decided they would no longer build light railways in the forward area of operations; instead, all efforts would be focused on restoring road and rail transport along the axis of advance. However, the story was different in the Canadian Corps where, thanks to Gen. Currie’s efforts, control over light railway construction and operations had been wrested from the British the previous summer. The Canadians continued to utilize light railways for the duration of the Hundred Days. At Amiens, for example, combat engineers managed to construct a line several kilometres in length - while under fire - from the Canadian front lines up to the positions then held by the forward battalions. Since the British had reduced their use of light railways, production of narrow gauge sleepers fell off considerably during the last few months of the war; only 11,941 tons were produced between September 1st and November 2nd, although these records only account for monthly allotments and not for any special orders the CFC might have received for 60-cm sleepers.

---

301 Cook, *Shock Troops*, pg. 513
302 According to Tim Cook, the narrow gauge line was immediately put into action ferrying supplies forward and wounded soldiers back to casualty clearing stations.
The CFC’s most important contribution to the Hundred Days Offensive was undoubtedly the wooden sleepers and construction material it produced for railway construction. As previously mentioned, the rapid advance of the Entente armies in August created gaps of several kilometres between the forward rail heads and the front lines. The resulting gaps endangered the momentum of the advancing Entente armies; thus, a high priority was placed on extending and repairing the forward rail heads so the supply lines would not lag behind the advancing armies. This was important because, by Henniker’s estimations, each British division needed two train loads of supplies each day when not engaged in combat. However, during combat operations, a division required a dozen trains each day to ferry forward supplies for the infantry and artillery, as well as 38 trains within the first 48 hours after an attack to evacuate the wounded soldiers. For example, during Operation Michael, the British moved a total of 200,000 soldiers from Flanders south to Amiens, while also moving out 160,000 exhausted survivors.

During the Hundred Days, the railways were vital to the transport of the vast quantities of ammunition expended by the British and Canadians during their drive into Northern France. More ammunition was expended in support of combat operations during the Hundred Days then during the battle for Vimy Ridge because, unlike the battle at Vimy Ridge, both the BEF and CEF were suffering from a shortage of reinforcements. With some battalions operating at three quarters of their authorized strength, they did not have the same strength they had a year earlier. To compensate for their reduced strength, the British, and especially the Canadians, relied even more on their artillery to destroy as much as possible of the Germans’ forward positions before the attacks. At Amiens, a total of 6,831 tons of shells were stockpiled for the 18 pounder field guns, while an additional 3,000 tons were stockpiled for the heavy guns. Ammunition trains were the only means of moving so much ammunition forward to the artillery batteries in the lulls between offensives, which were often less than 10 days apart by October.

Extending the forward rail heads was easier said than done because most of the construction had to take place on ground that had once been a battlefield; the thoroughness of the German sabotage only worsened the situation. Thousands of delayed action mines were placed along the tracks, causing considerable damage to hundreds of kilometres of track; the Germans even torched most of the stations and other trackside infrastructure such as signal boxes and coal and water towers. Repairs to damaged tracks and infrastructure could have required in excess of 100,000 tons of timber, given the widespread damage along the entire British front and in the occupied

303 Henniker, Transport, pg. 358
304 Cook, Shock Troops, pg. 459
An additional 44,892 tons of standard gauge wooden sleepers were produced between September 1st and November 2nd, which was enough to lay 448 kilometres of track. But for the efforts of the CFC during the first two months of the Hundred Days Offensive, it is unlikely that the Entente would have been able to sustain enough pressure on the German Armies to break through the outer rings of the Hindenburg line by early October. During September, the CFC produced a total of 294,427 tons of sawn, round and fuelwood timber for the British armies in France.

The CFC also provided direct logistical support to the British and Canadian divisions near the front lines during the Hundred Days campaign. As the supply lines widened during the campaign, it became increasingly difficult for the CFC to transport its timber to the front lines. By September and October 1918, the shortage of rolling stock on the Western Front had become so severe that the CFC often had to wait several days for enough rail trucks to arrive to transport the timber shipments. Therefore, it was decided that some of the work would be taken over by small detachments of men operating portable sawmills in forests destroyed by the fighting. According to an article printed in the London Times on September 16th, the decision was made because the damaged trees could still be harvested and used for fuelwood. The BEF needed hundreds of thousands of tons of fuelwood each month; rather than using precious space on board trains to ship fuelwood from the camps, it was easier to harvest it from destroyed forests near the front lines. To avoid serious injuries, the Canadians first had to remove an often considerable amount of metal shrapnel from the trees before sawing them.

Gen. MacDougall also authorized the creation of another district in France - No. 11 District - in June 1918 in response to a request from the British Royal Air Force (formerly the Royal Flying Corps) for further assistance constructing aerodromes in France. Since the British planned to use the RAF to its full effect during the Hundred Days Campaign, more aerodromes were needed to house the pilots and aircraft close to the front. Most British aircraft of the Great War had a short range (only a few hundred kilometres) and, as such, had to operate close to the front in order to maximize flight time. The first companies began organizing at the Base Depot in Sunningdale within days of receiving MacDougall’s orders. The first two companies, No. 12 and No. 13, were mobilized on June 26th and were dispatched to Le Havre, before moving on to their final destinations of Etreval and Sandaucourt.

---

305 Due to incomplete production records, I am only able to estimate production totals of wooden sleepers for standard gauge British sleepers.

11 District was assigned to assist the newly created (as of June 6) Independent Air Force - a strategic bombing force that operated as part of the Royal Air Force - with aerodrome construction. Upon arrival, No. 12 and 13 Companies were immediately set to work constructing aerodromes for the IAF (its de Havilland DH4 and DH9 bombers needed wider and longer taxi and runways). 307

Work was carried out at Etreval and Sandaucourt until late August, when construction was finished on both aerodromes. Since no reinforcements arrived from Britain during July or August, 202 German POWs were attached to the District, while an unknown number of labourers from the Chinese Labour Corps arrived in late August at No. 12 Company’s new work site near the town of Oelleville. Three more companies were mobilized in August, but did not arrive until the beginning of September, with No. 9 Company going to Blevaincourt, No. 10 company to Saulxures and No. 11 Company to Dombasle. Again, construction continued on the IAF aerodromes for another six weeks before Lt. Col W.S. Fetherstonhaugh received orders to move his District north to support the British advance into Belgium in late October. Much of the work in Belgium was focused on restoring captured German aerodromes to operational capacity, instead of new aerodrome construction. So, for the next three weeks, the Canadians spent most of their time filling in trenches and shell holes, removing barbed wire and dragging damaged Fokker and Albatross fighter planes off runways. 308

Military situation October - November 1918

Having broken the outer ring of the Hindenburg line in September and having retaken Cambrai and several other key towns, the British/Imperial Armies continued their relentless offensive against the German Armies. By mid-September, the Canadians and British had stormed the Canal du Nord, capturing sections of the outer ring of the Hindenburg line. Offensive operations farther north forced the German army to continue falling back in Flanders, while further south the French and American armies carried out several offensives that drove the Germans far back from the Muse River, inflicting crippling losses. On September 27th, the British and Canadians broke through the Saint-Quentin Canal and tore a gap open in the German Hindenburg line, throwing the Germans out of their last defensive line into open country. The key logistical centre of Cambrai was re-captured on October 9th, forcing the Germans to begin a head long retreat towards Germany because they could no longer maintain their lines. By the

307 War Diary June to August 1918, No 11 District CFC, RG 9 III D 3 Vol. 5017, File No. 759, No. 11 District, Canadian Forestry Corps Records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
308 War Diary September to November 1918, No 11 District CFC, RG 9 III D 3 Vol. 5017, File No. 759, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
beginning of November, over 369,000 German soldiers - equivalent to one quarter of Germany’s soldiers on the Western Front - had been captured, while an estimated 100,000 had deserted the front and returned to Germany. Faced with continuing desertion and the surrender of their key allies, Austria-Hungary and the Ottoman Empire, the German government entered into negotiations with the Entente. On November 11th, Germany signed an armistice that brought an end to the war on the Western Front at 11:00 am.309

Armistice Operations and Demobilization

When news arrived in the logging camps that combat operations had officially ceased at 11:00 AM on November 11th, the soldiers of the CFC were jubilant. No. 1 District’s war diaries reported that operations were suspended for the entire day so the soldiers could celebrate the cessation of hostilities.310 Come the dawn on the 12th, however, the forests of Britain and France were once again filled with the shriek of Canadian sawmills because the armistice was a temporary truce during which Germany and the Entente powers agreed not to fight. With the German Army undefeated in the traditional sense, fears arose amongst the Entente High Command that Germany could possibly regroup, break the armistice and resume the war. Therefore, orders were issued that all work on aerodrome construction by the aerodrome construction companies of No. 11 District was to be continued as it had prior to the signing of the armistice.311 The British wanted to ensure their armies were in a good position to meet any attack that a resurgent German Army could launch against them.

While work on aerodrome construction was continued by the CFC, Brig. Gen. MacDougall issued a new set of production orders to comply with the needs of the Entente armies a week after the cessation of hostilities. The new orders provided for an immediate halt to the further acquisition of new forests in France, a restriction on the felling of timber and a temporary focus on clearing the camps of debris. Each company was also ordered to fell enough lumber to maintain a one week supply at each camp in order to satisfy any special orders from the British; a one week supply of lumber could also be disposed of quickly if demobilization orders were received. MacDougall also included a list of timber items that were to be produced until such time as the camps were closed; records

309 Lloyd, Hundred Days
310 War Diary, No. 1 District CFC, November 1918, RG 9 III D 3 Vol. 5017, File No. 754, Canadian Forestry Corps records, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada.
311 Circumstances proved otherwise; by December, Germany had descended into a state of civil war that forced its newly established Republican government to focus on internal security, thus precluding any hope German military officers had of resuming the war.
indicate that only standard gauge sleepers for the British were to be produced, while production of road slabs, 60-cm sleepers, telegraph poles and sawn defence timber was to cease or be curtailed.312

While MacDougall’s orders were issued to comply with the British Military’s new supply requirements, the CFC’s work during the Armistice period in France benefitted not just the British Armies but also millions of Belgian civilians who were on the brink of a major famine. Relief aid was badly needed in Belgium because, prior to the outbreak of the war, imports accounted for 70% of all foodstuffs consumed by Belgium’s 7.5 million citizens. Losses in domestic agriculture only exacerbated the potential for famine as 240,000 acres of farm land had been lost due to shelling and shortages of vital fertilizer that left Belgium barely able to feed its citizens. The Commission for Relief in Belgium (CRB) headed by Herbert Hoover was distributing relief aid to Belgian and French civilians (5 million tons had been delivered between November 1914 and November 1918), but it faced an insurmountable obstacle in the devastated road and railway network in Belgium.313

According to Major Henniker’s report, the fighting between September and November had left the railways in Northern France and Belgium in a terrible state so that dozens of towns and villages were completely cut off from badly need aid. Much of the civilians’ food, fuel and medical supplies had been appropriated by the retreating Germans by force, leaving the Belgian and French civilians destitute and in danger of starving. Henniker stated that “the first object of both the French and Belgian Governments was to re-establish railway services essential to their countries in…the liberated regions in particular”314. The problem was also noted by Walter Guinness, a staff officer with the British 66th Division; Guinness said that “The roads on the whole front of the Army, although numerous on the map, are seldom fit for heavy traffic under the most favourable conditions, and the enemy had destroyed both roads and railways very thoroughly. There was scarcely a bridge over a stream or canal which had not been destroyed and a few cross roads at which a crater had not been blown”.315 While Henniker and Guinness were focused on the impediments that the destroyed road and rail lines posed to the military and civilian authorities, Henniker also mentions that efforts were made by the British to repair rail lines for use by civilian aid societies such as the CRB.

---

314 Henniker, Transport on the Western Front, pg. 466
315 Lloyd, Hundred Days, pg. 263
Demobilization

By late November, with the threat of a resurgent German Army no more, British and French authorities determined that the services of the CFC were no longer needed in France and granted the Canadians permission to begin the demobilization process. The first step in the process entailed the disposal of each camp’s remaining stock of sawn timber, either to British or French authorities or to local merchants. Their machinery was also disposed of because the CFC could not transport the several hundred tons of machinery then in France back to Canada. Therefore, Maj. Gen. MacDougall authorized his deputies White and Hepburn to facilitate the sale of the equipment to local interested parties. Once it became known that the Canadians were selling off their equipment, local forestry companies began approaching camp commanders with offers to purchase the equipment for use in their local logging operations. In one case, a local French newspaper, the *Echo of Alencon*, advertised the sale of Canadian equipment: “After their [Canadians] departure, the barracks, huts and other wooden buildings constructed by the Canadians are no longer useful. Anyone who would like to buy them and take them away may address inquiries to the Lieutenant-Colonel at the office of the Canadian General Staff on rue de Bretagne”\(^{316}\). The sale of equipment continued for several months after the signing of the Armistice; 21 horses were sold to Alexis Coupe on January 23rd, while a further 25 horses were sold the next week, followed by the sale of several sawmills in February and March 1919. The last of the CFC stock was liquidated in August 1919 by the administrator of the Department of Orne.\(^{317}\)

The second step was to ensure that the logging sites and the land on which the camps had been built were cleaned up and made ready for replanting by French forestry officials in the spring. While this task was, for the most part, completed in an orderly fashion, French forestry officials did raise complaints with Brig. Gen. White, OC CFC Paris, alleging that several logging sites in the La Joux district had been left in poor condition. Overall, the officials were dissatisfied with the removal of stumps - too many tall stumps had been left behind - and they complained about sites strewn with debris and a number of damaged roads.\(^{318}\) The District OC disputed these claims, stating that he had only ever received praise for the clean up work, and that all damage to the roads had been fixed before the companies departed. As a gesture of good faith, however, he offered to leave behind 200 soldiers to finish cleaning

\(^{316}\) Le Goic, Bordenes, Leconte & Martin, *Battle Axes*, pg. 132
\(^{317}\) Le Goic, Bordenes, Leconte & Martin, *Battle Axes*, pg. 135
the logging sites and repair any remaining road damage. There is no indication in the records whether Gen. Chevalier accepted the offer, likely because he felt the claims did not warrant further investigation.

The third and most difficult step for the foresters was to say their goodbyes to locals with whom they had forged long lasting bonds. This was especially true of soldiers of the 30th Company Central Group, District 1. They were stationed just outside of the town of Alencon, the regional capital of the Department of Orne in Normandy. The local newspaper, *Journal d’Alencon*, recorded several stories of the close cooperation that existed between the townspeople and the Canadian soldiers. There were reports that the Canadians were always willing to lend the locals a hand; there were several stories of Canadians offering medical assistance to locals in need, while others discussed the many pleasant interactions the locals had with the Canadians in the local park. The *Journal* also recorded that the people of Alencon often held events such as the cultural festival August 26th, 1917, to which the Canadians were invited, while the Canadians always made sure to extend invitations to the townspeople to attend their sporting events. The Canadians even put on a play for the locals titled *The Red Lamp* - written and composed by Pte. E.A. Cooke - in April 1918, which elicited much enjoyment from both the Canadians and the townspeople.319

However, with the signing of the Armistice came the signal that the soldiers of the 30th Company would soon depart Alencon, causing much sadness amongst the Canadians and townspeople. The words of the Prefect of Orne best summarize the relationship between the Canadians and the French townspeople: “The departure of these troops and particularly your departure [Lt. Col. McDonald], leaves an empty space and the inhabitants of Orne feel strongly… I will not forget, for my part, how often during your stay with us, you participated in our daily life, shared our sorrow during the dark moments of the war, and participated in our celebrations for our common victory…We maintain, my dear Colonel, a profound memory and I ask you to remember the good people of the Orne once you have returned to your noble country. In their name, let me restate their sentiments of sincere gratitude for you, your officers and your soldiers, and permit me to assure you of my thanks and my deep friendship”.320

These heartfelt goodbyes continued up until February, when the last Canadian operations were shuttered and the remaining soldiers were dispatched to Le Havre, where they were shipped back to Britain on their way to the Canadian demobilization camp at Kinnel Park in Wales.

**Race Riots and Bolshevik Fears**

319 Le Goic, Bordenès, Leconte & Martin, *Battle Axes*, pp. 103-105
320 Le Goic, Bordenès, Leconte & Martin, *Battle Axes*, pg. 132
Upon arrival at Kinmel Park, the soldiers of the CFC found themselves amongst what Desmond Morton described as “a random mixture of combatants and non-combatants, conscripts and ‘Old Originals’, mixed with the professional misfits who drift to the rear of any army”.321 The mixture of infantry and support troops in the 11 different camps made Kinmel Park a dangerous environment because there was a burning resentment between the two groups, especially with regard to which group should be repatriated to Canada first.

According to Morton, this was the greatest source of contention between infantry and support soldiers, and also between those soldiers who had arrived with the 1st Division in 1914 and those who had arrived later (conscripted soldiers brought over in 1918, for example). The “Old Timers” wanted priority over the conscripted soldiers because they (the “Old Timers”) had been overseas the longest, while Gen. Currie wanted to keep the CEF’s battalions together, rather than have them broken up and the soldiers shipped home in drafts. However, this aroused significant anger amongst those soldiers who had spent the last three years of their lives fighting on the Western Front; shipping home the battalions intact meant shipping home thousands of conscripts who had recently arrived as reinforcements, thereby passing over some of the “Old Timers”. Resentment was further fanned by the numerous delays caused by poor planning and repeated dock worker strikes. After years of being separated from their families, the Canadians just wanted to go home.322

322 Morton, Kicking and Complaining, pg. 344
While Overseas Minister Andrew Kempt tried in vain to schedule more sailings, Col. Malcolm Colquhoun, OC Kinnel Park, tried in vain to keep the restive soldiers entertained while they waited for their drafts to leave for Canada. Col. Colquhoun was unable to maintain order, and periodic bouts of violence erupted between January and March 1919, directly and indirectly involving No. 2 Construction Company and other CFC soldiers. Starting with the events involving No. 2 Construction Company, a Pvt. Elms testified that, on the morning of January 7th, members of the company were “on a bath parade under the direction of Sgt. Edward Sealy [when a] White Non-Commissioned Officer ... made racist comments [and] ignored orders from Sealy and interfered with the line of march”.

Sealy immediately ordered the soldier placed under arrest for “insolent behaviour” and had him marched under escort to the guard room. However, the Afro-Canadians were almost immediately set upon by white soldiers who objected to having their NCO arrested by Sealy’s men. What ensued can only be described as a race riot as white soldiers attacked the No. 2 Company men, who defended themselves with straight razors. Five white soldiers were injured, while seven Afro-Canadians were injured when hit by rocks thrown by white soldiers. The white soldiers also ransacked the huts and personal kit of every soldier in No. 2 Company. Adding insult to injury, all 275 Afro-Canadians involved were implicated in the ensuing incident report; it was alleged that Sealy’s men had used

323 Shaw, Most Anxious to Serve, pg. 572
excessive violence against the white soldiers, ignoring the fact that they had acted in self-defence when confronted by a mob.

This attack speaks to the larger issue of racism and racial privilege prevalent amongst the rank and file of the CEF. Instead of acknowledging the actual instigator of the riot - the white NCO who uttered the racial slur - the Provost Marshal concocted a wildly inaccurate story that “depicted the men of the Black Canadian Battalion as the deviants when they were in fact the target of unprovoked bodily violence…[who] had audaciously transgressed ‘proper’ racial boundaries…when they placed a white man under the watchful eye and control of a Black man - thereby reversing the racial roles”.324 The report absolved the white soldiers of any responsibility, blaming instead the Afro-Canadian soldiers for inciting the riot. There was no investigation of the violation of the CEF’s policy of racial tolerance.

Two months after the race riot, another series of riots broke out in the camp after the sailing of the SS Haveford was cancelled. Soldiers from MDC Camp 3 raided the canteens, starting a riot that soon spread across the rest of the camp. Within hours, numerous YMCA, ANCB and Red Cross canteens had been raided, and the food and liquor distributed to the rioters. Hundreds of disgruntled soldiers rampaged through the camp for almost two days before Colquhoun was able to re-establish some semblance of order. As regards the CFC’s involvement, stories emerged afterwards that socialists or even Bolshevik sympathizers had raised a red flag during the riots. As mentioned in chapter one, lumberjacks working in British Columbia and Alberta had been heavily involved in unionization efforts and constituted a large portion of the Industrial Workers of the World’s membership in Western Canada. The IWW was among the most powerful left leaning socialist affiliated labour unions in the world in the early twentieth century; the IWW also had a reputation for staging effective yet violent industrial strikes. This was a constant worry for Col. Colquhoun during the riot; he was concerned that members of the CFC and Canadian Railway Troops could have organized the rioters into a more disciplined and dangerous movement that would have been difficult to counter. More important to the story is the form of protest Colquhoun feared if the foresters and Railway Troops acted upon their suspected socialist impulses.

The riots occurred only five months after the Bolshevik coup in Russia, and the Canadians and Entente nations feared the possibility of a similar communist takeover occurring in the west. As evidenced by the warning

324 Shaw, Most Anxious to Serve, pg. 573
distributed to the CFC in 1918 regarding communist propaganda, Canadian authorities were worried about the corrupting influence of such propaganda on the nation’s industrial labourers, including the thousands then serving in the CEF. There were fears that this could lead to soldiers forming workers councils (also known as Soviets) through which they could spread communist influences, as happened in Germany after the Armistice was signed. The rioting and subsequent rumors of a red flag being raised at Kinmel park only served to heighten fears that the foresters and Railway Troops (or other Bolshevik elements) had attempted to form Bolshevik Soviets during the riots. There were even rumors - created and spread by Col. Colquhoun without proof - that the man who had raised the red flag had been shot and killed. Even Sir Richard Turner believed that a possible Bolshevik uprising had been put down at Kinmel Park.

Despite the fears expressed by Colquhoun and Turner, there is no evidence that any attempt was made by foresters, Railway Troops or by other unknown Bolshevik entities to organize a Soviet in the camp. Although not directly stated, it was implied that, after the riots had been brought under control, Colquhoun wanted to move the foresters and the Railway Troops out of the camp quickly to avoid any further “attempts” to establish a Soviet.

While Desmond Morton does not directly accuse Colquhoun of investigating any members of the CFC for their alleged involvement in the “Red Flag” incident, a search of Library and Archives Canada’s personal records has revealed that at least one CFC member, Pte. Valentine Miculka (an Austro-Ukrainian immigrant) was arrested and court martialed for his involvement in the riots. According to his service record, Miculka was found guilty of having participated in what the defence described as a “mutiny” and was sentenced to 10 years hard labour to be served in Canada. However, upon his return to Saint John in 1919, his sentence was commuted to 2 years imprisonment by military authorities. While there are few details surrounding Miculka’s case (Morton says the court martials were hurried affairs involving trials lasting only a few hours) that might help us better understand why he was given such a harsh punishment, Morton states that it had little to do with the accused’s actions. Instead, Morton states that the accused’s status as an enemy alien (an unnaturalized immigrant) was the reason for his unduly harsh sentence. It is noteworthy that other Eastern European immigrants were also amongst those given long prison sentences for their alleged roles in the riot.325

325 Morton, Kicking and Complaining, pg. 355
Conclusion

By the end of 1919, the remaining Forestry Corps soldiers had been returned to Canada. Those who had been working in the logging industry at the time of their enlistments likely returned to logging camps in the Ottawa River Valley and the dense forests of Northern Ontario and Quebec, while others left for the Rain Forest coast of British Columbia and the forests of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. Returning to work was not a luxury that all members of the Forestry Corps would have enjoyed. Hundreds had suffered terrible injuries working in the sawmills and were prevented from any return to normalcy, while still more had been injured in battle prior to their transfer into the CFC. Due to the physical and psychological scars left by the war, reintegration back into Canadian society
proved difficult for returning soldiers. Jobs were few and far between and support for the disabled proved wanting.\textsuperscript{326} Lastly, despite having proved their worth in the Forestry Corps - and on the Western Front - the Afro-Canadian, Indigenous and Ukrainian soldiers found their return to civilian life more difficult because of the prevailing social climate in Canada. While overseas (barring a few instances of ill-treatment), Afro-Canadians, Indigenous and Ukrainian men had been treated relatively equally with other soldiers, being free from the worst of the racial prejudices that permeated Canadian society. Upon their return to Canada, however, the men of No. 2 Construction Battalion and the Indigenous and Ukrainian members of the CFC had to once again contend with societally entrenched inequality.\textsuperscript{327}

If it could be said any group in the Forestry Corps had an easier time readjusting to civilian life, that group would be the officer corps, especially the senior officers. The CFC’s O.C. Alexander McDougall was promoted to Major General and awarded the Companion of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath (C.B.) and a Legion d’Honneur before he returned to work with his brother running their company O’Brien & McDougall Bros. in Ottawa. The CFC’s deputy O.C. William Hepburn was promoted to Brigadier General and made a Commander of the Order of St. Michael and St. George before returning to Ottawa, where he resumed his post as MP for Prince Edward County, Ontario, to which seat he had been re-elected to in 1917. O.C. of operations in Britain, Gerald White, was promoted to Colonel and made a Commander of the Order of the British Empire before likely returning to his post as director of the Pembroke Lumber Company, where he had been employed in 1916 until he volunteered for overseas service. Director of forestry operations in France, John Burton White, was promoted to Brigadier General and awarded the Distinguished Service Order before returning to work in the lumber industry in the Ottawa River Valley.

As to the fate of the Canadian Forestry Corps, it was not formally disbanded by the Militia Department until some time in 1920. From its inception in March 1916, the Forestry Corps had grown from the 224\textsuperscript{a} Forestry Battalion of 1,500 foresters to a corps-sized formation 25,000 Canadian foresters by January 1918, in addition to 10,000 attached labourers; the Forestry Corps also constructed and operated a total of 151 logging camps across the breadth of Great Britain and France. During the three years the CFC was active between May 1916 and June 1919, it


\textsuperscript{327} Winegard, \textit{For King and Kanata}
helped to reduce Britain’s annual imports of timber from six million tons in 1916 to 2 million tons by December 1917. The reduction of timber imports freed enough tonnage on board Britain’s merchant fleet to import enough foodstuffs to feed an estimated 12 million civilians, thus achieving the mandate that the CFC had been given in February 1916.

Regarding its military importance, the Forestry Corps formed an essential link in the vast logistical supply chain operated by the British and French far behind the front lines. While the Forestry Corps work was largely relegated to supporting the operations of Army Service Corps and the Railroad Operating Division among other logistic and transport units, the CFC’s work ensured that even under the worst conditions imaginable, supplies and reinforcements continued to flow to forward to the front lines. Over the course of two and a half years, the Forestry Corps supplied millions of wooden railway sleepers (enough to construct several thousand kilometres of track), millions of road planks and tens or possibly hundreds of millions more pieces of sawn defence timber. Regular deliveries of construction timber kept the supply/hospital trains running on time and ensured that the weary soldiers had warm bunkers in which they could rest when not manning their trenches.

The Forestry Corps also played a pivotal role in the campaigns and battles fought by the British and Canadians during 1917, including Vimy Ridge where the CFC supplied the timber that the CEF used in their preparations for the successful capture of the ridge. Without the support of the three CFC companies attached to the CEF, the kilometres of light railway track could not have been built; nor could the numerous “subways” have been excavated as easily as they were; nor would there have been successful deliveries of the millions of tons of supplies and water consumed each week by the five divisions stationed opposite the ridge. The Forestry Corps was also instrumental in supporting the logistical operations at the battles of Hill 70 and Passchendaele, especially the former where torrential rain turned the battlefield into a barely navigable sea of mud. Supply routes were kept open thanks to the deliveries of millions of duckboards and road slabs that allowed British engineers to construct hundreds of kilometres of wooden plank walkways and roads across the ruined fields of Flanders. 1917 was also the year that the Forestry Corps’ impact was measurable enough for the British to declare a partial victory over Germany’s U-Boat fleet as enough cargo space was saved through reductions in timber imports to offset losses caused by U-Boat attacks.

Elsewhere, the Forestry Corps was also called upon to assist in the aerial defence of Britain, first from the threat of Zeppelin raids and then from the Gotha bomber scourge later in the war. Over the course of 1917 - 1918,
eight aerodrome construction companies were established in Britain and France, where they constructed or renovated well over one hundred aerodromes. While the Forestry Corps’ work helped to secure British skies from German bombers, the Corps’ work also benefitted the Royal Flying Corps/Royal Air Force on the Western Front because it gave the RFC/RAF more aerodromes at which to train new pilots. While an exact number is difficult to determine, it is likely that thousands of aircrew were trained at the aerodromes built by the Forestry Corps over the course of the war.

However, it was the period between March 21st and November 11th, 1918 that should be seen as the defining moment of the Canadian Forestry Corps for, without the CFC’s support, it is unlikely the British and French Armies would have been able to weather the storm of the German spring offensive. As discussed, the British encountered repeated logistical difficulties caused by the loss of hundreds of kilometres of trackage during the rapid advance of the German Armies during March and April 1918. The survival of the BEF had been determined by its ability to rapidly move supplies and reinforcements from one endangered front to another, despite the complications posed by the loss of trackage and rail junctions. While the BEF survived thanks to the tenacity of its soldiers, that they were even able to mount such a determined and ultimately successful defence was due to the hard work of the Canadian Forestry Corps, which provided the British with enough wooden railway ties to build or repair 1,000 kilometres of track, thereby keeping the BEF’s vital supply routes from the channel ports to the front line open.

Finally, the Forestry Corps’ work during the last three months of the war enabled the Entente armies to sustain a furious pace in pursuit of the German Armies reeling from the Entente counterattack in August 1918. Thousands of tons of timber construction material flowed to the front every day, where it was used to repair/build bridges and roads destroyed by the Germans in a vain effort to halt the unrelenting Entente advance. Without the support of the CFC, the French, British and Canadian/ANZAC advance would likely have ground to a halt behind the Somme River or have become hung up upon the Hindenburg line for a prolonged period of time. The Forestry Corps even briefly assisted with opening up humanitarian supply lines into the formerly occupied territories in Belgium and Northern France after the fighting ceased on November 11th.
When all was said and done, the achievements of the Canadian Forestry Corps were quite impressive; William C. Wonders estimates that the Forestry Corps’ total timber production amounted to a staggering 70% of all Entente war-related timber production.\footnote{328}{Wonders, William C. \textit{The Sawdust Fusiliers: The Canadian Forestry Corps in the Scottish Highlands in World War Two}, (Montreal, Canadian Pulp and Paper Association, 1991)}

Unfortunately, it is difficult - but not impossible - to establish an exact figure for the CFC’s actual production in Imperial tons because of inconsistencies in the CFC’s production records; methods and quality of record keeping varied from district to district, and production totals were not always recorded in a manner that made much sense to outsiders. For example, one set of records might record the production of a set of timber products such as sawn defence timber, slab and round material, while other production records for the same region and covering exactly the same time period record the entire range of production - rather than a few select items. In other cases, production figures were recorded in pieces- individual pieces of timber- while other records were recorded in imperial tons or Feet Broad Measured.\footnote{329}{There are some records where production figures were written down in Cubic Feet and Cubic Meters} This can give rise to some confusion as to a district’s or group’s actual production rates on a monthly basis, likely contributing to the grossly under-estimated total production figure of 1.8 million tons that appears in a post-war government report on the CFC’s operations.

According to that report, the only kind of timber that was accounted for was round and slab materials, more commonly referred to as fuel wood and sawn defence timber. The report claims only 1.8 million tons was produced during the war, that in my opinion, based on the research that I have conducted, is a gross understatement of the CFC’s total wartime production. Consider, for example, that fact that between 1917 and 1919, Britain only imported two million tons of timber, whereas it had imported six million tons in 1916. The difference in tonnage seems to indicate the CFC in Britain must have produced an average of at least 3 million tons of timber per year in Britain from 1917 onwards.\footnote{330}{Domestic production likely amounted to around 1 to 1.3 million tons a year, based on pre-war production levels of 900,000 tons a year and accounting for increased war time production.}

Additionally, the Forestry Corps in France produced a total of 1.9 million tons of timber material between March 21st, 1918 and November 11th, 1918. While these figures clearly do not square with the reported figure of the government’s report and support my thought that the report contains a grossly underreported figure of the CFC’s total production, it is again difficult to say if the report is truly inaccurate as the figure for production totals other
than slab and round materials is 817 million FBM. However, this is again a gross underreporting of the total FBM cut by the CFC, as the totals reports by Bird and Davies state that 1.3 billion FBM of timber was sawn during the course of the war. Despite the fact that the CFC’s total was time production is difficult to accurately state, the Corps production records and the reported drop in British timber imports indicates that the Forestry Corps likely produced at its height 3 to 5 million tons per year starting in 1917 through to 1918. It is likely that the total estimated production of timber between May 13th, 1916 and June 1919 amounted to roughly 10 million tons of sawn timber products.

While the records of the Corps’ production might be murky, the achievements of the foresters who served in the Canadian Forestry Corps are quite clear; called upon to serve King and Country in an unconventional yet surprisingly effective manner, the Canadian foresters hailing from the Rain Forest coast of British Columbia, the isolated wilderness of Northern Ontario and dense forests of New Brunswick and Nova Scotia left the bush heeding the call of the recruiting sergeant. Donning a uniform and wielding a broad axe, the “timber beasts” waged an unrelenting war upon the forests of Britain and France for three years, striking repeated yet unfelt blows against the Kaiser’s submarines with every swing of their axes. Though the foresters never lifted a rifle nor fired a shot in anger, all members of the Forestry Corps - especially those foresters whose only option of service was the CFC - made an important contribution to the defeat of the German Empire and the Entente victory in the Great War.

---

331 Estimating the weight in tons of 817 million FBM is almost impossible so no accurate figure can be provided.
Thesis Bibliography

Archival sources- Library and Archives Canada

RG 9 III C 8
RG 25 A-2
MG A 72
RG 24
RG 150
RG III B
RG 9 B 1
RG 9-III-D-3

Print Sources- Secondary
Adams, R.J.Q. *Arms and the Wizard. Lloyd George and the Ministry of Munitions 1915-1916,* (Collage Station, Texas A & M University, 1978)


Avery, Donald. *Dangerous Foreigners: European Immigrant Workers and Labour Radicalism in Canada, 1896-1932,* (Toronto, McClelland and Stewart Ltd. 1979)


Dennis, Patrick, *Reluctant Warriors: Canadian Conscripts and The Great War,* (Vancouver, UBC Press 2017)


Mackay, Donald, *The Lumberjacks,* (Toronto, National Heritage Books, 1978)


Melnycky, Peter, “The Internment of Ukrainians in Canada”, in *Loyalties in Conflict: Ukrainians in Canada during the Great War,* ed. Frances Swyripa and John Herd Thompson, (Edmonton, Canadian Institute of Ukrainian Studies, 1983)


Starling, John and Lee, Ivor, *No Labour, No Battle: Military Labour During the First World War*, (Port Stroud, Spellmount, 2009)


Winegard, Timothy C. *For King and Kanata: Canadian Indians and the First World War*, (Winnipeg, University of Manitoba Press, 2012)


Wynn Graeme, *Timber Colony : A Historical Geography of Early Nineteenth Century New Brunswick*, (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1980)

Print Sources-Primary


Porter, Herman L. *A Review of Activities of the 126th Company Canadian Forestry Corps While Stationed at Ampthill Bedfordshire* (Bedfordshire, Bedfordshire Times Publishing Company Ltd. 1919)


Web based sources - videos

Neidell, Indiana, *The Great War Project*, Mediakraft Networks, 2018, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0e5szJBCYw&t=365s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v0e5szJBCYw&t=365s)
