

“EVERY INCH A FIGHTING MAN:” A NEW  
PERSPECTIVE ON THE MILITARY CAREER OF A  
CONTROVERSIAL CANADIAN, SIR RICHARD  
TURNER

by

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## **Abstract**

Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Ernest William Turner served Canada admirably in two wars and played an instrumental role in unifying veterans' groups in the post-war period. His experience was unique in the Canadian Expeditionary Force; in that, it included senior command in both the combat and administrative aspects of the Canadian war effort.

This thesis, based on new primary research and interpretations, revises the prevalent view of Turner. The thesis recasts five key criticisms of Turner and presents a more balanced and informed assessment of Turner. His appointments were not the result of his political affiliation but because of his courage and capability. Rather than an incompetent field commander, Turner developed from a middling combat general to an effective division commander by late 1916. His transfer to England was the result of the need for a proficient field commander to reform the administration. Turner proved to be an excellent administrator, a strong nationalist, and was crucially responsible for improvements in administration and training in England. Finally, the conflict with Sir Arthur Currie, the commander of the Canadian Corps, rather than being motivated by obstructionist jealousy was the outcome of competing institutional imperatives and Currie's challenging personality.

## **Dedication**

*To my wife, Anita, for her ever-constant love and support in times of trials and tribulation to joys and jubilation.*

## Acknowledgements

A PhD is at its core a solitary pilgrimage punctuated by rewarding interactions with other scholars, fellow pilgrims, friends, and family. The acknowledgements allow me the opportunity to thank the many people who guided, facilitated, and encouraged me. First, is Dr. Tim Cook of the Canadian War Museum, who started me on this journey by suggesting I convert my nascent Turner project into a PhD. His assistance and encouragement were vital to its pursuit. He was also extremely generous with his time and insights into the First World War and the Canadian Expeditionary Force. His detailed comments materially improved the thesis.

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scans of Douglas Haig's diaries and discussed obscure aspects of the Battles of St. Eloi and Courcellette. Dr. Stephen Harris at the Directorate of History and Heritage at the Department of National Defence answered numerous questions and was most accommodating in my visit to the Directorate. Thanks are also due to Dr. John English and Dr. Jack Granatstein, who were helpful in trying to pin down Turner's political affiliations. Carol Reid and Maggie Arbour-Doucette at the Canadian War Museum were most helpful in my visits to review their extensive archival and photographic resources.

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My family was surpassingly supportive for this strange interest in a 'long-dead white guy.' My sons, Eric and Kirk, good-naturedly endured long tales of major-generals behaving badly and my absences trying to track down that last footnote. I must especially need to acknowledge my mother whose unwavering support and assistance was vital to the project. Finally, this project would not have happened without my wife's unstinting enthusiasm, encouragement, and support. I hope they will find the resulting work worthy of their commitment.

Despite the feedback, recommendations, suggestions, and pleas from all who contributed, any errors, omissions, and infelicities are my responsibility.

## **Table of Contents**

LIST OF FIGURES .....	III
LIST OF MAPS .....	IV
GLOSSARY .....	V
SOURCE REFERENCES .....	VI
NOMENCLATURE .....	VII
<b>INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>1</b>
HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	12
SOURCE REVIEW .....	15
ORGANISATION OVERVIEW.....	19
CONCLUSION.....	20
<b>1 BOER WAR HERO: TURNER TO 1914.....</b>	<b>21</b>
EARLY LIFE .....	21
CANADIAN MILITARY .....	23
SOUTH AFRICAN CAMPAIGN.....	29
PERIOD BETWEEN THE WARS.....	42
<b>2 ‘AN AWFUL WAR:’ TURNER AS BRIGADE COMMANDER.....</b>	<b>46</b>
CONTEXT OF CANADA’S PARTICIPATION .....	46
VALCARTIER .....	52
SECOND YPRES.....	59
ANALYSIS.....	70
FESTUBERT .....	77
CONCLUSION.....	79
<b>3 WE ARE IN DESOLATE PLACES: BATTLE OF ST. ELOI CRATERS.....</b>	<b>81</b>
FORMATION OF THE 2 <sup>ND</sup> DIVISION .....	81
IN FRANCE .....	91
ST. ELOI.....	98
ANALYSIS.....	120
HUNT FOR SCAPEGOATS.....	131
ROSS RIFLE.....	143
<b>4 ‘WON BY <u>MY</u> INFANTRY:’ TURNER’S SOMME CAMPAIGN .....</b>	<b>146</b>
COMMAND CHANGES .....	147
PREPARING FOR THE ONSLAUGHT .....	151
APOTHEOSIS: COURCELETTE 15 SEPTEMBER .....	159
FUTILITY: 28 SEPTEMBER AND 1 OCTOBER.....	182
ANALYSIS.....	196
CONCLUSION.....	200
<b>5 CHAOS IN ENGLAND: UNWISE MANAGEMENT.....</b>	<b>202</b>
STRUCTURE.....	203
EFFECTIVENESS.....	206
EFFICIENCY.....	212
PROMOTIONS.....	214
MINISTRY OF OVERSEAS MILITARY FORCES OF CANADA FORMED.....	222
ANZAC COMPARISON.....	226
TURNER IS SELECTED .....	228

<b>6 ‘A WISE CHOICE:’ TRANSFORMATION .....</b>	<b>234</b>
EFFECTIVENESS.....	244
COMPARISONS WITH OTHER DOMINIONS .....	250
EFFICIENCY .....	256
PROMOTIONS.....	263
POLITICAL INTERFERENCE .....	269
ASSESSMENT .....	272
REASONS FOR SUCCESS .....	281
<b>7 FIGHTING THE AUTHORITIES: THE TURNER-CURRIE RELATIONSHIP .....</b>	<b>290</b>
TURNER AND THE ABORTIVE BIRTH OF A CANADIAN AIR FORCE .....	302
FURTHER DETERIORATION .....	307
CHALLENGES OF 1918 .....	310
CANADIAN CORPS REORGANISATION .....	311
RESPONDING TO THE GERMAN MARCH OFFENSIVE .....	319
HUNDRED DAYS CAMPAIGN.....	324
NADIR: POST-ARMISTICE CLASHES .....	325
CONCLUSION.....	328
<b>8 FADE AWAY: TURNER 1918 - 1961 .....</b>	<b>341</b>
CONSCRIPTION AND ELECTION .....	342
KEMP ARRIVES .....	346
DEMOBILISATION.....	364
ANALYSIS .....	368
TURNER POST-WAR.....	370
LAST SERVICE: CANADIAN LEGION .....	371
<b>CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>380</b>
HISTORIOGRAPHY.....	381
ASSESSMENT .....	384
TURNER AND CURRIE .....	396
<b>APPENDIX .....</b>	<b>400</b>
APPENDIX 1   AWARDS.....	400
<b>BIBLIOGRAPHY.....</b>	<b>401</b>
PRIMARY SOURCES.....	401
SECONDARY SOURCES.....	406



## **List of Figures**

FIGURE 1	LIEUTENANT RICHARD TURNER 1900 .....	30
FIGURE 2	COMPARISON OF EFFECTIVE STRENGTHS BY ARMS BETWEEN BRITISH AND CANADIAN FORCES IN FRANCE, 3 JUNE 1918 .....	51
FIGURE 3	3RD BRIGADE ORDER OF BATTLE, 22 APRIL 1915 .....	55
FIGURE 4	2ND DIVISION ORGANISATION CHART – ST. ELOI, 6 APRIL 1916 .....	83
FIGURE 5	2ND DIVISION BATTALION COMMANDERS’ ORIGINS.....	84
FIGURE 6	ST. ELOI PANORAMA, 14 MARCH 1915 .....	100
FIGURE 7	ST. ELOI AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH, 31 MARCH 1916 .....	103
FIGURE 8	ST. ELOI AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH, 16 APRIL 1916 .....	120
FIGURE 9	CANADIAN BATTLE LOSS PERCENTAGE 1915-1918.....	121
FIGURE 10	2 <sup>ND</sup> DIVISION COMMAND CHANGES – SEPTEMBER 1915/NOVEMBER 1916.....	150
FIGURE 11	2 <sup>ND</sup> DIVISION ORGANISATION CHART – COURCELETTE, 15 SEPTEMBER 1916 .....	160
FIGURE 12	COURCELETTE SUGAR REFINERY INTELLIGENCE DIAGRAM.....	164
FIGURE 13	LOSSES, REINFORCEMENTS, AND CUMULATIVE DEFICIENCY 2 <sup>ND</sup> DIVISION FOR WEEKS ENDING 15 SEPTEMBER TO 13 OCTOBER 1916.....	183
FIGURE 14	CANADIAN FORCES IN ENGLAND 1916 SIMPLIFIED ORGANISATION CHART .....	204
FIGURE 15	LIEUTENANT-GENERAL SIR RICHARD TURNER, GOC CANADIAN FORCES IN THE BRITISH ISLES .....	235
FIGURE 16	CANADIAN FORCES IN ENGLAND 1917 SIMPLIFIED ORGANISATION CHART .....	241
FIGURE 17	REPLACEMENTS RECEIVED AND DESPATCHED .....	243
FIGURE 18	TRAINING SYLLABUS .....	248
FIGURE 19	REDUCTION IN STAFF DECEMBER 1916 TO SEPTEMBER 1917 .....	259
FIGURE 20	OVERSEAS MILITARY COUNCIL ORGANISATION CHART .....	350
FIGURE 21	OMFC 1918 ORGANISATION CHART .....	351
FIGURE 22	PROMOTION COMPARISON – TURNER/CURRIE .....	386

## **List of Maps**

MAP 1	TURNER’S BOER WAR CAMPAIGN .....	42
MAP 2	YPRES, THE GAS ATTACK, 22 APRIL 1915 .....	62
MAP 3	THE APEX LOST, 24 APRIL 1915.....	66
MAP 4	THE BATTLE OF ST-JULIEN, 24 APRIL 1915 .....	67
MAP 5	WESOUTRE SECTOR, 23 SEPTEMBER 1915 .....	92
MAP 6	ST. ELOI CRATERS, 4 AND 6 APRIL 1916 .....	108
MAP 7	ST. ELOI CRATERS, 10 APRIL 1916 .....	116
MAP 8	COURCELETTE, 15 SEPTEMBER 1916 .....	162
MAP 9	BATTLE OF THIEPVAL RIDGE, 26 SEPTEMBER 1916.....	184
MAP 10	BATTLE OF ANCRE HEIGHTS, 1 OCTOBER 1916 .....	189

## **Glossary**

ADC	Aide-de-Camp
AIF	Australian Imperial Force
AMS	Assistant Military Secretary
ANZAC	Australian and New Zealand Army Corps
BEF	British Expeditionary Force
BGGS	Brigadier-General, General Staff
CASC	Canadian Army Service Corps
CEF	Canadian Expeditionary Force
CETD	Canadian Engineers Training Depot
CFA	Canadian Field Artillery
CIGS	Chief of the Imperial General Staff
CMGC	Canadian Machine Gun Corps
CRA	Commander, Royal Artillery
CRE	Commander, Royal Engineers
CRT	Canadian Railway Troops
DSO	Distinguished Service Order
<i>FSR</i>	<i>Field Service Regulations</i>
CGS	Chief of the General Staff
GHQ	General Headquarters
GOC	General Officer Commanding
GOCRA	General Officer Commanding Royal Artillery
GSO 1	General Staff Officer 1
GSO 2	General Staff Officer 2
KRO	King’s Regulations and Orders
MGC	Machine Gun Corps
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officers
OMC	Overseas Military Council
OMFC	Overseas Military Forces of Canada
PF	Permanent Force
PPCLI	Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry
QOCH	Queen’s Own Canadian Hussars
RCD	Royal Canadian Dragoons
RCR	Royal Canadian Regiment
RMC	Royal Military College (Kingston)
RO	Routine Orders
SMLE	Short Magazine Lee-Enfield
VC	Victoria Cross

## **Source References**

CWM	Canadian War Museum
DHH	Directorate of History and Heritage, Department of National Defence
IWM	Imperial War Museum (UK)
LAC	Library and Archives Canada
LHCMA	Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives (UK)
McGill	McGill University Archives
QUA	Queen’s University Archives
TNA	The National Archives (UK)

## **Nomenclature**

Times: Time is given as a twelve-hour clock following contemporary practice. The British Army did not shift to a twenty-four hour clock until late in the war.

Distances: Distances are measured in metric units, with yards equal to meters. This avoids the inelegant appearance of a 914 metre advance for a 1000 yard advance, without unduly distorting the narrative.

Unit Designations: Canadian units are described without a national modifier, so the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and 16<sup>th</sup> Battalion. British, Australian, French, and New Zealand units include a national designation, such as the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division. Following contemporary practice, battalions, brigade and divisions are presented as Arabic numerals, corps as Roman numerals and Armies are written out, so the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division, II Corps, and Reserve Army. Italics designate German units, for example the 45<sup>th</sup> *Reserve Division*.

Imperial: One of the confusing aspects of nomenclature of this period is the multiple meanings of the term 'Imperial.' Canadians used it to refer to British forces raised in the United Kingdom, while the British used it for forces raised in colonies under the auspices of the War Office. The head of the British Army was titled the Chief of the Imperial General Staff indicating a mandate that encompassed more than just the forces raised in the United Kingdom. The Australians called themselves the Australian Imperial Force, but also referred to the British as Imperials – often in a derogatory sense. The term is avoided in the thesis, as it is particularly confusing to modern audiences, but it is retained in quotations.

To reduce repetition, allusions to France, England and Canada refers to Canadian forces in those locations, unless explicitly indicated otherwise.

# INTRODUCTION

*Gen Turner the great Canadian General, was here today. He is very popular as [he] is every inch a fighting man.*

Cadet Cecil Frost, 1 February 1917<sup>1</sup>

Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Ernest William Turner, VC, KCB, KCMG, DSO was a controversial and unconventional First World War Canadian general. This thesis will demonstrate that Turner, unlike many of his Canadian confrères in the Boer, First, and Second World Wars, was capable, affable, engaging, courageous, and charismatic, despite his unprepossessing appearance. He was also highly esteemed by his officers, staff, and other ranks. The dominant narrative in Canadian historiography, described later, however portrays Turner as a political appointee and repeated failure in combat command. It also claims he was exiled to England and obscurity. The only time he emerges in this standard interpretation is when he clashes with Sir Arthur Currie, the commander of the Canadian Corps. The only biographical study on Turner belittlingly refers to him in the title as a 'dashing subaltern.'<sup>2</sup> This portrayal is badly skewed. It ignores, minimises, or ascribes to others Turner's successes as a combat commander and head of Canadian forces in England. Turner played a critical part in every stage of the development of the Canadian Corps for the first

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<sup>1</sup> Cecil Frost was the brother of Leslie Frost who was later the sixteenth Premier of Ontario from 1949 to 1961. Leslie M Frost, Cecil Frost, and Rae Bruce Fleming, *The Wartime Letters of Leslie and Cecil Frost, 1915-1919* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 118.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas P. Leppard, "The Dashing Subaltern - Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect," *Canadian Military History* 6, no. 2 (1997).

## Introduction

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half of the war and contributed significantly to the Canadian Corps' success thereafter. His experience was unique in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) in that it included senior command in both the combat and administrative aspects of the Canadian war effort. Examining Turner's career also allows an important window into the wider issues of tactical, operational, and administrative matters. The tactical and operational matters include the debates on command centralisation versus decentralisation, the increasing combat capability of the British and Canadian forces, described as a 'learning curve,' the role of pre-war British tactical and operational preparation, and responses to the challenges presented by trench warfare. The administrative issues include the appropriate organisation for overseas forces in a hybrid control environment and the impact of a mixed managerial/professional approach to administration and training. He was at the nexus of the evolution of the Canadian military in the First World War but is a peripheral caricature in current Canadian historiography.

Turner was the senior Canadian officer in the CEF throughout the war, meaning he outranked Currie.<sup>3</sup> He commanded the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade in the 1<sup>st</sup> Canadian Division at the Battles of Second Ypres and Festubert. In August 1915, Turner received command of the newly formed 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, while Currie took over the 1<sup>st</sup> Division in September 1915. Turner commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division at the Battles of St. Eloi Craters and the Somme. Appointed commander of

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<sup>3</sup> It is a common error to claim Currie was the senior officer during the war. Turner had seniority throughout the war, based on his appointments pre-dating Currie's. For example, see David A. Borys, "The Education of a Corps Commander: Arthur Currie's Leadership from 1915-1917" (Masters, University of Alberta, 2006), 13.

## Introduction

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Canadian forces in England in November 1916, Turner was also the chief military advisor to the newly formed Ministry of Overseas Military Forces of Canada (OMFC). His mandate was to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the Canadian forces in England. In June 1917, the rivalry between Turner and Currie culminated in a struggle over who would command the Canadian Corps, after Sir Julian Byng's promotion to command the Third Army. In the end, Currie received the corps, while Turner's consolation prize was promotion to Lieutenant-General in advance of Currie to maintain Turner's seniority. For the rest of the war, Currie and Turner had an uneasy relationship marked by periods of cooperation but also of tension and conflict. Turner returned to Canada in the summer of 1919 and held no further formal military office but played an instrumental role in the formation of the Canadian Legion.

While there are multiple biographies of Sam Hughes, the Minister of Militia and Defence, and Currie, there is no full biography of Turner. Neither has there been much attention paid to the significant Canadian presence in England and the effect of Turner's improvement in administration of Canadian forces in England on the Canadian Corps' effectiveness in 1917/1918. The majority of both popular and scholarly works has focused on the active front to the neglect of the essential role of training and administration in England, as well as support units in France and Belgium.<sup>4</sup> This thesis will address this lacuna in our understanding by delineating the full scope of Turner's military career.

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<sup>4</sup> On 11 November 1918, there were 130,000 troops in England, 152,000 troops in France. Of the troops in France, approximately 105,000 were serving with the Corps and the remainder being service units, replacements, Railway, and Forestry troops. Demobilisation Factors, Folder 41, 74/672 Box 8, DHH.



### Historiography

Turner's historiography is sparse. There is no full-length biographical study, other than a perfunctory article in the journal *Canadian Military History*.<sup>5</sup> Other works that provide some limited coverage are a Master's thesis on the Battle of St. Eloi, an excellent PhD thesis on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, and three articles on St. Eloi.<sup>6</sup> As a comparison, there are three full biographies of Currie, plus one book of his selected writings, three biographies of Sam Hughes, and one shared biography of Currie and Hughes, plus multiple theses and articles.<sup>7</sup>

Thomas Leppard is the published authority on Turner as he has produced a biographical article and a Master's thesis on Turner and St. Eloi. In his article, Leppard makes the case that historians have treated Turner as a 'peripheral

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<sup>5</sup> Leppard, "The Dashing Subaltern - Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect."

<sup>6</sup> Thomas P. Leppard, "Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi" (Masters, University of Calgary, 1994); David Charles Gregory Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918" (PhD, University of Calgary, 2003); David Campbell, "'A Leap in the Dark' – Intelligence and the Struggle for the St. Eloi Craters: Reassessing the Role of Major-General Richard Turner," in Andrew B. Godefroy (ed.), *Great War Commands: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Army Leadership 1914-1918* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2010); Terry Copp, "Slaughter at St. Eloi," *Legion Magazine Army Part* 55(2004); Tim Cook, "The Blind Leading the Blind - the Battle of the St. Eloi Craters," *Canadian Military History* 5, no. 2 (1996).

<sup>7</sup> On Currie, see Daniel G. Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography* (Methuen, 1985); A. M. J. Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*, Canadian War Museum Historical Publication (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987); Hugh MacIntyre Urquhart, *Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian* (Toronto: J.M. Dent & Sons (Canada), 1950). For Currie's selected writings see Arthur Currie and Mark Osborne Humphries, *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie: Diaries, Letters, and Report to the Ministry, 1917-33* (Waterloo, ON: LCMSDS Press of Wilfrid Laurier University, 2008). On Hughes, see Ronald Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*, Canadian War Museum Historical Publication (Wilfrid Laurier University Press in collaboration with Canadian War Museum, Canadian Museum of Civilization, National Museums of Canada, 1986); Charles F. Winter, *Lieutenant-General the Hon. Sir Sam Hughes, K.C.B., M.P., Canada's War Minister, 1911-1916: Recollections of Service as Military Secretary at Headquarters, Canadian Militia Prior to and During the Early Stages of the Great War* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1931); Alan R. Capon, *His Faults Lie Gently : The Incredible Sam Hughes* (Lindsay, Ont.: F.W. Hall, 1969). For the shared biography, see Tim Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2010).

## Introduction

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figure,' but 'he deserves better.'<sup>8</sup> Leppard's portrayal of Turner's combat record is bleak, as he claims Turner never learned to command, but he does not discuss Turner's victory at Courcellette in his article. Leppard, however, credits Turner with the improvements in England and makes the salient point that Turner in his battles with Currie never allowed "their animosity to interfere with the welfare of the Corps."<sup>9</sup>

David Campbell's thesis on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division is a well researched and argued divisional history, and he treats Turner carefully, albeit in the context of the standard narrative. As Campbell's thesis focuses on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, Turner disappears from the account when he moves to England. Campbell has also published two articles on the battles of St. Eloi and Courcellette that are generally favourable to Turner.<sup>10</sup>

The majority of historians writing about Canada's participation in the First World War follow a standard narrative for Turner. They credited him with physical courage but in a manner that suggests his bravery diminished his suitability for high command.<sup>11</sup> They characterised Turner as a repeated failure as a combat commander at Second Ypres, Festubert, St. Eloi, and the Somme.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Leppard, "The Dashing Subaltern - Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect," 21.

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> David Charles Gregory Campbell, "A Forgotten Victory: Courcellette, 15 September 1916," *Canadian Military History* 16, no. 2 (2007); Campbell, "'A Leap in the Dark' – Intelligence and the Struggle for the St. Eloi Craters: Reassessing the Role of Major-General Richard Turner."

<sup>11</sup> Examples include "Brave men do not necessarily make good generals" and "Personally fearless, he was unsuited for command in the field." Brereton Greenhous, *Canada and the Battle of Vimy Ridge, 9-12 April 1917* ([Ottawa: Dept. of National Defence, Directorate of History], 1992), 27; George H Cassar, *Hell in Flanders Fields: Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), 61.

<sup>12</sup> On Second Ypres "Even accounting for the disorder of the battle, the messages Hughes and Turner sent to Loomis are nothing short of absurd" and "Turner clearly reacted badly and was not in contact or control of his Brigade for much of the time." Nathan M. Greenfield, *Baptism*

## Introduction

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They also asserted that his promotion to General Officer Commanding (GOC) 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and subsequent retention in command were due to unjustified political interference.<sup>13</sup> They also claimed Turner sacrificed his men for political advantage.<sup>14</sup> Further, the interpretation states the authorities sacked Turner because of the bloody fiasco at St. Eloi, and Byng, the Canadian Corps commander, actively supported his removal.<sup>15</sup>

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*of Fire; the Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada April 1915* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 197.; Wesley Gustavson, C., "Missing the Boat? Colonel A.F. Duguid and the Canadian Official History of World War I" (Masters, University of Calgary, 1999), 59. Regarding St. Eloi Craters, "Costly mistakes by Major-General Turner of the 2nd Division and Brigadier-General H. D. B. Ketchen of the 6th Brigade at St. Eloi." and "The operation was ineptly conducted by the divisional commander, Major-General Richard Turner, who had done so poorly at Second Ypres as a brigadier." Robert Craig Brown, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1980), 63.; Daniel G Dancocks, *Gallant Canadians: The Story of the Tenth Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1914-1919* (Calgary, Alta., Canada: Calgary Highlanders Regimental Funds Foundation, 1990), 81.

<sup>13</sup> For example, "Mercer and Currie received their promotions on merit. Even if he was not completely beloved by the Minister, Turner had not" and "The other division commander in the Canadian Corps was Richard Turner. He owed his advancement entirely to Sam Hughes, who was among the few who held him in high regard, particularly after his weak performance at Second Ypres" J. L. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 81.; Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography*: 60. On the aftermath of St Eloi, "The defeat so tarnished his reputation that not even Hughes could override British objections to his becoming the Canadian Corps GOC; he was lucky to keep his division." and "kept the questionably competent Canadian--born General Richard Turner in command of the 2nd Division." Leppard, "Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi," 11.; Tim Cook, "Documenting War and Forging Reputations: Sir Max Aitken and the Canadian War Records Office in the First World War," *War in History* 10, no. 3 (2003): 278.

<sup>14</sup> "Turner revealed his greatest weakness as a military commander. He was willing to subordinate the wishes and best interests of his men to his personal ambitions, his political loyalties and his desire to settle scores with Alderson. Set within their context, Turner's action and decisions regarding the Ross rifle may be comprehensible but they are not condonable." Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 157.

<sup>15</sup> "Nine men commanded the Corps' four divisions in battle during WWI and only Richard Turner was sacked" and "Turner was transferred to an administrative post in London after he bungled the 2nd Division's first battle at St. Eloi early in 1916." Patrick Brennan and Thomas Leppard, "How the Lessons Were Learned: Senior Commanders and the Moulding of the Canadian Corps after the Somme," in Yves Tremblay (ed.), *Canadian Military History since the 17th Century : Proceedings of the Canadian Military History Conference, Ottawa, 5-9 May 2000* (Ottawa: Directorate of History and Heritage, Dept. of National Defence = Direction--Histoire et patrimoine, Ministère de la défense nationale, 2001), 138.; Cassar, *Hell in Flanders Fields: Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres*: 321. "Byng, delighted to be rid of an inadequate commander." Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*: 86.

## Introduction

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The standard narrative will usually admit that Turner was of some value as the commander of Canadian forces in England, but often will attribute the success in England to the first Minister of the OMFC, Sir George Perley.<sup>16</sup> A conspicuous exception is Desmond Morton who accurately observed in *When Your Number is Up* that Perley left Turner to make the military decisions.<sup>17</sup> Another major strand of the standard narrative was Turner clashed with Currie, while Turner was in England, to the detriment of the Canadian Corps.<sup>18</sup> The more informed historians, however, do not accept Currie's claims that Turner deliberately subverted him.<sup>19</sup>

Turner's subordinates, both officers and men, extolled his competence, approachability, and courage. Memoirs, diaries, and contemporary letters rarely mention senior officers, but a surprising number of Turner's subordinates refer to

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<sup>16</sup> "Major-General Richard Turner had been found wanting on the Somme and was sent to England to bring order out of the chaos of army administration where, as it would turn out, his talents really lay" and "He did a good job. It took several months to sort out the mess, but there would be no further complaints about the standard of training of the replacement troops reaching the Canadian Corps." Patrick Brennan, "Julian Byng and Leadership in the Canadian Corps," in Andrew Iarocci Geoffrey Hayes, Mike Bechthold (eds.), *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment* (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 89; Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography*: 81. "Perley achieved an impressive transformation." and "the architect of the new system was Sir George Perley." Desmond Morton, "Exerting Control: The Development of Canadian Authority over the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919," in Timothy Travers and Christon Archer (eds.), *Men at War* (Precedent, 1982), 12; Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 62.

<sup>17</sup> Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 92.

<sup>18</sup> "That this appointment should of aroused personal jealousies was natural; that the jealousies should of led to personal animosities, bitter recriminations, and political intrigue was indicative of immaturity and a lack of a proper sense of military discipline." George F. G. Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People*, 3d ed. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1974), 312.

<sup>19</sup> "From his combat record alone it was obvious Turner was not a particularly good commander, but he did not attack Currie behind the latter's back." Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 130.

## Introduction

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him and do so in a positive light.<sup>20</sup> The regimental histories published before the Second World War were also commendatory, with two containing forwards written by Turner, indicating the esteem with which he was held.<sup>21</sup>

During the war and immediately post-war, Turner had a distinguished reputation, much like Douglas Haig.<sup>22</sup> As to be expected during the war, works like J.A. Currie's *The Red Watch* and Max Aitken's *Canada in Flanders* praised Turner.<sup>23</sup> Immediate post-war accounts were either laudatory, triumphal commentary devoid of significant criticisms of leaders, or detailed regimental histories where the battles of reputation were irrelevant.

Turner's reputation has declined precipitously, again like Haig's, while Currie's has ascended. In the 1920s without detailed academic or official histories, the rumours of Currie's poor standing with the men of the Canadian Corps affected the narrative. Currie's victory at his libel trial in 1928 lifted the pall over his reputation and encouraged both officers and men to rally around

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<sup>20</sup> Some of the examples from each category are D.E. Macintyre on Turner transferring to England "certainly is the right man in the right place. Unfortunately, it is a great loss for us, everyone was his friend out here. He is not only a capable soldier but an absolutely honest and fearless man and should go far." Macintyre Diary Entry, 26 November 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC. Diary Entry, November 26 1916. Another is Private Fraser writing about the contempt the men felt towards their officers "One officer I can single out as a decided exception. He is General Turner, V.C." Donald Fraser and Reginald H. Roy, *The Journal of Private Fraser, 1914-1918: Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Victoria, B.C.: Sono Nis Press, 1985), 75. Another example, "Gen Turner the great Canadian General, was here today. He is very popular as [he] is every inch a fighting man." Frost, Frost, and Fleming, *The Wartime Letters of Leslie and Cecil Frost, 1915-1919*: 118.

<sup>21</sup> R. C. Fetherstonhaugh, *The Royal Montreal Regiment: 14th Battalion, C.E.F. 1914-1925* (The Gazette Printing Co. Limited, 1927); Kim Beattie, *48th Highlanders of Canada, 1891-1928* (Canada: The Highlanders, 1932).

<sup>22</sup> Gary Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army*, (Aurum Press, 2011). Amazon Kindle. 340.

<sup>23</sup> John Allister Currie, *"The Red Watch"; with the First Canadian Division in Flanders* (London,: Constable and company, Ltd., 1916); Max Aitken Beaverbrook, *Canada in Flanders* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1916).

## Introduction

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Currie.<sup>24</sup>

The publication of the long delayed first volume of the Canadian Official History in 1938 damaged Turner's stature, despite A.F. Duguid, the official historian, burying much of his criticism of Turner.<sup>25</sup> Turner feuded repeatedly with Duguid over Duguid's portrayal of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and, by extension his role in its command, especially during the Battle of Second Ypres.<sup>26</sup> Turner, and his Brigade-Major, Garnet Hughes, wrote long memos, met repeatedly with Duguid, and Turner even threatened to escalate the matter to the Prime Minister.<sup>27</sup> In the end, Duguid did obfuscate what he regarded as Turner's errors as he did not believe the story could be told while Turner was alive.<sup>28</sup>

The British Official History treatment was circumspect because of the bruising battles fought by Duguid and senior Canadian officers with J. E.

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<sup>24</sup> In 1928, Currie sued a Port Hope newspaper and won for libel over accusations that Currie unnecessarily ordered a costly attack on Mons on the last day of the war. For details on the trial, see Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 336-359; Robert Scott Demill, "The 1928 Coburg Libel Trial of Sir Arthur Currie and the Port Hope Evening Guide: The Rehabilitation of the Reputation of a Corps Commander" (Masters, University of Ottawa, 1989); Barbara M. Wilson, "The Road to the Coburg Court Room: New Material from the Archives of the Canadian War Museum on the Sir Arthur Currie - Sir Sam Hughes Dispute, 1918-19," *Canadian Military History* 10, no. 3 (2001).

<sup>25</sup> A. Fortescue Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914 -1919*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1938).

<sup>26</sup> Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars*, vol. 10 (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006); Gustavson, "Missing the Boat? Colonel A.F. Duguid and the Canadian Official History of World War I."; Timothy Travers, "Allies in Conflict: The British and Canadian Official Historians and the Real Story of Second Ypres (1915)," *Journal of Contemporary History* 24(1989); Timothy Travers, "Currie and 1st Canadian Division at Second Ypres - Controversy, Criticism and Official History," *Canadian Military History* 5, no. 2 (1996).

<sup>27</sup> Comments on Official History, DHS 10-10-E, RG 24 v1756, LAC; Memorandum, HQ 683-1-30-5 v2, RG 24 v1756, LAC.

<sup>28</sup> Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars*, 10: 88. Major-General F. O. W. Loomis, a battalion commander in the 3rd Brigade and later GOC 3rd Division, also did not approve of Duguid's account. Loomis writing to Garnet Hughes thought the history was written in close contact with members of the 2nd Brigade but not the 3rd Brigade. "It was my opinion that the action of the 3rd Canadian Infantry Brigade had not been done justice and especially the work of the 13th Battalion." Loomis to Hughes, 20 January 1934, File 22, MG 27 II D23 v14, Hughes Fonds; LAC.

## Introduction

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Edmonds, the British Official Historian. It is quite evident from reading Edmonds' account of Second Ypres that he was treading a careful line to avoid triggering another battle with the Canadians. Edmonds' coverage of St. Eloi and Courcellette was short and uncontroversial.<sup>29</sup>

After a long hiatus due to the Second World War, the looming fiftieth anniversary of the First World War caused historians to return to the war with a deluge of books. Identifying a hero to rally around, writers elevated Currie to his rightful place as the dominant Canadian military leader in the First World War. In the process, however, it was apparently necessary to undermine Turner's reputation to build up Currie's.

In the wake of Duguid's failure to publish more than a single volume of the projected eight, G.W.L. Nicholson's one volume history published in 1962 had to cover the entire Canadian war effort.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, Nicholson had to be concise, but despite this, it is an excellent narrative history, with especially strong battle descriptions. Nicholson tended to avoid most of the controversial topics and his treatment of Turner was neutral, while burying criticisms in footnotes.

The opening of the British and Canadian First World War archives triggered academic interest in delving deeper into the First World War, and another flood of books emerged starting in the 1980s that further solidified the

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<sup>29</sup> James Edward Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916*, vol. 2, History of the Great War, Based on Official Documents by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence (London: Macmillan, 1932), 413.

<sup>30</sup> G. W. L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Ottawa: R. Duhamel, Queen's Printer, 1964).

## Introduction

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standard narrative, discussed above. These works concentrated on the combat operations of the Canadian Corps.<sup>31</sup> Works such as Hyatt's biography of Hughes, Haycock's on Currie, Desmond Morton's multiple works, and Harris' on the Canadian staff provided a broad coverage and were based on previously under-utilised primary documentation.<sup>32</sup> This trend culminated in Tim Cook's two award-winning books on the Canadian Corps that covered not only the battles but also the experiences of the soldiers at and away from the front.<sup>33</sup>

Nevertheless, in all these works aspects of the standard narrative persisted.

The two indispensable works on the administrative portion of Turner's career are Desmond Morton's *A Peculiar Kind of Politics* and Stephen Harris's *Canadian Brass*. Morton covers the previously ignored history of the OMFC. This groundbreaking work is the only substantial narrative that deals with the CEF's administrative structure, governance, and changes.<sup>34</sup> Morton explores the evolution of Canadian administration from the chaos of Sam Hughes to the more

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<sup>31</sup> René Chartrand, *Canadian Military Heritage*, vol. III (Ottawa: National Defence, Directorate of History and Heritage, 2000); Bill Freeman and Richard Nielsen, *Far from Home: Canadians in the First World War* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1999); Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*; J. L. Granatstein, *Canada and the Two World Wars* (Toronto: Key Porter Books, 2003); Norman Hillmer and J. L. Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World to the 1990s* (Toronto: Copp Clark Longman, 1994); J. K. Martenson, *We Stand on Guard: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Army* (Montréal: Ovale Publications, 1992); Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People*.

<sup>32</sup> Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*.; Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*.; Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*, Toronto ed. (University of Toronto Press, 1982); Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War*.; Stephen John Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).

<sup>33</sup> Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007); Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008).

<sup>34</sup> The only other work dealing with administrative matters is Love's *A Call to Arms*. It is an explanatory work that exhaustively details the organisation of the CEF. It provides essential detailed order of battle information for all units in the CEF including combat, training, railway, and forestry troops. David W Love, *A Call to Arms: The Organization and Administration of Canada's Military in World War One* (Winnipeg: Bunker to Bunker Books, 1999).



## **Introduction**

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structured and bureaucratic experience of the OMFC. Morton's focus is on the political level and not the military, so generals appear only when they affect or interact with the politicians. Morton, more than most, appreciates the contribution Turner made to the improvement in the administration.

Harris investigates the transformation of the Canadian military from a militia force to a professional army in 1939 through the lens of command and staff. Harris' study showed the evolution from a militia dominated by political influence, to increasing professionalism during the First World War. Harris's interpretation was conditioned by the lens of Currie's papers, as he approached the process from primarily the Canadian Corps' perspective.

## **Research Questions**

The thesis explores five key questions that will determine the nature of Turner's contribution and assesses him as a general in his combat and administrative roles. These questions fall out of the primary elements of the standard narrative and are presented as four case studies. Each case study provides points for evaluation within the constraints of a thesis length work.

The first question revolves around the extent to which Turner's selection, appointments, and retention were the consequence of Turner's purported Conservative Party affiliation, so important in the patronage-driven Canadian Militia. The thesis will explore the underlying reasons for the political support for Turner.

The second question is Turner's combat generalship. The conventional

## Introduction

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interpretation has Turner as, at best, a mediocre combat leader. The thesis explores whether this is a valid appraisal by reviewing in depth, the two battles Turner commanded as a divisional commander at St. Eloi Craters, regarded as a bloody failure, and Courcellette, a 'forgotten victory'.<sup>35</sup> The thesis also investigates whether Turner demonstrated a learning process as a divisional commander in an unprecedented situation. To supplement this analysis, the thesis will also assess three of Turner's key decisions at Second Ypres.

The process and rationale for Turner's selection to command the OMFC is the third major question. The thesis will test whether the standard narrative's explanation that Turner was effectively dismissed with Byng's support is valid.

The penultimate question is Turner's performance as an administrator. The thesis analyses the changes in the efficiency and effectiveness of the administration in England with a special focus on the first seven months of Turner's command. It also evaluates Turner's responsibility for the improvements.

Many historians accept uncritically Currie's assertion that he was at constant loggerheads with the administration in England. The fifth principal thread examines the extent to which Currie's claim was well-founded. No other work has examined this 'battle' from Turner's perspective and reviewed his responses to Currie's demands.

To provide context, the thesis also briefly evaluates Turner's Boer War experiences; how he related to his political masters; his role in demobilisation;

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<sup>35</sup> Campbell, "A Forgotten Victory: Courcellette, 15 September 1916."

## Introduction

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the abortive formation of the Canadian airforce; the election of 1917; and the establishment of the Canadian Legion.

Canadian First World War studies, unlike many Australian works, often have a limited awareness of the equivalent Australian, New Zealand, and British experiences.<sup>36</sup> These other perspectives provide a useful comparison with the Canadian approach to understand how other organisations in analogous conditions solved the challenges. This is an effective tool to help evaluate Turner's performance. Hence, where applicable, the Australian, New Zealand, and British approach to an issue will be compared with the Canadian response.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> James Wood's recent book is an exception. James A. Wood, *Militia Myths : Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier, 1896-1921*, Studies in Canadian Military History, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>37</sup> E. M Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion: Anglo-Australian Relations During World War I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993); E. M Andrews, "Managing the War: The Department of Defence, 1914-1919," in Peter Dennis and Jeffery Grey (eds.), *Defining Victory 1918* (Army History Unit, Department of Defence, 1999); Bruce Douglas Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918" (PhD, University of New South Wales, 1997); Jeffrey Grey, *The Australian Army*, The Australian Centenary History of Defence (South Melbourne, Australia ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Jeffrey Grey, *A Military History of Australia*, 3rd ed. ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Roger Lee, "The Australian Staff: The Forgotten Men of the First AIF," in Peter Dennis and Jeffery Grey (eds.), *Defining Victory 1918* (Army History Unit, Department of Defence, 1999); Ross Mallett, "The Interplay between Technology, Tactics and Organisation in the First AIF" (PhD, Australian Defence Force Academy, 1998); John Dermot Millar, "A Study in the Limitations of Command: General Sir William Birdwood and the A.I.F., 1914-1918" (PhD, University of New South Wales, 1993); Christopher Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War* (Auckland: Reed, 2004); Christopher Pugsley and Laurie Barber, *Kiwis in Conflict: 200 Years of New Zealanders at War*, New ed. (Auckland: David Bateman in association with Auckland Museum, 2008); L. L Robson, *The First A.I.F.: A Study of Its Recruitment 1914-1918* (Melbourne University Press, 1970); Christopher Wray, *Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life*, Australian Army History Series (South Melbourne, Vic. ; New York: Oxford University Press, 2002); Richard Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918* (London: Harper Perennial, 2005); Matthew Dominic Hughes, "General Allenby and the Campaign of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, June 1917-November 1919" (PhD, King's College, 2000); Changboo Kang, "The British Infantry Officer on the Western Front in the First World War: With Special Reference to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment" (PhD, University of Birmingham, 2007); Charles Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005); Keith Simpson, "The Officers," in I. F. W Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds.), *A Nation in Arms: A Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985); Keith Spiers, "The Regular Army in 1914," in I. F. W Beckett and Keith Simpson (eds.), *A Nation in Arms: A*

## Introduction

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A formidable challenge facing the biographer is to steer between Scylla and Charybdis of advocating or loathing the subject.<sup>38</sup> It is the biographer's duty to present the facts and analysis reflecting the context of the period under study and what the subject could or should have known and done but not act as a prosecutor or advocate. The other pertinent issue is to separate the personal aspects from the professional. It is his role as a military commander with responsibility for thousands of men and by his works that Turner will be evaluated. The objective, therefore, is to assess Turner's personality as relevant to his military role and provide a considered analysis of his achievements and failures as an officer. The overarching goal is to present Turner in all the relevant military dimensions.<sup>39</sup>

## Source Review

Both the primary and secondary materials for the thesis are extensive and in some instances unexploited. The paramount sources are the archival records of the Canadian National Archives, Canadian War Museum, and the Department of National Defence, Directorate of History, and Heritage. This was supplemented with evidence found at the McGill University archives in Montreal, Queens' University Archives in Kingston, and The National Archives, Imperial War Museum and the Liddell Hart Centre for Military Archives in

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*Social Study of the British Army in the First World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1985).

<sup>38</sup> Hughes, "General Allenby and the Campaign of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, June 1917-November 1919," 13.

<sup>39</sup> An absence of evidence restricts the ability to portray Turner outside of his military role.

## **Introduction**

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London, England. Over 1,200 volumes of archival material were consulted in preparation of the thesis.

The Canadian National Archives' materials consist of official documents, personal papers, and service records; and records of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and the Royal Canadian Legion. The official documents are split between RG 9 (Department of Militia and Defence), RG 24 (Department of National Defence) and RG 150 (Service Records). The RG 9 volumes are the contemporary records of the CEF, and the RG 24 volumes consulted relate to the writing of the official histories, while RG 150 contains the service records of the officers and men of the CEF.

The most critical set of volumes are the RG 9 collection, which consists of four series – A, B, C, and D. Historians have thoroughly mined the A, C, and D series files. Three groups of volumes, however, have been hitherto virtually untouched – the correspondence files of John Wallace Carson, the OMFC's ministerial personnel correspondence, and the B series of volumes on administration in England. There are 127 volumes of individuals' correspondence sent and received by Major-General John Wallace Carson, Sam Hughes' 'Special Representative' in England. Unlike the other volumes in the A series, historians have not thoroughly examined Carson's correspondence, except the files on the most senior officers. There was much useful information scattered throughout the files that help explicate events, characters, motivations, and major-generals behaving badly. This information ceases with Carson's unseating in December 1916.

## Introduction

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The second set was the 105 volumes of personnel correspondence of the ministers of the OMFC. Similar in purpose to Carson's files, they provide useful background information on motivations and relationships.

The other major unexplored set were the series B volumes on Turner's command and his immediate staff in England, including Turner's office, Adjutant-General, Quartermaster-General, General Staff, and Assistant Military Secretary. For the most part, historians have not reviewed these files.<sup>40</sup> They reveal the management style of Turner and the contribution he and his staff made in reforming the administration in England. These materials were the by-product of the administrative process and were not developed to aid later historians. Like all such materials, they must be evaluated in terms of their purpose and context.

The pertinent RG 24 files relate to the writing of the Canadian official history and officers' comments on the British and Canadian official histories. While Duguid completed only one volume, Duguid's researchers did extensive work on the second and some preliminary effort on the third. Duguid for all his failings was a careful researcher, and he and his staff greatly facilitated later historians in their painstaking amassing of material. The comments made by officers on both the British and Canadian official histories can be rewarding, as they often provide information that is unavailable elsewhere and makes explicit

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<sup>40</sup> To confirm this assertion, I queried the LAC regarding the number of requests since 1993 for a selection of five Series A and five Series B volumes. These volumes were all ones I found useful and would likely be of interest to other researchers. On average, excluding my requests, the Series A volumes were requested fourteen times since 1993, while only v806 in Series B was requested and that just six times. RG9 III A1 and B1 Circulation Stats 15 02 2011 Email from LAC, 12 February 2011 in Author's possession.

## Introduction

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how the officer in question wanted their story presented. These comments, however, have to be rigorously evaluated, as they are subject to both unintentional and deliberate errors.

Another important category of source material was the personal papers of men and officers in the CEF, historians, and politicians. Currie's personal papers are an especially valuable source. Sir Edward Kemp's papers, the second Minister of the OMFC, are well organised and cover his time as the minister in depth and, as a result, are a rich source of information. Researchers have selectively consulted them before, but this thesis is the first to use his ministerial files in almost their entirety. Perley's papers are less abundant but provide useful information. Prime Minister Robert Borden and Lord Beaverbrook's (Max Aitken) papers are extensive, and historians have thoroughly investigated them.<sup>41</sup>

Turner left limited personal papers, letters, or diaries that show the interior man. His available papers amount to just twelve volumes in the National Archives – consisting primarily of official documents – and letters, clippings, and certificates at the Canadian War Museum. His diaries are compilations and extracts of letters to his wife that stop when he moves to England. Therefore, there is little evidence of his innermost feelings and thoughts. His actions have to be traced through the paper trail left behind in the archives and the Canadian War Museum, and his motivations inferred in most cases.

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<sup>41</sup> Max Aitken was raised to the peerage as Lord Beaverbrook in 1917. He will be referred to as Max Aitken in the thesis for clarity.

### Organisation Overview

To answer the questions posed earlier, the thesis is divided into two sections, of four chapters each, focused on Turner's combat and administrative career. Chapter One briefly explores Turner's early life, service in the Canadian Militia, and exploits in the Boer War. It also describes the pertinent aspects of the pre-war Canadian military. The second chapter provides an overview of Turner's command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, and three select incidents of his conduct of the Battle of Second Ypres cited as major failures. Chapter Three is the first of the case studies, and it analyses Turner's command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and especially his prosecution of the Battle of St. Eloi Craters. The chapter also deals with the post-battle attempts to oust Turner. The fourth chapter and the second case study examines Turner's victory at the Battle of Courcellette and the two subsequent less successful engagements at the Somme.

The second section on Turner's administrative role opens with Chapter Five's discussion of the disastrous state of Canadian administration and training in England, and Turner's appointment to reform this flawed organisation. Chapter Six is the third case study concerned with Turner's actions in the first seven months of his command in England and his responsibility for the resulting transformation. The final case study is Chapter Seven's analysis of Turner's often-fractious relationship with Currie in the period from June 1917 to August 1919. Chapter Eight focuses on Turner's challenging relationship with a new minister. The chapter starts with the federal election of December 1917 and covers Turner's remaining military career until his retirement in 1919, and his



## **Introduction**

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endeavours to unify the fractured Canadian veterans' movement. The conclusion brings together the answers to the key questions and assesses Turner as a military leader.

## **Conclusion**

This study revises the prevalent view of an important Canadian officer based on new primary research and interpretations. Five key questions are the focus of the thesis related to Turner's appointments, his competence and evolution as a combat commander, his transfer to England, his role in the acknowledged transformation of the administration in England, and his relationship and rivalry with Currie. The study also weaves into the narrative a comparison where appropriate with the British and Anzac experiences and solutions. The thesis presents Turner in all his facets related to his military roles and evaluate his contributions, his failures, his flaws, and his virtues to bring a more balanced and accurate assessment.

# 1

## BOER WAR HERO: TURNER TO 1914

*Never let it be said the Canadians had let their guns be taken.*

R.E.W. Turner, 7 November 1900

Richard Turner's First World War military career was, in part, the product of his pre-war active service and experience as an officer in the Canadian Militia, and the nature of the pre-war Canadian military. This chapter, therefore, will concisely review Turner's early life, his initial experiences in the Militia, his service in the Boer War, and in the inter-war period. In addition, the structure and state of the Canadian military will be analysed, as it played a critical role in preparing Turner for the demands of active service.

### Early Life

Richard Ernest William Turner, the future Lieutenant-General, was born on 27 July 1871 in Quebec City. He was the fourth born and the first of four sons of Richard and Emily Turner.<sup>1</sup> They had five daughters, as well. Turner's father was

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<sup>1</sup> Maria was born in 1867, Amy in 1869, Effie in 1870, Leila in 1872, Albert in 1873, William in 1875, Erie in 1879 and Evan in 1886. Maria, Amy, and Leila died as infants. Albert served in the Boer War in the Royal Canadian Regiment, and William was a doctor who served in the First World War. Christopher Smyth, 'Descendants of William Ellis,' Email, 6 February 2012; Department of Militia and Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914)* (Ottawa 1914), 341; *1901 Canadian Census, Quebec, 10, Ward Saint-Louis, Family 87*, (Quebec 1901); Turner Diary Entry, 1 November 1899, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC; Donald Stuart Macpherson, *A Soldier's Diary: The WWI Diaries of Donald Macpherson* (St. Catharines, Ont.: Vanwell Pub., 2001), 156.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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born in 1843 in Quebec City and was of English/Irish origin. He entered the work force at age 15, and formed a partnership with Joseph Whitehead in 1870 in a wholesale grocery firm called Whitehead and Turner. Turner married Emily Ellis in 1865. Turner took over the firm in 1885 with Whitehead's retirement and expanded his business interests into lumber and importing from China, Japan, and the West Indies. His business success translated into a family home on the Rue d'Auteuil, amongst the better addresses in Quebec City. He was also active in social, business, and local and provincial political affairs. He was the Honorary President of the provincial Liberal Party, for a term.<sup>2</sup>

R.E.W. Turner attended private schools and graduated from Quebec City High School in 1889.<sup>3</sup> He received what was, for the time, a first-class education that equipped him socially and intellectually for a career in business and the military. Turner grew up in the late Victorian era, and this shaped his views on imperialism, honour, and duty. He had the conventional views of his time and social position. Unlike many other Anglophones in Quebec City, he did learn to speak French with relative fluency. He was an Anglican, but religion did not play a central role in his life, as evidenced from the lack of references in his diaries and letters.<sup>4</sup>

Turner started in his father's company as an office boy in 1891 and steadily received more responsibility in his father's wide-ranging business interests. Turner

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<sup>2</sup> Henry James Morgan, ed. *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadian Biography*, 1 ed. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1898); Henry James Morgan, ed. *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadian Biography*, 12 ed. (Toronto: William Briggs, 1912).

<sup>3</sup> Leppard, "The Dashing Subaltern - Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect," 21.

<sup>4</sup> Other than his wedding there is only one reference to attending church and that was during the Boer War.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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was affluent, as by 1901, his annual income was \$2,000, when the average factory worker's yearly pay was \$364, and a manager's was \$1,069.<sup>5</sup> Turner's business career would have exposed him to modern management techniques, such as setting broad policies and then delegating execution to subordinates. Having to deal with the uncertainties and constantly changing circumstances of an export and distribution business was an excellent preparation for the challenges he later faced in England.

## Canadian Military

Turner's military career commenced with appointment to The Queen's Own Canadian Hussars (QOCH) on 22 April 1892, as a Second Lieutenant. The Canadian military, at this point, consisted of a tiny Permanent Force (PF) and a nominally 40,000 man Non-Permanent Active Militia, referred to hereafter as the Militia. The PF were regulars who were responsible for training the Militia, but there was considerable friction between the two forces.<sup>6</sup> High personnel turnover and limited opportunities for its own training hampered the PF. The Militia consisted of scattered inadequately manned, equipped, and trained infantry battalions, cavalry regiments, and artillery batteries that lacked support services.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> 1901 Canadian Census, Quebec, 10, Ward Saint-Louis, Family 87; Eric W. Sagar, "The National Sample of the 1901 Census of Canada: A New Source for the Study of the Working Class," in *Social Science History Conference* (Amsterdam 1998), 19-20.

<sup>6</sup> They fought over the limited defence funds. Wood, *Militia Myths : Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier, 1896-1921*: 58.

<sup>7</sup> Carman Miller, *A Knight in Politics : A Biography of Sir Frederick Borden* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2010), 88.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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As a result, the Canadian military in 1892 was at low ebb.<sup>8</sup>

The QOCH was a city unit, with training on weeknights in armouries.<sup>9</sup>

Commissioning was expensive, as it cost \$300 to \$500 for uniforms and officers usually stood a round of drinks at the end of a parade night, which restricted commissioning primarily to the wealthy.<sup>10</sup> City units, also, expended considerable efforts on parades and other ceremonies to retain personnel and gain recruits. As a result, training tended to be a secondary activity.<sup>11</sup>

The General Officer Commanding the Militia of Canada, who was always a British Regular Army officer, was in charge of the Canadian military.<sup>12</sup> The post of GOC was a graveyard of careers – all but one of the GOCs left before their term expired.<sup>13</sup> Their attempts to reform the Canadian military consistently ran afoul of Canadian financial and political realities.

Canadians shared a strong belief in the “Militia Myth” of the effectiveness of the citizen soldier, based on a misreading of past wars, such as the War of 1812.<sup>14</sup> This myth, one shared by Australia and New Zealand, put faith in the innate

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Arthur Preston, *Canada and Imperial Defense; a Study of the Origins of the British Commonwealth's Defense Organization, 1867-1919*, Duke University Commonwealth-Studies Center Publication No 29 (Durham, N.C.; Published for the Duke University Commonwealth-Studies Center by Duke University Press, 1967), 183.

<sup>9</sup> James A. Wood, "The Sense of Duty: Canadian Ideas of the Citizen Soldier, 1896-1917" (PhD, Wilfred Laurier University, 2007), 48.

<sup>10</sup> Kenneth Eyre, "Staff and Command in the Canadian Corps: The Canadian Militia 1896-1914 as a Source of Senior Officers" (Masters, Duke University, 1967), 82; Wood, "The Sense of Duty: Canadian Ideas of the Citizen Soldier, 1896-1917," 51.

<sup>11</sup> Wood, "The Sense of Duty: Canadian Ideas of the Citizen Soldier, 1896-1917," 56.

<sup>12</sup> Miller, *A Knight in Politics : A Biography of Sir Frederick Borden*: 97-99.

<sup>13</sup> Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*: 35. For more on the troubled history of the ministers and generals, see Desmond Morton, *Ministers and Generals : Politics and the Canadian Militia, 1868-1904* ([Toronto]: University of Toronto Press, 1970).

<sup>14</sup> Wood, "The Sense of Duty: Canadian Ideas of the Citizen Soldier, 1896-1917," 10; William Beahen, "A Citizens Army: The Growth and Development of the Canadian Militia, 1904-1914" (PhD, University of Ottawa, 1979), 193.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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superiority of the 'hard riding and straight shooting' citizen soldier over the professional.<sup>15</sup> The difficulties the British experienced in defeating the Boers in the Boer War and the success of the Canadian contingents reinforced this myth. As a result, there was limited interest in a more professional military.

The military was inextricably linked to the politics of the era, and patronage was an accepted fact.<sup>16</sup> It was beneficial, if not essential, for an officer to belong to the right party if he wanted promotion.<sup>17</sup> One GOC, Lord Douglas Dundonald, claimed his career effectively ended in attempting to stop patronage in the Militia.<sup>18</sup>

Owing to the lack of direct evidence, the factors that led Turner to join the Militia have to be inferred, but they were probably, like most who joined, an amalgam of fulfilling the late Victorian ideals of 'manliness,' vigour, and service, allied with more commercial considerations.<sup>19</sup> Young men joined city units because, as Carman Miller put it, they "offered a wide range of educational, social and recreational services, apart from martial skills."<sup>20</sup> They also offered social respectability and the opportunity to gain business and social contacts.<sup>21</sup> The camaraderie of the regiment, outdoor pursuits, and military training also appealed

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<sup>15</sup> Grey, *A Military History of Australia*: 77.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, *A Knight in Politics : A Biography of Sir Frederick Borden*: 90.

<sup>17</sup> Beahen, "A Citizens Army: The Growth and Development of the Canadian Militia, 1904-1914," 268; Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 3.

<sup>18</sup> Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*: 46; Douglas Mackinnon Baillie Hamilton Cochrane Dundonald, *My Army Life* (London: E. Arnold, 1926), 310.

<sup>19</sup> For a in-depth discussion of 'manliness' and the Militia, see Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914," *Labour*, no. 42 (1998).

<sup>20</sup> Carman Miller, "Chums in Arms: Comradeship among Canada's South African War Soldiers," *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 18, no. 36 (1986): 362; Carman Miller, "The Montreal Militia as a Social Institution before World War I," *Urban History Review* 19, no. 1 (1990): 57-64.

<sup>21</sup> Desmond Morton, "The Militia Lobby in Parliament: The Military Politicians and the Canadian Militia, 1868-1897," in Richard Preston and Petter Dennis (eds.), *Swords and Covenants* (Croom and Helm, 1976), 80.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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to the adventurous. Turner, throughout, his life belonged to hunting and fishing clubs and listed riding as a hobby.<sup>22</sup>

In 1892, Turner was of a generation that understood war as “more a manly triumph over the obstacles of nature than massive and indiscriminate slaughter.”<sup>23</sup> Wars were frontier adventures – short, sharp, and glorious, with the British triumphant. In 1892, Canadians of Turner’s class strongly identified themselves both as members of the British Empire and as Canadians. They would view the conflicts and victories of the British Empire as their own.<sup>24</sup> The Boer War, while neither short nor particularly glorious, reinforced this view of war, as Turner’s regiment in the Boer War suffered only 7% of its losses due to enemy fire.<sup>25</sup>

The QOCH was a longstanding cavalry regiment, based in Quebec City.<sup>26</sup> Turner was fortunate that, for the first year of his service, the Cavalry School of Instruction was located at Quebec City, and would have provided more advanced and professional training than would normally have been the case for a Militia

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<sup>22</sup> Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC; *Who's Who and Why*, ed. C.W. Parker, vol. 5 (Vancouver: International Press., 1914).

<sup>23</sup> Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power; Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), 236.

<sup>24</sup> Patrick Brennan, "The Other Battle: Imperialist Versus Nationalist Sympathies within the Officers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919," in Phillip Buckner & R. Douglas Francis (eds.), *Rediscovering the British World* (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2005), 251; Katharine McGowan, "'A Finger in the Fire': Canadian Volunteer Soldiers and Their Perceptions of Canada's Collective Identity through Their Experience of the Boer War," *War and Society* 28, no. 1 (2009).

<sup>25</sup> Canada, *Supplementary Report: Organization, Equipment, Despatch and Service of Canadian Contingents During the War in South Africa, 1899-1900*, ed. Militia and Defence (Ottawa 1901).

<sup>26</sup> It formed in 1856, and would later be re-designated the 10th Queen’s Own Canadian Hussars in 1903. The regiment disbanded in August 1913. Charles H. Stewart, *The Concise Lineages of the Canadian Army, 1855-Date*, 2nd enl. and rev. ed. (Toronto: [s.n.], 1982). Canadian cavalry were trained as Mounted Rifles and were not the equivalent of British or Continental cavalry units. *Cavalry Training Canada 1904*, (Ottawa: Government Printing Bureau, 1904).

## 1 Boer War Hero

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cavalry unit.<sup>27</sup>

Before the Boer War, Turner worked conscientiously to raise his qualifications through training and testing. He scored well in his cavalry test in 1892 and on the Maxim gun in 1899, but earned a disappointing mark in his infantry exam in 1896. He attended the cavalry school in 1896, as well.<sup>28</sup> This training and testing projects the image of an officer who was committed to investing the time and effort necessary to improve his qualifications, and that his strengths lay in the cavalry and not the infantry.

His Troop demonstrated respect by the presentation of a \$175 gift on his 25<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1896. A newspaper article reported "the troop has never had a more faithful and painstaking officer and that the unit's effectiveness was due to him."<sup>29</sup> This was a recurring theme in how Turner was perceived; his positive image was probably an outcome of his strong man management skills.

Given his relative diligence in upgrading his military education and strong leadership skills, it should not be surprising that Turner rose rapidly through the ranks, receiving a promotion to Captain in 1895 and Major in 1900.<sup>30</sup> Leppard's assertion that Turner's promotions were due to Tory political influence and nepotism, rather than his own merits is highly doubtful.<sup>31</sup> Turner was not

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<sup>27</sup> It moved to Toronto in 1893 and formed the basis of the Royal Canadian Dragoons. Brereton Greenhous, *Dragoon: The Centennial History of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, 1883-1983* (Belleville, Ont.: Guild of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, 1983), 13.

<sup>28</sup> Turner earned a combined 85% on his Cavalry, 78% on his Maxim and 64% on his Infantry examination. Certificate of Military Instruction, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.4, CWM. Canada

<sup>29</sup> A Popular Officer: Presentation to Captain R.E.W. Turner Yesterday, Unattributed Newspaper Clipping, 19710147-005/DOCS MANU 58E 5 2.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>30</sup> Richard Turner Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9842 - 47, LAC.

<sup>31</sup> Leppard, "Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi," 2.



## 1 Boer War Hero

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politically active and was not likely a member of the Conservative Party – he was not a ‘Tory hack.’ The evidence for Turner’s political leanings in the period before the First World War is primarily negative in the sense that there are no indications of political activity, although there is a paucity of records of the Conservative party survive from this period.<sup>32</sup> Turner’s father was a prominent figure in the Quebec provincial Liberal Party, and while this does not rule out Turner adopting a contrary political stance, it is suggestive. Turner ran for no political office either before or after the First World War.<sup>33</sup> Given he was from a prominent, wealthy family, had won a VC, and evidence from his wartime career indicates he was an excellent public speaker, he could have had a political career had he wanted one. There was no party affiliation listed in any of the pre-war *Who’s Who* or *Canadian Men and Women of the Time* listings for Turner.<sup>34</sup> Searches of pre-war Quebec City newspapers reveal no indications of political activity by Turner. Finally, Sir George Perley, when evaluating whether to select Turner or Currie to command the forces in England, wrote Borden that he believed Turner to be a neutral Liberal.<sup>35</sup> Given Perley was at one point the Conservative party Whip, he would have had familiarity with party supporters, indicating Turner was not active in the

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<sup>32</sup> Dr. John English, 'Request for Advice on Pre-Great War Conservative Party,' Email, 15 August 2011. Dr. English is the leading expert on the Canadian Conservative party.

<sup>33</sup> Turner was appointed to two one-year terms on the Quebec City Protestant School Board. "Turner Appointed to Protestant School Board," *Quebec City Daily Telegraph*, 13 June 1923.

<sup>34</sup> *Who's Who and Why*, 5; Morgan, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadian Biography*; Morgan, *The Canadian Men and Women of the Time: A Handbook of Canadian Biography*.

<sup>35</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 22 November 1916, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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Conservative party.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, a comparison with the 1914 Quarterly Militia List indicates Turner's promotions were slightly faster than contemporary PF officers' promotions, but not markedly so.<sup>37</sup>

### South African Campaign<sup>38</sup>

In 1899, Turner was a respected field grade cavalry officer from a wealthy and influential family, but then so were many other officers in the Canadian Militia, who had greater personal accomplishments, were wealthier, and had more powerful political influence at their disposal. Moreover, photographs of the time reveal an unprepossessing war leader. They show a slim twenty-six year old man of slightly over average height at 5' 9½" with a weak chin and owlsh glasses, who resembles a mild grocery clerk. Despite his appearance, he was a highly successful subaltern, who through personal example later repeatedly convinced men to follow him on the battlefield.

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<sup>36</sup> Roy MacLaren, *Commissions High : Canada in London, 1870-1971* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2006), 160.

<sup>37</sup> The Militia List only provides promotion data for Permanent Force officers whose promotions were likely slower than in the Militia. Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914)*.

<sup>38</sup> For a more detailed description of Turner's campaign, see "Turner in the Boer War" in the Royal Canadian Army Journal to be published summer 2012.

**Figure 1 Lieutenant Richard Turner 1900**



"Canadian Victoria Cross Winners."

[http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/boer/victoriacrossrecipients\\_e.shtml](http://www.warmuseum.ca/cwm/exhibitions/boer/victoriacrossrecipients_e.shtml)

In 1901, Turner returned to Quebec City to a tumultuous welcome, as a Lieutenant-Colonel with two wounds, a Victoria Cross, a Distinguished Service Order, and an enviable war record.<sup>39</sup> In 1914, when it was time to appoint senior commanders of the first Canadian Contingent, there were PF officers more qualified to lead. However, Sam Hughes wanted Militia officers to command, and there were none with Turner's record of active service, seniority, proven capability, and reputation for valour.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Turner also was awarded the Queen's South Africa Medal 1899-1902 with clasps Johannesburg, Diamond Hill, Belfast, Cape Colony, Orange Free State, South Africa. See Appendix 1 Awards for Turner's complete list of decorations.

<sup>40</sup> Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914)*.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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Turner's Boer War participation was critical for his military career in three respects. It developed his reputation and profile to legitimately differentiate him from other Militia officers of the same age and class. It moulded his character as a leader. It also raised his confidence through successful military service.

Turner served in the second Canadian contingent sent to South Africa to support the British Empire in its conflict with the Boers. The British authorities accepted the offer of the contingent on 16 December 1899. Within a month, a regiment of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, formed into two battalions, along with three batteries of field artillery were assembled, equipped, and were waiting transport to South Africa. This was a creditable performance considering the state of the Canadian Militia.<sup>41</sup> The name of Turner's unit, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, changed in August 1900 to the Royal Canadian Dragoons (RCD), at the behest of the unit's commander, Lieutenant-Colonel F. Lessard.<sup>42</sup> This is the name used in the chapter. Turner thought the change absurd, and told Lessard so.<sup>43</sup> This was an early example of Turner's willingness to confront authority.

On 28 December, Turner was appointed to command the 3<sup>rd</sup> troop, from

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<sup>41</sup> Hugh John Robertson, "The Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Anglo-Boer War, 1900" (Masters, University of Ottawa, 1983), 13; Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal: Canadian War Museum and McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), 154.

<sup>42</sup> Its role did not change, as it remained a Mounted Rifle unit.

<sup>43</sup> Robertson, "The Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Anglo-Boer War, 1900," 13; Turner Diary Entry, 5 September 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC. Note this is not an actual diary but a collection of excerpts of letters to Turner wrote to his wife. It is similar to his diary from the First World War. When compared to extant letters, the diary entries are accurate but incomplete, as not everything in the letter is included in the 'diary' entry.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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Quebec City, of 'B' Squadron RCD.<sup>44</sup> Turner, like many other officers, reverted to a lower rank to participate in the campaign.<sup>45</sup> He was eager to go, and worried that he would have to remain behind when not selected for the first contingent.<sup>46</sup>

The RCD were Mounted Rifles, who trained and were equipped to fight both mounted and dismounted as infantry.<sup>47</sup> They were usually the first to fight and the last off the battlefield. The Mounted Rifles had to be consummate horsemen, physically tough, masters of field craft, and possess endurance and stamina.<sup>48</sup> Successful leaders had to have quick intelligence, *coup d'oeil*, decisiveness, and the ability to motivate exhausted, thirsty, and scared men.

Before leaving for the war, in what the newspapers chronicled as one of the most romantic moments of the departure of the Second Contingent, Turner married his fiancée Harriet Augusta Godday, on 8 January 1900. She was vacationing in England with her parents when Turner cabled her that they could marry, if she returned before the unit departed in a week. She was clearly resourceful and decisive, as within two hours of receiving the cable, she packed

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<sup>44</sup> Canada, *Supplementary Report: Organization, Equipment, Despatch and Service of Canadian Contingents During the War in South Africa, 1899-1900*: 70. Arthur Currie, the Canadian Corps Commander in the First World War, was ill in late 1899 and early 1900 and did not join. It is unclear why he did not join a later contingent. Urquhart, *Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian*: 15.

<sup>45</sup> Permanent Force officers held all the senior positions, meaning Militia officers, such as Turner, had to revert if they wanted to join the contingent.

<sup>46</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 1 November 1899, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>47</sup> Mounted Rifles were an intermediate type between Cavalry, who were fully trained in horsemanship and Mounted Infantry, who had less training in equitation. For more on the complexities of nomenclature and the controversy within the British Army between the advocates for Cavalry and Mounted Infantry, see Stephen Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880-1918* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2008).

<sup>48</sup> Gary Sheffield's paraphrase of Douglas Haig's view was the "MI were not worth their rations." Sheffield. 1091-1109; Badsey, *Doctrine and Reform in the British Cavalry 1880-1918*: 90. As the Canadians were Mounted Rifles, Haig's condemnation may not have applied to the same extent.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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and was on her way to catch the next steamer to North America. She arrived the day before the wedding. They married in the Quebec City Anglican Cathedral in appropriate pomp and circumstance. Turner and his new bride had a one-day honeymoon in Montreal highlighted in Turner's diary by buying kit for his departure.<sup>49</sup> Turner and his wife had one son and two daughters.<sup>50</sup> His son, Harold Richard Turner, continuing a family tradition, would win the DSO in the Second World War, serving as a Major in the 6<sup>th</sup> Anti-tank Regiment.

Shortly thereafter, the unit departed to Halifax with Turner and his new wife after a torch lit honour guard to the train station. Turner wrote in his diary 'Happy Man'.<sup>51</sup> The unit spent six weeks in Halifax, because of shipping problems, which probably was not a hardship for the newly married couple. It, also, enabled further training of the raw troops.

Upon reaching South Africa, the RCD was attached to Colonel Edwin Alderson's 1<sup>st</sup> Mounted Infantry Corps, a brigade strength unit. Alderson, because of his successful experience in leading Canadians, including the RCD, would command the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and the Canadian Corps in the First World War. Alderson would later develop an exceedingly negative view of Turner's ability during the Great War.<sup>52</sup> However, as Turner was three levels removed from Alderson, it is unlikely Alderson would have had much opportunity to judge his

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<sup>49</sup> Wedding Article, 8 January 1900, 19710147-005/DOCS MANU 58E 5 2.1, Turner Fonds; CWM; Turner Diary Entry, 29 December 1899, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>50</sup> Harold, Kathleen, and Evelyn.

<sup>51</sup> Turner Diary Entry, January 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>52</sup> See Chapters 2 and 3 for more details on Turner's fractious relationship with Alderson.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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capabilities in this campaign.<sup>53</sup>

During the advance on Pretoria, the capital of the South African (Transvaal) Republic, the Northern Boer republic, Turner earned his first recognition on 6 May. He, with six volunteers, crossed the Vet River and distracted the Boers' defence sufficiently to enable the remainder of the RCD to cross the river at another location and compel the Boers to retreat.<sup>54</sup> For his initiative and gallantry, Turner received the DSO, which given he was a subaltern at the time, indicates his actions were highly regarded. Typically, the authorities at that time awarded the DSO to officers in command above the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel or to more junior officers for actions just short of the Victoria Cross.<sup>55</sup>

After the capture of Pretoria, the RCD garrisoned towns on the outskirts of the capital and defended against probing Boer attacks through June and July. By now, the Canadians had developed into an under-strength but effective Mounted Rifles force. In a battle near Pretoria, Turner reported a British General saying the "Canadians have shown the regulars how to fight."<sup>56</sup>

As an indication of the worth of the Canadians, the British authorities offered

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<sup>53</sup> The command structure was Alderson, Lieutenant-Colonel Francois Lessard, the RCD commander, Major Victor Williams, 'B' Squadron commander, and then Turner, as a Troop Lieutenant. Turner does not comment about Alderson in his diary.

<sup>54</sup> Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902*: 229; Turner Diary Entry, 7 May 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC. The description of the engagement and the number of participants varies across the different accounts. I have relied on Turner's Diary for the number of men who accompanied him.

<sup>55</sup> "The Distinguished Service Order (DSO) was instituted on 6 September 1886 by Queen Victoria to reward 'individual instances of meritorious and distinguished in a war.' In principle, the Order was for officers ranked Major - or its equivalent - or higher, but the honour also could be conferred on junior officers in very special cases." "Orders and Decorations - Distinguished Service Order (DSO)," <http://www.vac-acc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm?source=collections/cmdp/mainmenu/group01/dso>; Kang, "The British Infantry Officer on the Western Front in the First World War: With Special Reference to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment," 367.

<sup>56</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 20 July 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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all RCD officers, including Turner, commissions in the British Regular Army.

Turner clearly wrestled with this opportunity. He liked the active aspects of the military life – he had already been in seventeen engagements by his count – but he found camp life dull and the meagre pay of a subaltern an issue. In the end, he decided to remain with the Militia and his family's business.<sup>57</sup>

By the end of August, the RCD garrisoned Belfast, which was roughly halfway between Pretoria and the Portuguese border. The lack of men and a passive British commanding officer, Turner called him an 'awful old woman,' hamstrung the ability of the RCD to take the battle to the enemy.<sup>58</sup> As a result, there were an ongoing series of encounters initiated by the Boers that resulted in further casualties to men and horses. Boer attacks on trains would require a patrol to burn some unfortunate's farm and send the family to a camp at Middleburg, as an object lesson. Turner did not enjoy this duty as he found it, 'unpleasant work.'<sup>59</sup>

There were constant engagements and in one case, in October, Turner demonstrated his leadership skills and *sang-froid*. While returning from a farm burning expedition, the Boers ambushed Turner's force. Turner expertly extracted his troops out of the Boer trap. As one of his troopers put it "Lt. Turner certainly

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<sup>57</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 9 August 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC; Turner Diary Entry, 27 September 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC; Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC.

<sup>58</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 25 October 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>59</sup> For more on farm burning, see, Chris Madsen, "Canadian Troops and Farm Burning in the South African War," *Canadian Military Journal* 6, no. 2 (2005); Turner Diary Entry, 21 August and 7 October 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.



## 1 Boer War Hero

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showed good judgment in extricating us from a very nasty operation."<sup>60</sup> The Boers wounded and took captive Private Carter, but the Boers, in their characteristic excellent treatment of the captured, dropped him off at the outskirts of Belfast later that day. Turner dispassionately wrote that he cut a bullet out of Carter's chest with a pocketknife. Surprisingly, given the state of medical care and the rough surgery, Carter survived.<sup>61</sup>

Turner won the Victoria Cross (VC) at the Battle of Lillfontein on 7 November 1900, along with two other Canadians. Major-General Horace Smith-Dorrien, who later commanded the Second Army at Second Ypres in 1915, led a 'flying column' of approximately 1,200 men including the RCD to attack a Boer Commando south of Belfast.<sup>62</sup> After a day's hard fighting, Smith-Dorrien determined that he did not have sufficient troops to succeed and decided to fall back to Belfast, as the Boers gathered elements of three commandos to resist the British column.<sup>63</sup> Smith-Dorrien assigned the difficult role of the rear guard to the RCD, along with two guns and a machine gun in support.<sup>64</sup>

By about 10 a.m. on 7 November, after three hours of fighting and a

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<sup>60</sup> *Comrades All*, MG 30 E339 v1, Hilder Fonds; LAC, 56; Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902*: 257.

<sup>61</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 7 October 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC; Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902*: 257.

<sup>62</sup> The column consisted of the RCD of 90 to 95 men, CMR, four companies each from the Shropshire Light Infantry and Suffolk regiments, and a squadron of the 5th Lancers and supported by two guns of 'D' battery RCA, a section of pom-poms and two five-inch guns of 84th Field Battery. B. A Reid, "'For God's Sake ... Save Your Guns!' Action at Lillfontein, 7 November 1900," in Donald E. Graves (eds.), *Fighting for Canada : Seven Battles, 1758-1945* (Toronto: R. Brass Studio, 2000), 217.

<sup>63</sup> Horace Lockwood Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of Forty-Eight Years Service* (London: J. Murray, 1925), 257; Robertson, "The Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Anglo-Boer War, 1900," 181.

<sup>64</sup> The Canadians were better suited to rearguard actions because the 5th Lancers were equipped with swords, lances and carbines that were outranged by the Boer's Mausers. Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of Forty-Eight Years Service*: 254.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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withdrawal of three miles, the rearguard was in trouble. Their left was wiped out, while their right was under intense pressure, and the centre denuded of troops to support the wings. The horses pulling the supporting guns were faltering and the Boers realized they had the glittering prospect of capturing them. Seizing the opportunity, the Boers, untypically for this stage of the war, launched a cavalry charge.<sup>65</sup>

Lieutenant E.W.B. Morrison, the commander of the guns, realising he could not escape, sent his last galloper to seek assistance. The rider encountered Turner, who took immediate and decisive action that saved the guns and made his career. Turner 'picked up' a wound in his left shoulder and used this as an example to rally about twelve men. He shouted: "Never let it be said the Canadians had let their guns be taken." He positioned the dismounted men in a declivity. The Boers, about 100 to 200 strong, charging and firing like a 'wild west show,' with their two commanders in front, rapidly closed on the guns.<sup>66</sup> When the Boers reached the optimal range, Turner ordered his men to fire. In the first moments they killed the two Boer commanders. The loss of their two leaders disrupted the Boers' cohesion and gave enough of a respite for the guns to escape.<sup>67</sup> The surviving

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<sup>65</sup> Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902*: 273.

<sup>66</sup> D Battery, RCFA Report, 9 March 1901, 19870027-001 58C 2.14, Morrison Fonds; CWM; E. W. B. Morrison, *With the Guns in South Africa* (Hamilton Ontario: Spectator Print. Co., 1901), 269; Turner Diary Entry, 7 November 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC; *Comrades All*, MG 30 E339 v1, Hilder Fonds; LAC, 64; B. A Reid, *Our Little Army in the Field: The Canadians in South Africa, 1899-1902*, 1. ed ed. (St. Catharines, Ont.: Vanwell Publishing, 1996), 134; "Saving the Guns in South Africa," <http://www.legionmagazine.com/en/index.php/2004/05/saving-the-guns-in-south-africa/>.

<sup>67</sup> Robertson, "The Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Anglo-Boer War, 1900," 195.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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Canadians were able to scramble away.<sup>68</sup>

Roughly thirty minutes after Turner's first wound, a bullet struck him in the neck just missing his spine and carotid artery. His horse received two wounds as well, indicating the battle's intensity. Morrison claimed that Turner only left the field after Lessard ordered a sergeant to take him away.<sup>69</sup>

Turner's actions were sufficient for the third Victoria Cross awarded that day.<sup>70</sup> Ironically Turner, at the beginning of the advance south, remarked that he hoped the men would not take undue chances as he wanted to lead them in a promised march through London.<sup>71</sup> Turner's courageous act despite his wounds falls into classic officer action of saving a combat situation.<sup>72</sup> During the Boer War the British High Command was sensitive to the loss of artillery and awarded twenty per cent of the VCs won during the war for saving guns.<sup>73</sup> Turner demonstrated courage and skill in setting up the ambush and steadiness in an adverse situation. That Turner was able to rally men in such a dire situation is also indicative of his leadership. Military decorations are arbitrary in that factors

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<sup>68</sup> One of the 12 pdr. guns now is prominently displayed in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

<sup>69</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 22 and 28 November 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>70</sup> Lieutenant Hampden Zane Churchill Cockburn won the VC for his defence of the right flank. He reached the rank of Major before his death on 12 July 1913. "Hampden Zane Churchill Cockburn," <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/vcg-gcv/bio/cockburn-hzc-eng.asp>. Sergeant Edward James Gibson Holland won the VC for saving a Colt Machine Gun from the Boers. After returning to Canada, he was commissioned and later commanded a Motor Machine Gun battery at the Somme under Turner, as a Major. "Edward James Gibson Holland," <http://www.cmp-cpm.forces.gc.ca/dhh-dhp/gal/vcg-gcv/bio/holland-ejg-eng.asp>.

<sup>71</sup> *Comrades All*, MG 30 E339 v1, Hilder Fonds; LAC, 60. In the end, the RCD did not get their march through London, as promised.

<sup>72</sup> T. Robert Fowler, *Courage Rewarded: The Valour of Canadian Soldiers under Fire 1900 to 2007* (Victoria: Trafford Publishing, 2008), 14.

<sup>73</sup> Sixteen out of seventy-eight VCs were awarded for saving guns. Reid, "'For God's Sake ... Save Your Guns!'" Action at Leliefontein, 7 November 1900," 234.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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beyond the circumstances of the act condition their awarding.<sup>74</sup> Despite this caveat, winning the VC said much about Turner's prowess and bravery as an officer.

Turner wrote his wife on 15 November to assure her that his wounds were not serious and, showing he was recovering, he mentioned that two of his nurses were quite pretty. While in hospital a parade of the great and mighty visited him, including the formidable General Lord Kitchener, the new Commander-in-Chief of South Africa, who complimented him on his plucky fight.<sup>75</sup> Turner took the sensible precaution of getting a note from Kitchener to expedite his return. He employed it when a medical officer presented an obstacle to his departure and the situation changed instantly as "The red tape medico got very busy."<sup>76</sup> Turner sailed to England, where he met his wife.

Turner demonstrated sound judgment, *sang-froid*, and a cool eye in the stress of battle. His men, his peers and his superiors, as indicated by his increasing responsibilities during the campaign, respected him. He had endurance to survive without any illness through to the final stages of the campaign.<sup>77</sup> Despite the physical demands and pressures of battle he maintained a positive outlook. His letters to his wife are relatively honest about the horrors and strains, but his attitude is affirmative with few negative comments in comparison to multiple

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<sup>74</sup> Hugh A. Halliday, *Valour Reconsidered : Inquiries into the Victoria Cross and Other Awards for Extreme Bravery* (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio, 2006), 2.

<sup>75</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 15 and 28 November; 13 December 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>76</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 6 February 1901, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>77</sup> Turner fought in twenty-seven out of the twenty-nine engagements of the RCD, and almost all of the 2,700 kilometres the regiment marched. Canada, *Supplementary Report: Organization, Equipment, Despatch and Service of Canadian Contingents During the War in South Africa, 1899-1900*: 99.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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positive references to his men, other officers, and other units. His letters also indicate a reflective officer who was much more than just a dashing subaltern. Despite all of his excellent service, he was only acting as a junior officer with far fewer responsibilities than he would bear in the First World War.

Were Turner's two actions at the Vet and Lilienfontein indicative of an officer reckless with men's lives in unsound or unnecessary military actions, and one whose ardour for plaudits placed honour above the lives of his troops? In both cases, Turner's actions achieved the desired goal with only minimal losses, despite the Boers' significant numerical advantage. These are not the actions of a reckless officer, unlike, for instance, the British repeated attempts to retrieve the guns at Colenso.<sup>78</sup> There is no evidence in Turner's letters home of "medal hunting" beyond the natural desire to do his duty well. There is nothing in his actions or language that was particularly vainglorious in the context of the time and place. Turner was a product of the Victorian era, but then so were his men. He was a morally and physically courageous man who shrewdly used the resources he had available, including his wound, to carry out his duty.

Turner gained unstinting loyalty from troops under his command and was remembered with real affection long afterwards. Albert Hilder wrote to Turner forty-six years later recounting a RCD reunion stating the men in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Troop "respect you and know you as a man, and a gentleman and a brave officer."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> The son of Lord Roberts was killed attempting to retrieve the guns. Thomas Pakenham, *The Boer War* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 240-246.

<sup>79</sup> Hilder to Turner, 14 October 1946, 19730069-001/DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.11, Turner Fonds; CWM. Hilder reported of the original forty men in the troop, two died from enteric fever, five were wounded, five taken prisoner, and fourteen were sick in the hospital.

## **1 Boer War Hero**

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The other key factor arising from the Turner's participation in the Boer War was a strong appreciation for the capabilities of the Canadian soldier once properly trained. He realized from the start that the Canadians had much to learn. As he wrote "It has taken time to learn and teach – but we certainly have an efficient fighting unit."<sup>80</sup> Combined with his knowledge of what effective leadership could achieve, it undoubtedly contributed to his strong support for Canadian control over all aspects of the war effort in the First World War.

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<sup>80</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 20 July 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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### Map 1 Turner's Boer War Campaign



### Period Between the Wars

After the Boer War, the rising tensions in Europe resulted in increased spending on the military and a shift in the Canadian force structure to a more balanced organisation capable of fielding complete formations. Under the reforming Liberal Minister of Militia and Defence, Frederick Borden, a cousin of the later Conservative Prime Minister Robert Borden, the Canadian military established new support organisations, including supply and transport, ordnance,

## 1 Boer War Hero

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veterinary, intelligence, engineering and signals corps.<sup>81</sup> Another notable change instituted by Borden in 1904 was the abolition of the post of GOC and its replacement with a Militia Council modelled on the British Army Council.<sup>82</sup> The British in the restructuring after the Boer War instituted an Army Council, consisting of the Secretary of State for War, senior civilian officials, and the most important military authorities to make critical policy decisions integrating civilian and military imperatives.<sup>83</sup> In part, the goal of the Canadian change was obviate the problem of strong willed British Regular Army officers clashing with their Canadian political masters.<sup>84</sup>

The budget of the Ministry of Militia and Defence, hereafter referred to the Ministry of Militia, increased from \$3 million in 1904 to \$13 million in 1914 and the size of the Permanent Force grew from 900 to 3,100 in 1914.<sup>85</sup> Staff training was instituted by sending Canadian officers to the British staff college at Camberley starting in 1903, and a Canadian Militia Staff Course was developed, albeit one lasting weeks versus the two years at Camberley.

Another major development was the British initiative to standardise organisation, staff duties, training, and equipment across the Empire. For the most part, this endeavour was successful, as other than minor differences, the British

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<sup>81</sup> Arnold Warren, *Wait for the Waggon [sic]: The Story of the Royal Canadian Army Service Corps* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), 25; Canada. Canadian Army. Royal Canadian Corps of Signals., *History of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, 1903-1961* (Ottawa: Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, Corps Committee, 1962), 3; Beahen, "A Citizens Army: The Growth and Development of the Canadian Militia, 1904-1914," 205-209. For more on Borden's accomplishments see, Miller, *A Knight in Politics : A Biography of Sir Frederick Borden*.

<sup>82</sup> Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*: 15.

<sup>83</sup> Miller, *A Knight in Politics : A Biography of Sir Frederick Borden*: 176.

<sup>84</sup> Beahen, "A Citizens Army: The Growth and Development of the Canadian Militia, 1904-1914," 29-31.

<sup>85</sup> *ibid.*, 130.



## 1 Boer War Hero

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and Dominion forces were identical in all respects, other than equipment.<sup>86</sup>

Canada adopted an independent approach with equipment, and this will be discussed later.

Turner's military career prospered after his return from South Africa. As further recognition of his accomplishments, he commanded the right wing of Canada's contingent at the Coronation of Edward VII in 1902.<sup>87</sup> In 1903, he reached the pinnacle of most Militia officers' career with command of the QOCH. While in command of the regiment, Turner and his command received high marks in the yearly inspections, such as "A most efficient and energetic officer. Has brought his regiment to a very efficient state."<sup>88</sup> The 1905 and 1906 inspections recommended him suitable for command of a brigade.<sup>89</sup> After a four-year period in command, Turner transferred to lead the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Brigade based in Quebec City on 3 February 1907.<sup>90</sup> Without Turner's presence and probable financial support, the QOCH disbanded in 1913. Turner was the leading cavalry officer in the country, and he was elected President of the Canadian Cavalry Association in 1910.<sup>91</sup> As a further mark of distinction, Turner was made an Honorary Aide de Camp to the new Governor General, the Duke of Connaught in 1911. In 1912, Turner's career ostensibly ended with his retirement and transfer to

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<sup>86</sup> Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 16; Robson, *The First A.I.F.: A Study of Its Recruitment 1914-1918*: 15.

<sup>87</sup> On the voyage back to Canada, all men of the Cavalry signed a certificate thanking him for his interest in their welfare. Newspaper Drawing of Turner Receiving VC, 19710147-005/DOCS MANU 58E 5 2.1, Turner Fonds; CWM; Gratitude for Interest in Welfare for 1902 Coronation, 19710147-012/DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.12, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>88</sup> Inspection Report, 10 QOCH, 25 June 1904, HQ 145, RG 24 v6413, LAC.

<sup>89</sup> Inspection Report, 10 QOCH, 26 May 1905, HQ 145, RG 24 v6413, LAC.

<sup>90</sup> "Turner Appointed General Officer Commanding," *Montreal Daily Witness*, 25 March 1907.

<sup>91</sup> Beahen, "A Citizens Army: The Growth and Development of the Canadian Militia, 1904-1914," 328; Cavalry Association Formed, Newspaper Clipping, 24 May 1910, 19710147-005/DOCS MANU 58E 5 2.1, Turner Fonds.

## 1 Boer War Hero

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the Reserve Officer list.<sup>92</sup> Hughes, believing war with Germany was imminent, restored Turner to active service on 1 June 1914 with the rank of Colonel, however, without Turner taking the required exam for tactical fitness.<sup>93</sup>

Other than his presidency of the Cavalry Association, Turner does not appear to have engaged in discussions about the future course of warfare. Turner did not take the Militia Staff Course introduced in 1908, probably as he was at the end of his career.<sup>94</sup>

Turner's active service and long duty as a senior regimental officer developed his man management skills and facility in motivating and leading officers and men, his understanding of minor tactics, and administration at the regimental level. His four years of command of a cavalry brigade exposed him to some of the issues of commanding higher formations. What he lacked was staff training and even an appreciation of the necessity for trained staff officers, and a thorough understanding of contemporary infantry tactics. His later performance needs to be considered against this background. How Turner performed as a brigade commander on the Western Front is the topic of the next chapter.

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<sup>92</sup> Richard Turner Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9842 - 47, LAC.

<sup>93</sup> Leppard, "Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi," 7-8; Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 55.

<sup>94</sup> John R. Grodzinski, "'We Few, We Happy Few...'" Canadian Generalship in the First World War," *Canadian Military Journal* Autumn(2006): 77.

## 2

# **‘AN AWFUL WAR:’ TURNER AS BRIGADE COMMANDER**

*Still very tired, and my head and brain seem to act slower than usual -  
It has been an awful war.<sup>1</sup>*

R.E.W. Turner, 11 June 1915

The official cable from the British Government arrived at 8:45 p.m. on 4 August 1914, notifying Canada she was at war with Germany.<sup>2</sup> Turner, seeing it as his duty, joined the first Canadian contingent. This chapter examines Turner’s role as a brigade commander, three key incidents of his conduct at the Battle of Second Ypres, and the validity of his resulting reputation for incompetence. The focus of the chapter is on analysing Turner’s key decisions, his performance in the battle, and his relationship with his divisional commander, rather than a detailed battle study. The subsequent battle of Festubert will also be briefly examined, as well as the context of Canada’s participation, as it is necessary to understand the factors that would contribute to the problems that would plague the Canadian war effort.

### **Context of Canada’s Participation**

The scale, scope, and nature of the First World War were unprecedented

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<sup>1</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 11 June 1915, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>2</sup> Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914 -1919*, 1: 7.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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challenges for Canada. Like the British, Australians, and New Zealanders, Canada vastly increased its armed forces.<sup>3</sup> In Canada's case, as with Australia and New Zealand, the factors of distance, lack of experience in raising and maintaining overseas forces, and having to operate in a hybrid control environment of reporting to British and Dominion authorities all magnified the war's complexity. All these elements placed a tremendous strain on Canada's military, political, and societal structures, and were critical in shaping the problems Canada encountered in raising, maintaining, and controlling its forces in the first half of the war.

Canada's army was overwhelmingly an amateur force.<sup>4</sup> In the first two contingents, PF officers held only nine of the forty-four senior positions.<sup>5</sup> At the start of the war, Canada had only twelve Camberley trained staff officers and so had to rely on British supplied staff.<sup>6</sup> This amateur ethos changed as officers at the front increasingly recognised the need for professionalism and trained staff officers. As long as Sam Hughes was the Minister of Militia, however, the same drive for professionalism was absent from the Canadian administration, unlike at the front.

The geographic isolation of Canadian units in the pre-war period was an

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the expansion of the Territorial and New Army forces, see Peter Simkins, *Kitchener's Army : The Raising of Britain's New Armies, 1914-1916* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988).

<sup>4</sup> In the thesis, amateurs refer to members of the Canadian Militia whose primary profession was that other than a 'manager of violence,' whereas the professional officers' primary role is that of a soldier, employed full-time on duty.

<sup>5</sup> Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War*: 97.

<sup>6</sup> These officers were almost always excellent. As an indication of the quality, three future Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff, Dill, Ironside and Alanbrooke served in the Canadian Corps during the war.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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additional impediment, because Militia officers had little opportunity to work with fellow officers located in another province or area. There were few if any transfers, so officers had minimal contact outside of their own unit, with the result they did not know each other, unlike in the pre-war British Regular Army.<sup>7</sup>

The scope of the war was staggering. Canada expanded its infantry from one PF regiment to fifty active service battalions by the end of the war.<sup>8</sup> Canada's previous experience in the Boer War of an overseas force was restricted to raising, equipping, and shipping units to South Africa, but not maintaining these forces in the field. The scale of the losses in the First World War was immense, meaning the Canadian authorities had to improvise a massive recruiting and training infrastructure in Canada and England. Inevitably, given the scale of requirements and their rapid introduction, there was waste, failures, and fiascos, as the British and Australians experienced in the early days of the war.<sup>9</sup> The difference was the Canadian retention of the faulty system and commanders until 1917.

The nature of the war, with the rapid evolving tactics, technologies, and new weapons, materially added to the complexity of training. Contrast an infantry battalion in the First Contingent in 1914 needing drill, bayonet, rifle,

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<sup>7</sup> One of the few opportunities to meet other senior officers was Sam Hughes' military conferences held in 1911 and 1913. See, Wood, *Militia Myths : Ideas of the Canadian Citizen Soldier, 1896-1921*: 176-186.

<sup>8</sup> The fifty battalions included the forty-eight of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in France and two in the Canadian Expeditionary Force (Siberia). It consisted of the 259th and 260th battalions, a British battalion and supporting units. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 519. For more on the force, see Benjamin Isitt, *From Victoria to Vladivostok : Canada's Siberian Expedition, 1917-19*, Studies in Canadian Military History, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>9</sup> For more on the issues with the British mobilisation, see Simkins, *Kitchener's Army : The Raising of Britain's New Armies, 1914-1916*.

## **2 'An Awful War'**

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and machine gun instruction, with the requirements of a battalion in 1917 that included all the above plus Lewis Gun, anti-gas, trench warfare, grenades, rifle grenades, and new communications technology training.

Finally, Canadian forces were in a hybrid and constantly evolving control environment. The flawed Canadian command structure in England will be discussed in Chapter 5. On the continent the Canadian Corps and support forces were under the operational control of the General Headquarters (GHQ) of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), meaning GHQ directed the Canadian units in battle. In England, the Canadian training units were under the operational control of the War Office through the various area commands such as Aldershot Command. Initially, Canadians had limited authority over promotions, decorations, and other administrative matters, but Canadian authorities wrestled more control over the course of the war. The result was the Canadian forces followed British regulations in most matters, but there were exceptions and this caused delays as the various headquarters involved in any decision tried to determine what rules applied. Further, as these control responsibilities evolved, the rules had to be relearned. It was confusing for the British and the Canadians. As late as February 1918, the Canadian Adjutant-General in England wrote a sharp letter to the War Office asking them to follow procedure and pass all orders affecting the administration of Canadian units through the Canadian headquarters first. He complained that it was the fifth letter he had written on the

## 2 'An Awful War'

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subject.<sup>10</sup>

The CEF was dependent on the British for most matériel. Canada provided the men and officers, cap badges, pay, and record keeping, while the British provided clothing, personal equipment, rifles, bayonets, artillery, grenades, machine guns, ammunition, stores, and rations.<sup>11</sup> The following chart comparing the CEF in France and the British demonstrates how the Canadians relied on the British to provide the full gamut of military support necessary to maintain its troops in the field. This dependence was illustrated by the difference in ratios of British to Canadians in the combat arms (infantry, engineers, field artillery, and machine guns) with the supporting services (Army Service Corps, Army Ordnance Corps and Labour Corps). The ratio of the combat arms ranged from 5.3 to 1 in the engineers to 6.8 to 1 in the infantry while supporting services' ratio extended from 21.1 to 1 for the Army Service Corps to 61.9 to 1 in the ordnance service.

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<sup>10</sup> Thacker to Secretary War Office, A.G. 1-2-36, 4 February 1918, O-29-33, RG 9 III B1 v2881, LAC.

<sup>11</sup> The Canadian Government paid the British for all weapons, rations, and ammunition on a per capita basis. See Chapter 6 for more details.

## 2 'An Awful War'

**Figure 2 Comparison of Effective Strengths by Arms Between British and Canadian Forces in France, 3 June 1918<sup>12</sup>**

Combatants			
	British	Canadian	Ratio
HQ Army	4,324		
HQ Corps	1,664	141	11.8
HQ Division	2,326	249	9.3
HQ Bases	1,033	918	1.1
Army Corps Schools	4,618	213	81.5
Cavalry	17,353	2,334	71.1
RFA	165,833	14,973	5.1
RGA	76,944	2,964	34.7
RE	102,940	19,389	5.3
Infantry (+ Pioneers, Garrison, Lt T Mortar)	431,670	63,828	6.8
Cyclists	4,889	393	12.4
MG Corps	44,160	7,614	5.8
Tank Corps	10,578		
<b>Total Combatants</b>	<b>868,332</b>	<b>113,016</b>	<b>7.7</b>

Non-Combatants			
	British	Canadian	Ratio
ASC	134,961	6,408	21.1
RAMC	47,960	5,565	8.6
Army Vet Corps	13,874	703	19.7
AOC	15,858	256	61.9
Army Pay Corps	518	37	14.0
Transportation	55,767	14,568	3.8
Military Police	4,208	120	35.1
<b>Total Combatants</b>	<b>273,146</b>	<b>27,657</b>	<b>9.9</b>

<sup>12</sup> Comparison of Effective Strengths by Arms between British and Canadian Forces in France, 3 June 1918, 52839, MG 26 H1 v98, Borden Fonds; LAC.



## 2 'An Awful War'

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Non-Effectives			
	British	Canadian	Ratio
Labour Corps	199,769	5,798	34.5
WAAC	6,414	0	
<b>Total Non-Effectives</b>	<b>206,183</b>	<b>5,798</b>	<b>35.6</b>

### Valcartier

Unlike at the outset of the Boer War, there was no debate in Borden's government that Canada would take an active role in the war. The British Government accepted the offer of a Canadian expeditionary force on 6 August. Acting on the recommendation of the British Army Council that the Canadian force be a division, Hughes concentrated close to 35,000 men at Valcartier just outside of Quebec City.<sup>13</sup>

The forces started arriving in Valcartier in early August. Constant reorganisations of units, officers, and commands characterised the time in Valcartier. As Tim Cook phrased it, "Hughes cleared up things by embracing chaos."<sup>14</sup> The instability meant minimal effective training during the six weeks the men were in camp. The problems the Canadians encountered, however, were not that different from those experienced by the Australians, and British in raising the New Army divisions. The division had a solid core of Non-Commissioned Officers (NCO) and men with previous military experience, so the division was not entirely raw. In the rush of volunteers, recruiters preferred

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<sup>13</sup> Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919*, 1: 5-23.

<sup>14</sup> Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 31.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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men who had served in the military. A greater challenge was with the officers of the division. Most had no previous active service and were learning on the job.<sup>15</sup> One-third of the Canadian officers in the two first contingents did not even have the undemanding Militia qualifications for their post.<sup>16</sup> Turner wrote his wife that he was "studying hard as there is a lot to learn."<sup>17</sup>

A key decision for Hughes was the selection of the division's brigade commanders. Hughes's antipathy to PF officers meant well-qualified commanders, such as Brigadier-General Francois Lessard, commander of the RCD in the Boer War, did not receive appointments.<sup>18</sup> In their place, Hughes selected militia officers Colonel Malcolm Mercer, Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Currie, and Colonel Richard Turner as the commanders of the three infantry brigades of the division.<sup>19</sup> Turner was an obvious choice for Hughes, as Turner had the experience of successfully commanding a cavalry brigade, was only forty-three, with a sterling reputation with active service in the Boer War, was a genuine war hero, with a VC, and had long service in the Militia.

Did Turner warrant selection? Turner, in comparison to the other two brigade commanders, had the advantage of having seen active service and receiving awards for courage. He also represented the important province of

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<sup>15</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 31.

<sup>16</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 60.

<sup>17</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 4 October 1914, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>18</sup> Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 41.

<sup>19</sup> Hughes formed a fourth brigade to provide replacements to the division. While on Salisbury Plain, the three brigade commanders were promoted to Brigadier-General in accordance with British practice. Alderson to Secretary War Office, 29 January 1915, RG 9 III B1 v417, LAC; Richard Turner Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9842 - 47, LAC.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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Quebec, while Mercer represented Ontario and Currie the West. Turner's reputation from the Boer War meant many of the officers and men would know of him, and as a result, Turner claimed the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade requested him.<sup>20</sup> The history of the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion indicated the unit was elated with Turner's selection.<sup>21</sup> The Duke of Connaught, the Canadian Governor-General and a Field Marshal in the British Army thought Turner was a suitable choice. He informed Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War, that

A Col. Turner, VC, DSO, who has been commanding a militia Cavalry Brigade, is I think the best of them. He is quick, hard working and conscientious and will loyally carry out every thing he is told and has a certain sense of discipline and duty, both of which characteristics are hard to find in Canada.<sup>22</sup>

Hughes appointed Turner on 6 August to brigade command and to be the Assistant Adjutant-General of the camp.<sup>23</sup> As Valcartier was near Quebec City, it was likely Turner was one of the first senior officers to arrive.<sup>24</sup> According to post-war interviews, the brigade commanders drew lots for their brigades and Turner drew the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, which would be used to supply replacements, but Turner was able to persuade the Minister to make his brigade the third.<sup>25</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade consisted of four battalions: the 13<sup>th</sup> from Montreal, the 14<sup>th</sup> also from

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<sup>20</sup> Tuxford Comments, File 39, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

<sup>21</sup> Beattie, *48th Highlanders of Canada, 1891-1928*: 28.

<sup>22</sup> Connaught to Kitchener, 19 August 1914, WG/21, PRO 30/57/56, Kitchener Papers; TNA.

<sup>23</sup> Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC.

<sup>24</sup> From internal evidence, a misdated entry in Turner's 'diary' suggests he was at Valcartier on 10 August. The diary is actually a collection of letters to his wife similar to the ones from the Boer War. Turner Diary Entry, 10 August/September? 1914, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

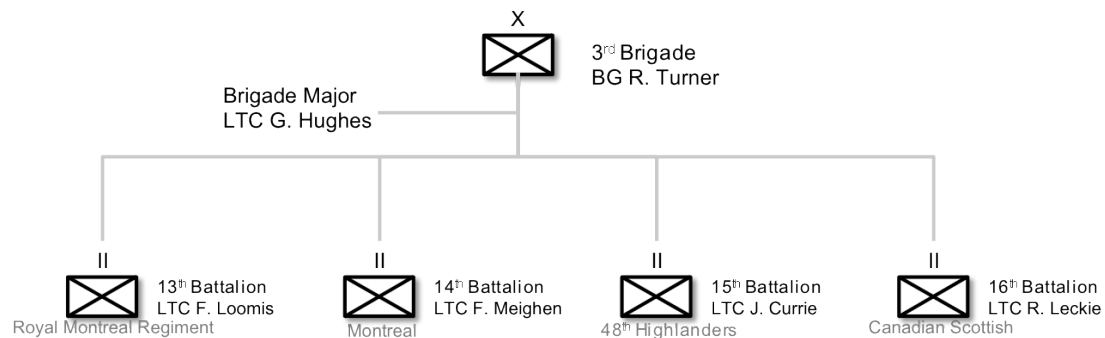
<sup>25</sup> Tuxford Comments, File 39, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives; Comments on Skeleton History by Sutherland Brown, GAQ 2-1 v2, RG 24 v1811, LAC; Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914 -1919*, 1: 59-61.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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Montreal, the 15<sup>th</sup> from Toronto and the 16<sup>th</sup>, a mixed highland battalion from across the country.

**Figure 3 3rd Brigade Order of Battle, 22 April 1915**



Turner selected the staff for his brigade.<sup>26</sup> His most crucial appointment would be his Brigade-Major, the senior staff officer in the unit. As Roger Lee, in his work on the Australian staff, phrased it, "The ability of the Brigade-Major was a key factor in a brigade's combat effectiveness."<sup>27</sup> Turner selected Lieutenant-Colonel Garnet Burke Hughes.<sup>28</sup> Hughes' selection was a logical choice for Turner for professional and political reasons. Professionally, Hughes had graduated from Canada's Royal Military College (RMC) – graduating first in his class in 1899 – had passed the Militia Staff Course, had long service in the Militia, and was the junior major in Currie's 50<sup>th</sup> Regiment in Victoria.<sup>29</sup> Garnet Hughes knew Turner, was a friend of Currie's, and, most importantly, was the

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<sup>26</sup> At this point in the war, brigade commanders could choose their own staff. Currie wanted another officer before selecting Major Kemmis-Betty as his Brigade-Major. Later in the war, commanders could not select their staff other than Aides des Camps. Gordon-Hall Comments, File 11, MG 4027 Acc. No 391 Ref 1-2, Urquhart Fonds; McGill.

<sup>27</sup> Lee, "The Australian Staff: The Forgotten Men of the First AIF," 120.

<sup>28</sup> Brigade-Majors for obvious reasons were rated as majors, but Hughes according to the Directorate of Historical Studies was a Lieutenant-Colonel, while acting as Brigade-Major. Career Outline for Garnet Hughes, RG 24 v1754, LAC.

<sup>29</sup> Royal Military College Results for 30 June 1899, File 14-1, MG 27 II D23 v14, Hughes Fonds; LAC; Bernd Horn and Stephen Harris, eds., *Warrior Chiefs* (Dundurn Press, 2001), 19.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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son of the Minister of Militia, Sam Hughes. Turner would write in October "Garnet Hughes is sound and I am well satisfied to have him as Brigade-Major."<sup>30</sup> However, in the unforgiving combat of Second Ypres, Hughes would prove a most unfortunate choice.

Sam Hughes' final pivotal decision was the divisional commander. British authorities considered no Canadian capable of divisional leadership, and Borden dissuaded Hughes from taking command. Hughes, instead, selected Major-General Edwin Alderson from a list of three senior British generals provided by Field Marshal Lord Kitchener, the British Secretary of State for War. In a prescient move, the British promoted Alderson to Lieutenant-General to outrank, the recently promoted, Major-General Sam Hughes.<sup>31</sup> Hughes asked Turner about Alderson and, based on his experience in the Boer War, Turner thought Alderson acceptable.<sup>32</sup>

Alderson, a small fastidious man, was a distinguished retired officer, who had specialised in the mounted infantry.<sup>33</sup> He had staff training and a worthy record of active service, including commanding Canadians successfully during the Boer War. He was well-connected to the Royal family, including the Duke of Connaught. He had most recently commanded a division in India from 1907 to 1912.<sup>34</sup> He was a well-known horseman and had published on the subject.<sup>35</sup> He

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<sup>30</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 11 December 1914, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>31</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 25.

<sup>32</sup> Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.

<sup>33</sup> Lieut-Gen. Sir Edwin Alderson, KCB, *The Khaki Call*, XII.1, W.A. Griesbach, GAQ 4-15K, RG 24 v1813, LAC.

<sup>34</sup> "Sir Edwin Alderson," in *Oxford Dictionary Of National Biography : In Association With The British Academy: From The Earliest Times To The Year 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,

## 2 'An Awful War'

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was an experienced trainer and was able to instil needed discipline in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. Regarded by the Canadians as a gentleman, but not inspiring, or particularly brilliant, he played a pivotal role in preparing the 1<sup>st</sup> Division for the front. At age fifty-five, however, he was past his prime, and he lacked the vigour needed for commanding a division on the Western Front. There were complaints that he did not sufficiently police brigades to enforce policies, and during battles, he did not leave his headquarters to visit his subordinates; instead, he relied on staff officers.<sup>36</sup> Turner's initial relationship with Alderson was satisfactory.<sup>37</sup>

The First Contingent reached Plymouth on 14 October. The Canadians moved to Salisbury Plain for further training. Weather, organisational changes, and an injury to Turner hampered training. It rained on 89 out of 123 days, with double the average rainfall, such that one battalion was only able to train for 40 out of the 140 days it spent on the Plain.<sup>38</sup> More time was lost when the battalion organisation switched repeatedly between eight and four companies

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2004), 615; Thomas P. Leppard, "Sir Edwin Alderson: Gentleman Soldier," (ed.), *Neither Art, nor Science : Selected Canadian Military Leadership Profiles* (Kingston, Ont.: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), 11.

<sup>35</sup> Edwin Alfred Hervey Sir Alderson, *With the Mounted Infantry and the Mashonaland Field Force, 1896* ([S.l.]: Methuen, 1898); Edwin Alfred Hervey Sir K. C. B. Alderson, *Pink and Scarlet; or, Hunting as a School for Soldiering, Etc* (London: William Heinemann, 1900); Edwin Alfred Hervey Sir K. C. B. Alderson, *Lessons from 100 Notes Made in Peace and War, Etc* (London: Gale & Polden, 1908).

<sup>36</sup> Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 74; Frith Comments, 7j, MG 4027 Acc. No 391 Ref 1-2, Urquhart Fonds; McGill; MacBrien Comments, File 34, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives; Draft Currie Biography, File 2, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives, 44.

<sup>37</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 11 December 1914, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>38</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 35; H. M. Urquhart, *The History of the 16th Battalion (the Canadian Scottish)* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1932), 30.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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until it stabilised at four in January 1915.<sup>39</sup> These changes left units in a state of constant flux and wasted time and energy. Finally, Turner suffered a broken right collarbone, when his car overturned on 23 December. Turner was in hospital, in considerable pain, for close to a month and did not return to duty until 17 January. He still needed a chair to mount his horse, in February, because of limited mobility of his right arm.<sup>40</sup> As a result, Turner lost valuable time for training and evaluating his brigade and staff.<sup>41</sup>

Despite these impediments, the division, by contemporary standards, was reasonably well trained, contrary to the usual description of the division.<sup>42</sup> The best evidence of the value of the training was its performance at the tactical level at Second Ypres. These disruptions, however, truncated the higher formation training, and this probably contributed to the problems experienced at the brigade and divisional levels at Second Ypres.<sup>43</sup>

The division crossed to France on 7 February, making it the first non-regular division to reach the front in the British Army.<sup>44</sup> The division served a tour with the 6<sup>th</sup> British Division, held a portion of the line on its own, and then conducted ten days of intense training, before moving north to relieve a French division in the ill-omened Ypres salient. This initial period in France allowed the

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<sup>39</sup> Fetherstonhaugh, *The Royal Montreal Regiment: 14th Battalion, C.E.F. 1914-1925*: 21.

<sup>40</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 24, 28 December 1914; 17, 18 January; 2 February 1915, 19710147-001/DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM; Richard Turner Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9842 - 47, LAC.

<sup>41</sup> Andrew Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 51.

<sup>42</sup> For a strong refutation that the division was poorly trained, see *ibid.*, 10.

<sup>43</sup> At one point, a division exercise collapsed in such confusion from units colliding with each other that Alderson had to stop the exercise. Kenneth Radley, "First Canadian Division, C.E.F., 1914-1918: Ducimus (We Lead)" (PhD, Carleton University, 2000), 63.

<sup>44</sup> Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 97.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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division to acclimatise to the conditions on the Western Front and do additional needed training.<sup>45</sup>

### Second Ypres

The Second Battle of Ypres was a grim battle extending for over a month, as the Germans attempted to erase the Ypres salient. Turner's role in the battle lasted from 22 to 26 April. Turner's conduct of the battle demonstrated his customary courage and energy, but also grave lapses in staff work, failures in communications, and a serious error by Turner.<sup>46</sup> To analyse Turner's performance in the space available, three of the most criticised incidents are investigated. These are his reaction to the initial German gas attack on 22 April 1915, the night counterattack at Kitcheners Wood, and Turner's decision to retreat to a rear defensive position that uncovered the left flank of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade, on 24 April.

The Canadians took over by British standards poorly prepared defences overlooked by German positions. Turner's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade held the left sector of the division front, with Currie's 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade on the right. The next major defensive position was the GHQ line, 4,000 meters to the rear, which was a series of well-built and sited redoubts 400 to 500 meters apart protected by a six-meter deep

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<sup>45</sup> Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919*, 1: 143,193; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 49-53.

<sup>46</sup> A staff officer reported Turner buckled on his revolver and set a fine example saying he would not surrender but was prepared to die. Ypres Memoirs, MG 30 E236 v4, Villiers Fonds; LAC. Duguid, writing the British Official Historian, claimed Turner moved around during the battle. Duguid to Edmonds, 18 January 1926, DHS 3-17 (vol 3), RG 24 v1739, LAC.



## 2 'An Awful War'

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belt of wire.<sup>47</sup> Turner's headquarters was at Chateau du Nord in the GHQ line.<sup>48</sup>

Alderson's headquarters was located at Chateau des Trois Tour, nine kilometres behind the front line and on the other side of the Yser Canal. While the location had good communications with the controlling corps, it was poorly situated to control the division.

To mask the transfer of forces to the East, the Germans planned an attack on the Ypres salient using a secret weapon – chlorine gas. The attack objective was a small hill at the base of the salient called Pilkem, whose capture the Germans thought would cause the Allies to withdraw from the salient.<sup>49</sup> There was no contingency plan to expand the scope of the attack.<sup>50</sup> The Germans assaulted the two French divisions on Turner's left at 5 p.m. on 22 April 1915. The Germans quickly overwhelmed the French and advanced to the Yser Canal and having reached their objective stopped and consolidated.

The British reacted by hastily committing reserves without maintaining unit integrity and either overloaded existing formations or formed ad hoc

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<sup>47</sup> Officially, it was called the GHQ 2nd Line but as there was no 1st Line, it is referred to as just the GHQ line. James Edward Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1915*, vol. 1 (London: Macmillan, 1927), 161; Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919*, 1: 199.

<sup>48</sup> This was the grand name for a farm complex, unlike the true chateau occupied by the Division's headquarters. Garnet Hughes claimed they never used the terms Mouse Trap or Shell Trap Farm, which other histories often use. Greenfield, *Baptism of Fire; the Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada April 1915*: 39; Hughes to Duguid, 29 March 1934, HQ 683-1-30-5, RG 24 v1503, LAC; Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1915*, 1: 175.

<sup>49</sup> German accounts refer to a Pilkem hill, situated at the village of Pilkem.

<sup>50</sup> *Germany's Western Front: Translations from the German Official History of the Great War, Volume II: 1915*. (Waterloo, Ont.: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2009), 72.160; Ulrich Trumpener, "The Road to Ypres: The Beginnings of Gas Warfare in World War I," *Journal of Modern History* 47, no. 3 (1975): 475.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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detachments without adequate staff or communications.<sup>51</sup> For instance, Turner at one point commanded nine battalions, while Mercer, GOC 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, only commanded two battalions. Alderson preferred to use a British battalion commander, Lieutenant-Colonel A.D. Geddes, to command a brigade strength detachment, rather than assign British Regular Army battalions to Mercer, suggesting a lack of confidence in Mercer or unwillingness to assign British troops to Canadian commanders.<sup>52</sup> The British high command, also, launched a series of imprudent and poorly prepared counterattacks to retake ground and support the French that resulted in heavy losses for no appreciable gains. Turner conducted one of these counterattacks on the night of 22 April.

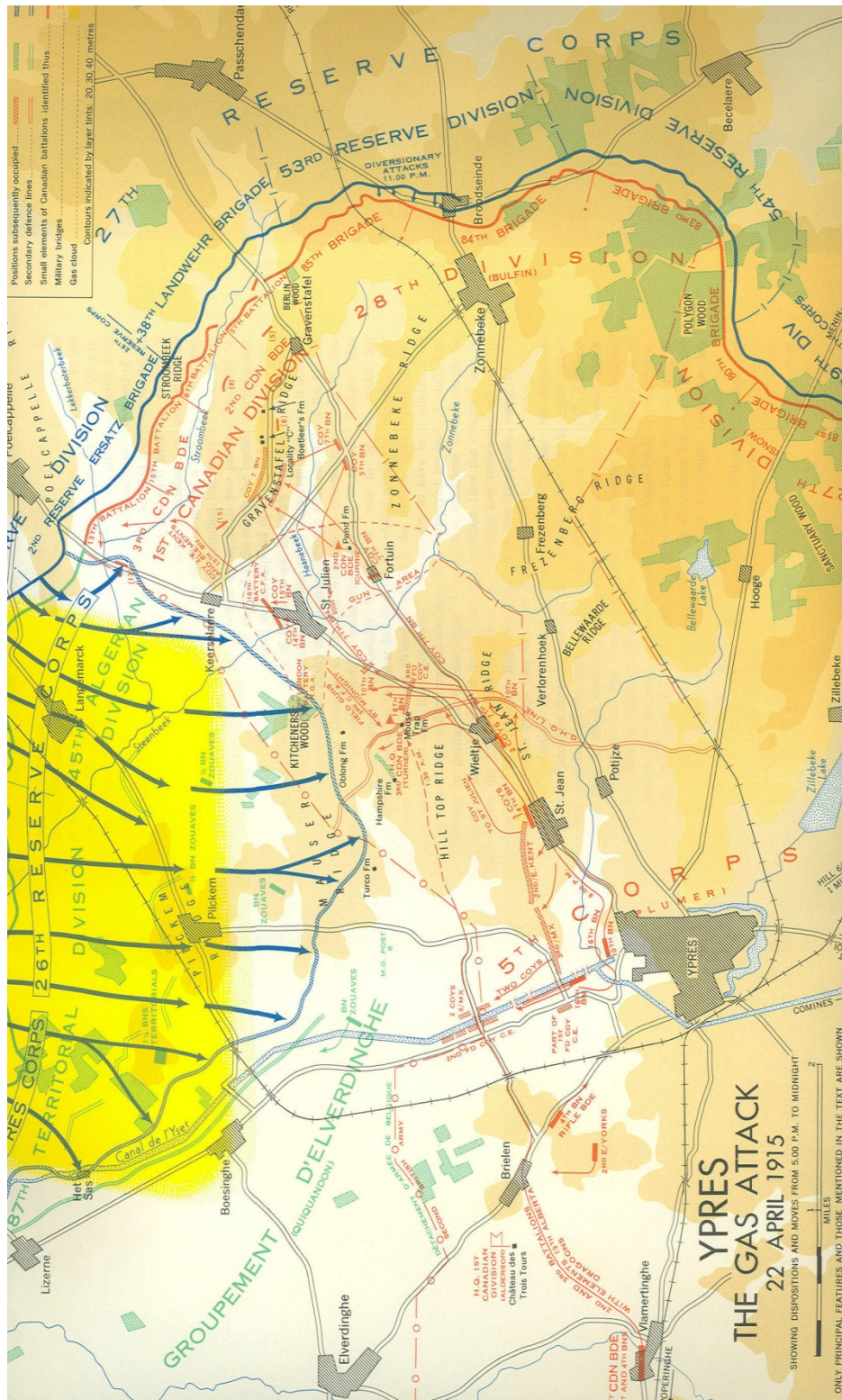
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<sup>51</sup> Geoffrey Powell, *Plumer: The Soldier's General: A Biography of Field-Marshal Viscount Plumer of Messines* (Barnsley, S. Yorkshire: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 1990; repr., 2004), 116.

<sup>52</sup> Iarocci argues Alderson's decision was not a reflection on Mercer, however, it is hard to see how it could be anything other than a lack of confidence in Mercer or Canadian officers. Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915*: 121; Gordon MacKinnon, "Major-General Malcolm Smith Mercer: The Highest Ranking Canadian Officer Killed in the Great War by Friendly Fire," *Canadian Army Journal* 8, no. 1 (2008).

## 2 'An Awful War'

Map 2 Ypres, The Gas Attack, 22 April 1915



Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D. (1964) Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919

Map 1, Ypres the Gas Attack, 22 April 1915, page 66

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## 2 'An Awful War'

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After spending 23 April failing to expand a foothold across the Yser canal, the German army command decided to eliminate the Ypres salient with a second gas attack aimed at the Canadians. Attacking in the early hours of 24 April, the German assault, despite significant advantages in artillery, shells, observation, and gas, was initially stopped, except for a breakthrough on the front of the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade. Exploiting this hole and renewing the attack, the Germans were slowly able to drive the hard-fighting Canadians back to St. Julien. It was at this point; Turner interpreted an order from division headquarters to mean the brigade was to fall back to the rear defensive position; the GHQ line. Hard fighting and the arrival of additional units plugged the gap. After falling back to the GHQ line, Turner's brigade remained in the line until withdrawn on 26 April.

The first incident examined is Turner's reaction to the initial German attack on 22 April. The French collapse exposed Turner's left flank for 7,300 meters, leaving the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade in a catastrophic position.<sup>53</sup> Turner's situation was one few First World War commanders faced, where the enemy advanced as deeply as did the Germans in only ninety minutes. At 6:30 p.m. Turner thought 'all was lost' as the Germans swept around his flank and all he had were "our servants, the Engineer company and about 50 of my grenade co; all the rest had been sent forward to fill the gap."<sup>54</sup> Turner responded quickly by hustling his reserves

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<sup>53</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 63.

<sup>54</sup> 'Turner to Hetty, 3 May 1915,' DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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forward.<sup>55</sup>

Turner's reputation suffered because of three messages issued by his headquarters to division reporting that Germans had driven the brigade's left flank back to the GHQ line, which caused consternation at corps and army level.<sup>56</sup> Garnet Hughes (all messages are in his handwriting) was reacting to the move of a front-line battalion to refuse its open left flank, German rifle fire on the brigade headquarters, and probably the reports of disaster from men driven from their positions.<sup>57</sup> At 7:30 p.m. Hughes further confused matters by indicating an attack was developing from the southwest of the headquarters that if true meant the brigade was almost surrounded.<sup>58</sup> Historians have often characterised these reports as 'panicky', indicating Turner's and Hughes' loss of control.<sup>59</sup> The messages were erroneous and in some cases poorly worded, but given the dire news were straightforward and factual and certainly do not indicate 'panic.'<sup>60</sup> During this period three divisional staff officers visited Turner's headquarters, who apparently either did not realise or inform the division that

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<sup>55</sup> All actions and messages to and from Turner's Brigade are based on the 3rd Brigade message logs. 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 22 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>56</sup> 6:25 P.M., 6:45 P.M., and 7:10 P.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 22 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>57</sup> A. Fortescue Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914 -1919*, (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1938), 225,29.

<sup>58</sup> Hughes meant the attack was developing from the northwest, from Turco Farm.

<sup>59</sup> Nathan M. Greenfield, *Baptism of Fire; the Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada April 1915* (HarperCollins Publishers, 2007), 81; John Dixon, *Magnificent but Not War: The Battle for Ypres, 1915* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: L. Cooper, 2003), 48; Tim Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher* (Toronto: Allen Lane, 2010), 88.

<sup>60</sup> Iarocci argues that the messages were actually substantially correct. Andrew Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 106.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade lines were intact.<sup>61</sup> The valid criticism was neither Turner nor his staff confirmed this critical information before passing it on. Turner and his staff had a tendency to accept initial reports without ascertaining their veracity.

The second controversial incident was the night counterattack on 22 April. At 8:52 p.m., Alderson ordered Turner to make a night attack on Kitcheners Wood, roughly 900 meters north of Turner's headquarters, with two battalions to support a French attack.<sup>62</sup> The night attack was successful, albeit at a heavy cost. Despite the success, the attack has occasioned considerable criticism from historians over the lack of reconnaissance before the attack, the formation specified by Hughes, and the lack of consolidation instructions.<sup>63</sup> Amidst the chaos and shock of the German assault, Turner and his staff had limited time to prepare and their inexperience showed in the brevity of the instructions provided, but the same strictures apply to attack orders for other formations during the battle.<sup>64</sup> Tactically, given the time and training level of the units involved, one of which was not even from Turner's brigade, the formation adopted best suited getting the units to the objective in a minimum of time and disorder. What is surprising is not the loss rate or confusion, but that the units

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<sup>61</sup> The three staff officers were Major Beatty, Lieutenant-Colonel Macdonell, and Lieutenant-Colonel MacBrien. Staff Visits to 3rd Brigade, 8-1-10, RG 9 III A1 v28, LAC.

<sup>62</sup> Kitcheners Wood was a translation of the French name for the woods and was not named for the British Field Marshal. 8:52 P.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 22 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>63</sup> The battalions were ordered to attack on a two company front with 30 yards between each company. See for instance, Cassar, *Hell in Flanders Fields: Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres*: 131,243; James L. McWilliams, *Gas!: The Battle for Ypres, 1915* (St. Catharines, Ont.: Vanwell Pub., 1985), 66; Greenfield, *Baptism of Fire; the Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada April 1915*: 99; Daniel G. Dancocks, *Welcome to Flanders Fields: The First Canadian Battle of the Great War: Ypres, 1915*, M&S Paperback (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989), 175.

<sup>64</sup> For example, see the attack order to the 10th Brigade's attack on 25 April. Operation Order #10, 1st Canadian Division, 24 April 1915, RG 9 D3 v4866, LAC.

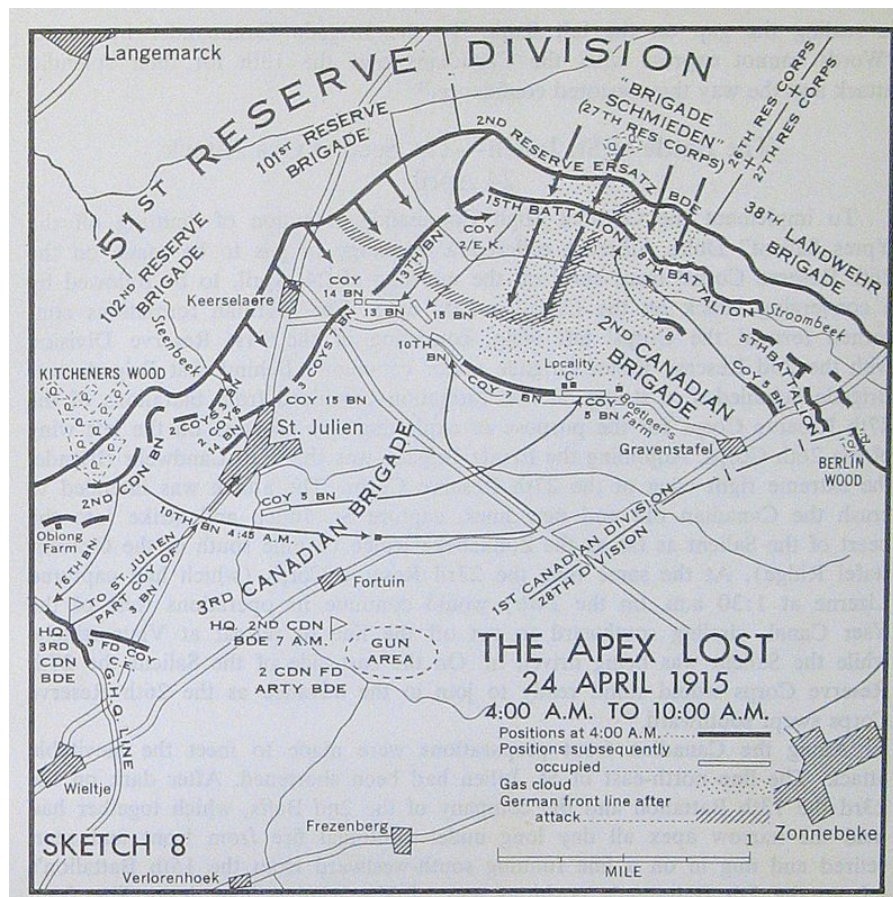


## 2 'An Awful War'

launched the only successful counterattack by the British during the battle.<sup>65</sup>

Even in 1918, with far better trained officers and staff, Currie refrained from making night attacks.<sup>66</sup>

### Map 3 The Apex Lost, 24 April 1915



Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D. (1964) *Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919*

Sketch 8, The Apex Lost, 24 April 1915, Page 72

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The final and most serious of the incidents was Turner's withdrawal to the GHQ line. By midday on 24 April, Turner's brigade was staggering, as the Germans slowly pushed it back with their crushing artillery and numerical

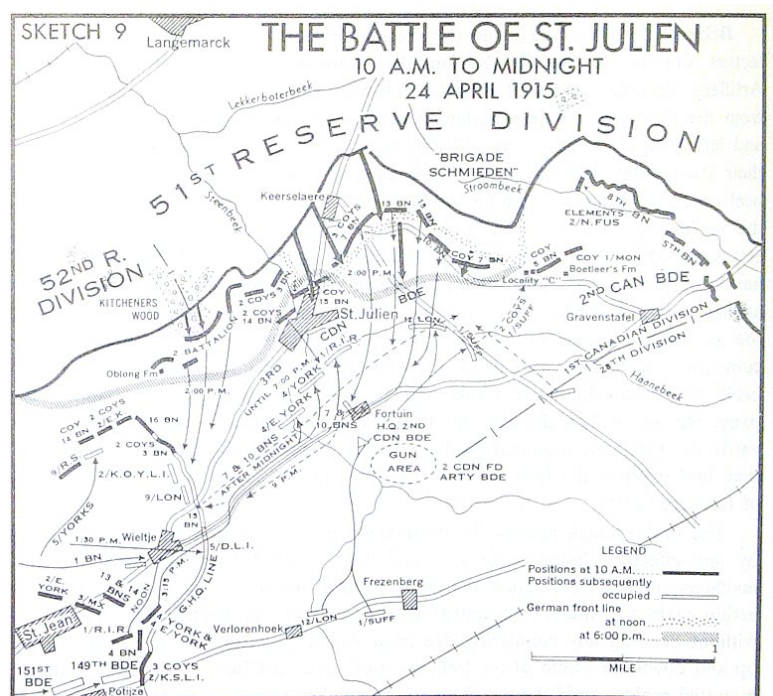
<sup>65</sup> McWilliams, *Gas!: The Battle for Ypres, 1915*: 215.

<sup>66</sup> Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918*: 460.

## 2 'An Awful War'

superiority.<sup>67</sup> Turner reviewed the situation, at 1 p.m., with the division's General Staff Officer (GSO) 1, Lieutenant-Colonel Cecil Romer, who cancelled a planned counterattack, and ordered Turner to strengthen the current line. Turner interpreted Romer's order to mean the GHQ line to the rear of the existing positions, and he ordered the brigade to retreat over the protests of some of his battalion commanders.<sup>68</sup>

### Map 4 The Battle of St-Julien, 24 April 1915



Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D. (1964) Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919

Sketch 9, The Battle of St-Julien 24 April 1915, Page 74

National Defence. Reproduced with permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2011

Did Turner misunderstand the order, or did he deliberately misinterpret a vague instruction? Historians divide on whether he misunderstood or

<sup>67</sup> The Germans were attacking eight battalions with twenty-four, but this understates the advantage, as the Canadian battalions had suffered heavy losses. John Dixon, *Magnificent but Not War: The Battle for Ypres, 1915* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: L. Cooper, 2003), 85.

<sup>68</sup> Duguid to Edmonds, (Undated, Missing First Page), DHS 3-17 (vol 1), RG 24 v1739, LAC.



## 2 'An Awful War'

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misinterpreted the order, with the majority believing it was the former.<sup>69</sup> Turner, after the war, claimed it was a misunderstanding, but given his memory lapses to be discussed later, and obvious desire to avoid the blame, this cannot be accepted at face value.<sup>70</sup> It was clear even before the retreat; Turner looked to his rear as demonstrated by a warning message to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery (CFA) that a retreat to the GHQ line might be necessary.<sup>71</sup> Given the lack of prepared defences, the absence of artillery support, the immense difficulty in supplying his forward forces, and the crushing German numerical and firepower advantages, there was a real possibility that Turner's brigade was going to be destroyed.<sup>72</sup> There was a strong incentive, therefore, to fall back to a prepared and well-sited position, easily supplied, and supported by artillery. Given the situation, it is more likely that Turner was going to take advantage of any opportunity to fall back, and so he interpreted Romer's imprecise instructions to save his brigade. Late that night, Turner travelled back to division headquarters, to clear up the situation, but he and Alderson talked past each other, failing to reach an understanding.<sup>73</sup> This was the beginning of a great rift

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<sup>69</sup> Some examples of scholars who attribute the retreat to a misunderstanding, include Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 152; McWilliams, *Gas!: The Battle for Ypres, 1915*: 122; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 76; John Alexander Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory: The Canadian Corps in World War I* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1965), 82. Two who attribute it to panic or wilful disobedience, include Greenfield, *Baptism of Fire; the Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada April 1915*: 254; Cassar, *Hell in Flanders Fields: Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres*: 208.

<sup>70</sup> Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.

<sup>71</sup> War Diary, 3rd Brigade Canadian Field Artillery, 24 April 1915, RG 9 III D3 v4966, LAC.

<sup>72</sup> Turner's supporting Field Artillery Brigade was withdrawn out of range by the division's Commander, Royal Artillery on the evening of 22 April. Turner fought throughout the battle without artillery support. War Diary, 3rd Brigade Canadian Field Artillery, 22 April 1915, RG 9 III D3 v4966, LAC.

<sup>73</sup> Duguid to Edmonds, 18 January 1926, DHS 3-17 (vol 3), RG 24 v1739, LAC; Turner to Duguid, 20 April and 11 May 1926, DHS 3-17 (vol 3), RG 24 v1739, LAC.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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between the two.

The withdrawal to the GHQ line was unquestionably a mistake and was not Romer's intention. Turner's withdrawal made sense for saving the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, but it was a potentially disastrous decision, as it exposed Currie's left flank. The factors of poor staff work, exhaustion, shock at the losses, non-existent communications, and perceived lack of support from the division all contributed to the decision, but do not excuse it. Given the nature of situation, it was a clear failure by Romer not to issue a written order to Turner to remove any possible ambiguity. A final error by Turner's staff was not informing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade until 1:45 p.m. of the retreat.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, Currie was diligent in warning his neighbour to his right that he might be compelled to retreat during this same engagement.

Most historians have accepted Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon-Hall's post-war assertion that the GHQ line faced the wrong way, thus making Turner's decision even more inexplicable, and that Turner overcrowded it with troops resulting in excessive losses.<sup>75</sup> Both of these assertions are disputable and indicate probably why Gordon-Hall, a trained staff officer, did not receive any further promotions, unlike most officers in his situation. The Germans attacked the Apex from both the east and the north, but their greatest success was the eastern attack that resulted in the breakthrough of the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion line. Given the main thrust of the German attack was westward, the GHQ line was not wholly out of position.

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<sup>74</sup> 1:45 P.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 24 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>75</sup> Gordon-Hall to Urquhart, 12 February 1939, File 1, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives. For example, see Greenfield, *Baptism of Fire; the Second Battle of Ypres and the Forging of Canada April 1915*: 195.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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While the notion of eight battalions crowded in the narrow confines of the redoubts of the GHQ line makes for an arresting image, it is misleading, given how weak were the units. Turner reported in the evening that the four battalions of his brigade amounted to 750 men. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had fewer than 200 men and the attached British battalion was not much stronger. Therefore, the total strength of the brigade holding the GHQ line was probably less than 1,500 men, which would not exceed the capacity of the redoubts.<sup>76</sup>

### Analysis

A set of factors, some of which were out of his control, conditioned Turner's performance. The first was fatigue. The prolonged strain of battle, lack of sleep, and the constant stress led to exhaustion and contributed to poor decision-making by Hughes and Turner. Turner reported to his wife that he had his boots off twice between 20 April and 4 May.<sup>77</sup> A key skill needed by senior commanders was to manage their energy and failure to do so resulted in breakdowns.<sup>78</sup>

Communications and logistics were a constant problem throughout the battle. Turner's situation was particularly difficult, as the Germans effectively interdicted his main supply and communications route to the front, because of

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<sup>76</sup> 11:20 P.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 24 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC; 6:35 P.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 24 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC. Garnet Hughes claimed to Duguid that the British battalions had suffered heavily at Hill 60 and one battalion was reduced to 116 men. Hughes to Duguid, 29 March 1934, HQ 683-1-30-5, RG 24 v1503, LAC.

<sup>77</sup> Turner to Hetty, 9 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

<sup>78</sup> *Army Leadership Competent, Confident, and Agile FM 6-22*, (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006), 11-18.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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their flanking position, and observation and artillery domination. Resupply was only possible at night, and, even then, was challenging. As a result, the Canadians had to fight hungry, thirsty, and short of ammunition. As Andrew Iarocci argues, the problems reported with the Ross Rifle were partly due to ammunition shortages.<sup>79</sup> Contributing to Turner's failure was the almost complete collapse of communications throughout the battle. A staff officer claimed the lack of information was 'stygian' and that "our energies were as much used up in groping for intelligence as in directing operations."<sup>80</sup> For example, one message from the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the front line took eighty-five minutes to reach Turner's Headquarters.<sup>81</sup>

Unlike Currie's compact position, Turner had a sprawling line, oriented at right angles, with unprepared defences on one flank, poor to non-existent communications, no artillery support, and the equivalent of two brigades of infantry to control. Turner commanded at various times nine battalions across a division-sized front.<sup>82</sup> Despite improvements in communications, the effective span of command in modern armies is a maximum of four to five subordinate units, so Turner was overloaded.<sup>83</sup> Alderson made a serious error in burdening an inexperienced brigade commander and his staff, with too long a front and too many units. Alderson faced similar problems of having to control thirty-three

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<sup>79</sup> Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915*: 10, 140.

<sup>80</sup> Gordon-Hall to Urquhart, 27 January 1938, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

<sup>81</sup> 11:25 P.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 22 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>82</sup> Turner commanded at various times his four battalions (13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>), the 2<sup>nd</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> battalions and the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Irish Regiment. Duguid to Edmonds 18 May 1925, DHS 3-17 (vol 1), RG 24 v1739, LAC.

<sup>83</sup> Richard Byrson, "The Once and Future Army," in Brian Bond (ed.), *Look to Your Front : Studies in the First World War* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), 52.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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battalions, and this contributed to the poor control exerted by the division.<sup>84</sup>

The staff work in Turner's brigade was consistently inferior to its neighbours, in fact it was less effective than in Geddes' Detachment, whose staff consisted of a captain. The information flow to Currie, to Geddes, and back to division was infrequent and at times inaccurate, whereas there are multiple instances of Geddes informing Turner of his situation in the message logs.<sup>85</sup> The commander of the 7<sup>th</sup> Battalion, while assigned to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, complained that he had no instructions or contact with Turner or his staff.<sup>86</sup>

By the evening of 24 April at staff conference, Hughes was unable to coherently describe the brigade's positions.<sup>87</sup> Earlier in the day, Paul Villiers, a 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade staff captain, stumbled badly when he tried reporting the brigade's positions to Major-General Thomas Snow of the 28<sup>th</sup> British Division. Snow, reportedly the rudest man in the British Army, was enraged when his rapid-fire questions and constant interruptions flustered Villiers.<sup>88</sup> Another staff captain went mad from the bombardment of the headquarters on April 25 and fled to Geddes' headquarters claiming the brigade staff was wiped out.<sup>89</sup> He had to be restrained and evacuated.

The brigade staff and, especially the Brigade-Major, were essential to

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<sup>84</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 63.

<sup>85</sup> 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 22 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>86</sup> Ypres Battle Description, MG 30 E300 v24, Odium Fonds; LAC.

<sup>87</sup> Gordon-Hall to Urquhart, 15 November 1934, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

<sup>88</sup> This was the preamble to the infamous Snow attack on Currie's courage, when Currie attempted to contact Canadian Division headquarters. Statement of Major E.F. Lynn, MC - Canadian Engineers, MG 30 E75 v2, Urquhart Fonds; LAC; Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915*: 154.

<sup>89</sup> Ypres Memoirs, MG 30 E236 v4, Villiers Fonds; LAC; Napier Comments, File 50, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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success and Turner was badly let down by his staff. Turner, however, was ultimately responsible for his staff selection and retention. He made no effort to replace Hughes after the battle, and this indicates one of his flaws in retaining friends in positions, when they had not proven successful. Another factor was Hughes' father. Turner was politically sensitive and would be loath to earn the enmity of the minister if he tried replacing Garnet. Although Turner did not know it, Sam Hughes was receiving exaggerated reports of the work done by Garnet at Second Ypres.<sup>90</sup> Alderson moved rapidly to transfer Garnet out of the brigade by having him appointed GSO 2 of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in England on 27 May 1915.<sup>91</sup> Turner fought Alderson over whom to appoint in his place, and Turner prevailed in appointing Villiers as his new Brigade-Major.<sup>92</sup>

In addition, divisional staff work was deficient. Orders were incomplete or imprecise, such as not specifying the two battalions to make the night counterattack on 22 April, or the confusion of what line Romer referred to on the 24<sup>th</sup>.<sup>93</sup> Attack orders set unrealistic movement schedules given the conditions. An example was the order for the 10<sup>th</sup> British Brigade to attack on 25 April that was to include fifteen battalions, but only the five battalions of the brigade reached

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<sup>90</sup> John Wallace Carson, Sam Hughes' special representative in England, wrote that Turner "would have been more or less lost if it had not been for the good quiet work - without fuss or feathers - done by Garnet under most trying circumstances." Carson to Hughes, 10 May 1915, 6-H-5, RG 9 III A1 v154, LAC.

<sup>91</sup> Turner complained that Hughes had only a one-hour notice of the move before Hughes had to leave. 2nd Division GS War Diary, 27 May 1915, RG 9 III D3 v4841, LAC; Turner Diary Entry, 29 May 1915, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>92</sup> Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.

<sup>93</sup> Alderson's order did not specify which battalions to use and Turner used the 10<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, while Alderson wanted the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> employed. Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914 - 1919*, 1: 236-237.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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the start line in time for the attack.<sup>94</sup> The timing expected by Alderson and his staff was impractical considering the conditions of the front. This was a fact neither Alderson nor his GSO 1 Romer understood, as they remained ensconced at the division headquarters throughout the battle.<sup>95</sup> Romer, who would later rise to the rank of full General, was notorious for being headquarters-bound when Brigadier-General, General Staff (BGGS) of the III Corps.<sup>96</sup> British observers considered Alderson did not properly grip the situation.<sup>97</sup>

Turner was dissatisfied with the information coming from the division, noting in pencil, on a message claiming the Germans were running out of ammunition, while German artillery pummelled his troops, that it was an "example of the value of information derived from the rear."<sup>98</sup> Currie also lost confidence in the division and was frustrated with Alderson.<sup>99</sup>

Turner's critics have under-appreciated the scale of the challenge Turner faced, especially in comparison to Currie; as a result, they judge Turner's performance too harshly. Even Duguid made the invidious comparison that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade held and the 3<sup>rd</sup> did not.<sup>100</sup> Despite, having to defend too long of a line running at a right angle, with too many units to control, unprepared defences, unsupported by artillery, hampered by an inexperienced staff, and

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<sup>94</sup> Dixon, *Magnificent but Not War: The Battle for Ypres, 1915*: 105.

<sup>95</sup> A detailed list of visits of staff officers to the 3rd Brigade does not show either Romer or Alderson visiting Turner's headquarters during the battle. Staff Visits to 3rd Brigade, 8-1-10, RG 9 III A1 v28, LAC.

<sup>96</sup> Kenneth Radley, *We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918* (St. Catharines, Ont.: Vanwell Pub., 2006), 241.

<sup>97</sup> Edmonds to Duguid, 18 March 1925, DHS 3-17 (vol 1), RG 24 v1739, LAC.

<sup>98</sup> 1135 A.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 24 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>99</sup> Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography*: 50; Robert Laird Borden, *Letters to Limbo* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971), 59.

<sup>100</sup> Defence of Ypres Account, File 73, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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hindered by constantly interrupted communications and logistics, Turner and his brigade performed surprisingly well for their first battle. Turner's performance was flawed, but not incompetent.

Turner made mistakes in his first battle as a senior commander, as did Currie and Alderson. Currie's leaving his brigade headquarters to search for reserves on the afternoon of 24 April is one example.<sup>101</sup> As Cecil Romer phrased it, "the Currie of April 1915 was not the Currie of August 1918."<sup>102</sup> Historians have assessed Currie's performance through the lens of his later successes, and from comments of officers long after the war, whose views were coloured by Currie's later reputation. The battle was poorly conducted at all levels of command from Field Marshal Sir John French, the commander of the BEF, through army, corps, division and brigade levels. Had Turner been a British officer, the British high command with their limited tolerance for failure would probably have removed him, and possibly Alderson and Currie.<sup>103</sup> Turner, however, was a Canadian Militia officer and given the scale and scope of the challenge he faced, allowances had to be made for his inexperience, the situation, and the political cost of removing a Canadian hero.

What is certain is that there was little confidence or trust remaining between Turner and Alderson. This eroded further in the aftermath of the battle. Turner's military career up to this point was an unbroken series of triumphs, and

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<sup>101</sup> For examples on how other scholars view Currie's actions, see Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915*: 160; Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 158; Borys, "The Education of a Corps Commander: Arthur Currie's Leadership from 1915-1917," 43.

<sup>102</sup> Romer Comments, 7j, MG 4027 Acc. No 391 Ref 1-2, Urquhart Fonds; McGill.

<sup>103</sup> Tim Cook argues that probably both Currie and Turner would have lost their positions in the British Army. Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 164.



## 2 'An Awful War'

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he had not experienced failure before, so he did not react well by, unfairly, blaming Alderson for his problems, complaining that no divisional staff visited his brigade during the battle.<sup>104</sup> Alderson easily refuted this grievance by providing a list of the repeated visits by his staff to Turner's headquarters during the battle. Turner had to apologise abjectly closing with "I can only explain the strange lapse of memory to the awful pounding we received on the 25<sup>th</sup> April."<sup>105</sup>

Why would Turner make such an obviously fallacious claim? The explanation probably lies with the destruction of Turner's headquarters by intense German shelling in the afternoon of 25 April.<sup>106</sup> It was so severe that the staff had to escape by swimming across a moat that surrounded the farm.<sup>107</sup> A 2<sup>nd</sup> Brigade staff officer later reported seeing Turner with his jaw bandaged up, and Turner's later behaviour strongly suggests that he suffered a concussion during the bombardment.<sup>108</sup> Turner lamented to his wife three times in the next two months about feeling thick headed, and that he was "still very tired, and my head and brain seem to act slower than usual – It has been an awful war."<sup>109</sup> One of the after effects of a concussion can be memory loss, and this may help explain his unsatisfactory later explanations of his decisions during the battle.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> For instance, see Turner to Hetty, 15 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

<sup>105</sup> Staff Visits to 3rd Brigade, 8-1-10, RG 9 III A1 v28, LAC.

<sup>106</sup> Duguid reported it was destroyed at 5:00 p.m. Duguid to Edmonds, 17 March 1926, DHS 3-17 (vol 2), RG 24 v1739, LAC.

<sup>107</sup> Turner to Hetty, 9 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

<sup>108</sup> Napier Comments, File 50, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

<sup>109</sup> Turner to Hetty, 3 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM; Turner to Hetty, 15 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM; Turner Diary Entry, 11 June 1915, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>110</sup> Dr. Michael Meier, 'Concussion Effects,' Email, 22 September 2011. Dr. Meier was an Associate Clinical Professor of Critical Care Medicine and Surgery and Director of the E. G. King Critical Care/Trauma Unit, University of Alberta at the time of the email.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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Another incident was Sam Hughes' bitter denunciation of Alderson to the Prime Minister. He asserted Alderson was not competent to command the division and Turner should replace him.<sup>111</sup> Hughes attack was unjust and deeply wounding, and Alderson responded with a detailed letter refuting the claims.<sup>112</sup> While Turner and Garnet Hughes were not directly involved in the exchange, it probably further undermined Alderson's trust in Turner.

### **Festubert**

The 1<sup>st</sup> Division had a brief rest before the British high command committed it to the continuation of the First Army's offensive at Festubert. Turner's 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade was ordered to Festubert on 16 May, and the remainder of the division followed shortly after. Poor staff work by the division resulted in engineer and ambulance units not accompanying the brigade, as was usually the case, which angered Turner.<sup>113</sup> At Festubert, the brigade was forced, over Turner's objections, to make a series of hasty and ill-prepared attacks, with minimal effective artillery support, but it was able to reach most of its objectives at the cost of further heavy losses.<sup>114</sup>

Two aspects of the battle are pertinent. First, despite Turner's already shaky relationship with Alderson and the divisional staff, he had the moral courage to protest obviously flawed orders. In one instance, the British commanders

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<sup>111</sup> Hughes to Borden, 28 May 1915, 31777-31779, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>112</sup> Alderson's letter is not entirely convincing, as there were definitely breakdowns in the division during the battle. In the main, Hughes letter was inaccurate, exaggerated, and tendentious. Alderson to Perley, 7 July 1915, 31780-31795, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>113</sup> Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH; Turner Diary Entries, 16, 18, and 23 May 1915, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>114</sup> Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 190.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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advanced an attack time originally planned for the dark at 9:00 p.m. up to 7:45 p.m., so the attack would be in daylight. The division order did not reach Turner until 3:00 p.m. leaving insufficient time to prepare. Turner protested in vain to the divisional staff that the attack was 'murder' in daylight against uncut wire, but he was over-ruled.<sup>115</sup>

Second, General Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the First Army, assigned Alderson command of the 51<sup>st</sup> Highland Division and the artillery of the 2<sup>nd</sup> British and 7<sup>th</sup> British Divisions, in a repeat of the errors at Second Ypres of over-loading commanders.<sup>116</sup> Alderson and his staff were clearly incapable of fulfilling their responsibilities. Alderson, in addition, was trapped between the protests of Currie and Turner over the attack timing and the intense pressure from Haig to attack as scheduled. Alderson weakly tried to convince Haig to grant more time to prepare, but Haig rejected any delays. As a result of his anaemic efforts, Alderson further alienated his brigade commanders and angered Haig. Lieutenant-Colonel F.S. Meighen of the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion claimed to Carson that both Currie and Turner went to Alderson to complain about how he was running the division.<sup>117</sup> Haig was so furious about Alderson's performance that he chastised Alderson and Romer about the 'sketchy methods of Command' of the

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<sup>115</sup> The officer involved, GSO 2 Lieutenant-Colonel Gordon-Hall did elevate the complaint to Haig, who raged that the attack must be made. Gordon-Hall was convinced that this was the reason he did not receive a promotion during the war. Turner to Duguid, 5 February 1937, HQ 683-1-30-5, RG 24 v1504, LAC; Gordon Hall to Duguid, 20 March 1937, File 120, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.

<sup>116</sup> The corps commander at the Battle of Givenchy a month later, was so concerned about the poor staff work of the 51st Highland Division that he sent his chief staff officer to assist, which meant, Alderson's staff would have been stretched to manage the 51st at Festubert. Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson, 1914-18* (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 97; Radley, *We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918*: 130.

<sup>117</sup> Meighen to Carson, 25 May 1915, 6-M-10, RG 9 III A1 v174, LAC.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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division and brigade staffs.<sup>118</sup> Haig did not forget such 'stickiness' and this probably played a role in Alderson's replacement after St. Eloi.

### Conclusion

Turner's first battle was not a success, as poor staff work, inaccurate information transmission and a dangerous decision indicated he was overstretched. Turner faced an unprecedented challenge in reacting to the effective annihilation of two divisions on his left flank by a new, devastating secret weapon. His initial decisions were appropriate for the situation, but his and his brigade staff's performance deteriorated over the course of the battle. Alderson erred in tasking Turner with controlling too many troops, over too long a front, given the inexperienced state of the brigade. Napoleon famously asked if an officer proposed for promotion to General was lucky, Turner at Ypres was not. He was dealt an unwinnable hand, but he did not play it as well as he could have.

At Festubert, the brigade reached its objectives and without much evidence of the previous problems, indicating some degree of improvement in Turner's performance. Turner proved his willingness to challenge flawed orders, but at the cost of a further estrangement from Alderson.

How Turner would have progressed as a brigade commander was to be moot as on 17 August, Turner took over command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.<sup>119</sup> The history of

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<sup>118</sup> Haig Diary, 25 May 1915 in Gary Sheffield and John Bourne, ed. *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters, 1914-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 126.

<sup>119</sup> 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 17 August 1917, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

## 2 'An Awful War'

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the 13<sup>th</sup> Battalion reported Turner "had earned an enviable military reputation and in addition had gained to an unusual degree the affection and regard of his men."<sup>120</sup> Turner's first eight months in command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and his conduct of the purported fiasco at St. Eloi Craters is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>120</sup> R. C Fetherstonhaugh, *The 13th Battalion Royal Highlanders of Canada, 1914-1919* (13th Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada, 1925), 68.

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## WE ARE IN DESOLATE PLACES: BATTLE OF ST. ELOI CRATERS

*We grope for the wall like the blind, and we grope as if we had not eyes: we stumble at noon day as in the night, we are in desolate places like dead men.*

Isaiah 59:10

In thirteen days of unrelenting combat in April 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division struggled and ultimately failed to hold and then retake a narrow 600 meter salient of craters, mud, and dead at the tiny crossroads of St. Eloi, Belgium.<sup>1</sup> Characterised by an unsympathetic historian as “ineptly conducted by the divisional commander, Major-General Richard Turner,” St. Eloi is often used as the exemplar that proves Turner’s incompetence.<sup>2</sup> The chapter investigates Turner’s performance in the context of the information, resources, and conditions of this ill-conceived and strategically purposeless battle. It starts with an examination of the formation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and Turner’s command up of the division to St. Eloi.

### Formation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division’s formation followed a different path than that of the 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The battle extended beyond 16 April as the Germans retook several more craters, but the primary aspect of the battle ends on that date.

<sup>2</sup> Dancocks, *Gallant Canadians: The Story of the Tenth Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1914-1919*: 81.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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Division. The British accepted a second contingent on 31 October 1914.<sup>3</sup> Rather than being mobilised centrally, as was the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division conformed to the original 1912 mobilisation scheme of the Military District staff raising the battalions in the districts and selecting personnel. The battalions spent the winter training in the districts under the supervision of the district staffs, as Valcartier was not prepared to barrack troops during the winter.<sup>4</sup>

The division consisted of the 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Brigades. The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade was from Ontario, with the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, and 21<sup>st</sup> Battalions. The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade was a mix of units from the Maritimes and Quebec, consisting of the 22<sup>nd</sup> (French Canadian), 24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup>, and 26<sup>th</sup> Battalions. The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade was unique, in possessing the only francophone battalion in the Canadian Corps. The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade included battalions from all four western provinces - 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, and 31<sup>st</sup> Battalions. The battalion commanders were a mix of six commanders of Militia regiments, two commanders of Militia infantry brigades, one retired officer, two majors, and one PF officer.

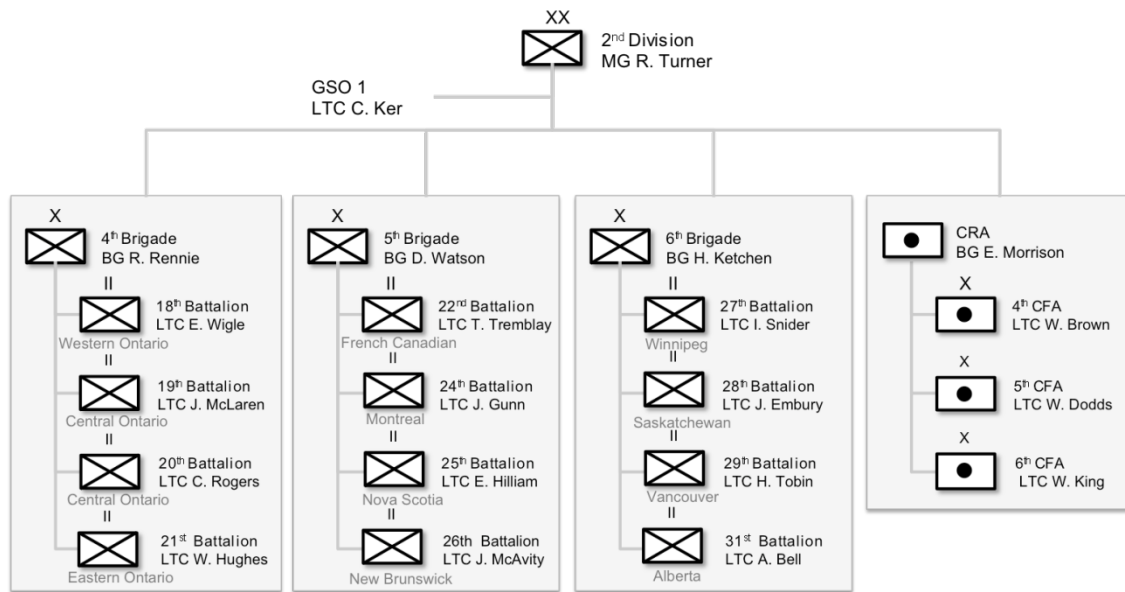
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<sup>3</sup> Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919*, 1: 404.

<sup>4</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 17.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

**Figure 4 2nd Division Organisation Chart – St. Eloi, 6 April 1916**



The training of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in Canada faced the same issues that confronted Territorial and New Army divisions in Britain, with inexperienced NCOs and officers inculcating outdated concepts.<sup>5</sup> There were the added impediments of being even further removed from the developments at the front than British formations and the harsh Canadian winter limiting training.

A further problem facing the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was a dearth of British Regular or Canadian PF officers in command positions at the battalion level to add experienced professional leadership. Unlike, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, all but one of the battalion commanders in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division were Militia officers, as were all the company commanders and the adjutants.<sup>6</sup> First wave British New Army

<sup>5</sup> Craig French, "The 51st (Highland) Division During the First World War." (PhD, University of Glasgow, 2006), 41; Simkins, *Kitchener's Army: The Raising of Britain's New Armies, 1914-1916*: 297.

<sup>6</sup> The one exception was Lieutenant-Colonel A. Bell of the 31st Battalion, who was a captain in the PF at the start of the war. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division had two British Regular Army officers in



### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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divisions, in contrast, had Regular officers commanding all battalions and most companies. Even the last mobilised wave of New Army divisions consisted of battalions commanded by retired Regular officers.<sup>7</sup>

**Figure 5 2nd Division Battalion Commanders' Origins<sup>8</sup>**

Officer	2nd Division	Canadian Command
E. Wigle	18th Battalion	21st Regiment
J. McLaren	19th Battalion	91st Regiment
J. Allan	20th Battalion	22nd Infantry Brigade
W. Hughes	21st Battalion	14th Regiment
F. Gaudet	22nd Battalion	Retired Colonel
J. Gunn	24th Battalion	Major, 3rd Regiment
G. Le Cain	25th Battalion	18th Infantry Brigade
J. McAvity	26th Battalion	62nd Regiment
I. Snider	27 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	99 <sup>th</sup> Regiment
J. Embury	28th Battalion	95th Regiment
H. Tobin	29th Battalion	Brigade-Major, 23rd Brigade
A. Bell	31st Battalion	Captain, PF

An instructive comparison is with the 21<sup>st</sup> British and 24<sup>th</sup> British Divisions, who had a calamitous introduction to combat at the Battle of Loos. Both of these were second wave New Army formations raised and sent to France at approximately the same time as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. The British Official History ascribed their problems to the relative shortage of trained commanders and staff. At a minimum, each battalion in the two divisions had one Regular or retired Regular officer, with all the battalion commanders in the 21<sup>st</sup> Division being

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command of battalions at Second Ypres, Lieutenant-Colonel A Birchall of the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion and Lieutenant-Colonel L. Lipsett of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion.

<sup>7</sup> Simpson, "The Officers," 73; Martin Samuels, *Doctrine and Dogma: German and British Infantry Tactics in the First World War*, vol. no. 121 (New York: Greenwood Press, 1992), 151.

<sup>8</sup> Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914)*.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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active or retired Regulars. The staffs of the two divisions had more trained and experienced staff officers than did the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.<sup>9</sup> As a result, it is not surprising that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was not well-prepared for battle when Turner assumed command.

Selecting the commander of the division was a tangled process. The British appointment of the British officer and former Secretary of State for War, Brigadier-General Jack Seely, to command the Canadian Cavalry Brigade, without any discussion with Canadian authorities, goaded Borden to ensure a Canadian commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.<sup>10</sup> Originally, Hughes thought to command the division, but Borden again dissuaded him, and instead Hughes recommended the PF officer, Major-General Sam Steele.<sup>11</sup> Steele, a Canadian western icon and legendary Mounted Police and military leader, also had the merit of satisfying the powerful cabinet minister Robert Rogers' demands for equal representation for Western Canada in the command ranks.<sup>12</sup> Kitchener, given Steele's age (66) and inexperience, rejected him and offered any unemployed major-general on the Active List as a commander.<sup>13</sup> Any

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<sup>9</sup> J.E. Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1915*, vol. 2 (London: Macmillan and co., limited, 1928), 293-294.

<sup>10</sup> Carson to Hughes, 23 February 1915, 8-5-10, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

<sup>11</sup> Hughes to Borden, 25 February 1915, 31763, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>12</sup> Granatstein, *Canada and the Two World Wars*: 65. Steele participated in the North-West Mounted Police's famous *March West* in 1874, attempted to persuade the Sioux War Chief Sitting Bull to return to the US, commanded posts all over the West, led the Mounted Police in the North-West Rebellion of 1885, and served as the commissioner of the Yukon during the gold rush. He then commanded the privately-raised Lord Strathcona's Horse in the Boer War, commanded 'B' Division of the South African Constabulary until 1906 and returned to Canada to command Military Districts #13 and #10. For an uncritical biography of Steele, see Robert Stewart, *Sam Steele, Lion of the Frontier* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 1979).

<sup>13</sup> Steele was actually 64 in 1915, although his army records indicated he was 66. Stewart, *Sam Steele, Lion of the Frontier*: 278. Hughes' 'intolerable' actions during this period annoyed and 'astonished' the King and the Colonial Office. Wigram to Fitzgerald, WG/9, PRO 30/57/56,

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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unemployed major-general at this stage of the war, however, was unlikely to be a better choice than Steele. The Canadian and British authorities, eventually, agreed that Steele could bring the division to England, but not take it to France. Kitchener did find Steele a position commensurate with his rank, as commander of the Southeastern area, which included Shorncliffe, the major Canadian training centre.<sup>14</sup>

Sir John French preferred Currie command the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, based on an adverse report by Alderson on Turner. Alderson thought Turner unfit for divisional command, other than that he was 'physically brave to a fault.'<sup>15</sup> Alderson did not show this document to Turner, as required.<sup>16</sup> Canadian authorities, however, were adamant that it was Canada's right to choose and they wanted Turner, believing him the most qualified Canadian given his pre-war and war records. Kitchener had to accede to Canadian demands, and appointed Turner.<sup>17</sup> On learning of Turner's appointment, Alderson was to lament "Canadian politics have been too strong for all of us."<sup>18</sup> Turner's appointment was generally popular, however, as even an anti-government

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Kitchener Papers; TNA; Intercepted Cable Reaction, 28 April 1915, WG/10, PRO 30/57/56, Kitchener Papers; TNA.

<sup>14</sup> Major-General Sir Samuel Steele File, S-9, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Command of the 2nd Division, WG/3 - WG/17, PRO 30/57/56, Kitchener Papers; TNA.

<sup>15</sup> No version of this letter has been found, so the only reference to it is in Alderson's 1916 adverse report. Alderson to AMS 2 Army, G.271, 18 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v5075, LAC.

<sup>16</sup> An adverse report was required to be shown to the subject of the report. *The King's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia 1917*, ed. Department of Militia and Defence (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1917), para. 93. Turner did not know of Alderson's opinion. Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.

<sup>17</sup> Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 270-273.

<sup>18</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 40.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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paper, the *Manitoba Free Press*, approved.<sup>19</sup> Turner officially took over command on 17 August.

In May, Hughes appointed three PF officers to command the brigades. Colonel Septimus Dennison commanded the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, but at fifty-six he was too old and his health broke down almost immediately. The British Regular officer Brigadier-General Lord Brooke replaced him on 25 June.<sup>20</sup> Brooke was an example of a curious aspect of Hughes' character: a fondness for aristocrats. Brooke was well connected and was the son of the Earl of Warwick, who was a friend of Hughes.<sup>21</sup>

Colonel J.P. Landry, initially, commanded the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade until replaced by Brigadier-General David Watson on 30 August. Steele did not believe Landry was competent and this was a view shared by other officers in the brigade.<sup>22</sup> In an indication of Turner's political sensitivity, he asked Landry be promoted to Brigadier-General, given he was a senior French-Canadian PF officer.<sup>23</sup>

Watson, the new commander of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, was a Militia officer who

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<sup>19</sup> "Generals Steele and Turner Are Promoted," *Manitoba Free Press*, 28 July 1915. The *Manitoba Free Press* became the *Winnipeg Free Press* in December 1931. Ramsay Cook, *The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press* ([Toronto]: University of Toronto Press, 1963), 202.

<sup>20</sup> J. A. Cooper, *Fourth Canadian Infantry Brigade: History of Operations, April 1915 to Demobilization* (London: Charles and son, 1919), 9; Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914)*.

<sup>21</sup> Brooke commanded a Cavalry Brigade in Canada in 1913 and led manoeuvres in June 1914. He was also an ADC to Sir John French in South Africa and in France when French commanded the BEF. Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 147; Archer Fortescue Duguid, *History of the Canadian Grenadier Guards, 1760-1964* (Montreal: Gazette Print. Co., 1965), 57; Murray to Aitken, 15 May 1916, Folder 41/File 2, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC.

<sup>22</sup> Steele to Carson, 3 November 1915, 6-L-86, RG 9 III A1 v170, LAC. Andrew Macphail in his diary reported Landry was superseded, after manoeuvres "ended disastrously for us, so much so that we described ourselves as dead men." Macphail Diary Entry, 14 August 1915, MG 30 D150 v4, Macphail Fonds; LAC. Landry remained as a training brigade commander and was a success in this role. Carson to Hughes, 25 January 1916, 8-5-10c, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

<sup>23</sup> Carson to Hughes, 6 September 1915, 6-L-86, RG 9 III A1 v170, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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had commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion with distinction at Second Ypres. Watson was the owner and editor of the Tory *Quebec Chronicle* newspaper, a staunch conservative, a shrewd intriguer, and a confidant of Hughes.<sup>24</sup> Watson would later rise to command the 4<sup>th</sup> Division and had a poor reputation. Watson's British GSO 1, Lieutenant-Colonel Edmund Ironside, thought him "at a loss commanding a division," and the Canadian Corps' respected chief administrative officer thought him "bad, goodness knows."<sup>25</sup>

The commander of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade, Colonel H.D.B. Ketchen, remained in command of the brigade until 1917. Ketchen was a major in the PF in 1914. He was educated at Sandhurst, but emigrated to Canada in 1894, and served in the North West Mounted Police for five years. He joined Steele's regiment, Lord Strathcona's Horse in the Boer War, and transferred to the PF afterwards. In 1914, he was the chief administrative officer in Military District #10 – Steele's command. Hughes selected Ketchen, in part, because he was a protégé of both Steele and Robert Rogers.<sup>26</sup>

The GSO 1 was Lieutenant-Colonel H.D. De Pree, a British artillery officer,

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<sup>24</sup> Biography David Watson, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC; Patrick Brennan, "Major-General David Watson: A Critical Appraisal of Canadian Generalship in the Great War," in Andrew B. Godefroy (ed.), *Great War Commands: Historical Perspectives on Canadian Army Leadership 1914-1918* (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2010), 112; Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 39.

<sup>25</sup> General Farmar Comments, File 13, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives; General Ironside Comments, 18 December 1934, File 12, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives. Patrick Brennan has a more positive view of Watson. See, Brennan, "Major-General David Watson: A Critical Appraisal of Canadian Generalship in the Great War."

<sup>26</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 40; 2nd Canadian Division Mobilization in Canada, Interview by Wm. F. Bradley, 2 March 1916, RG 24 v6999, LAC; Biography H.D.B. Ketchen, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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who joined from the Lahore Division, at the end of May 1915.<sup>27</sup> The GSO 2 was Major C.A. Ker, who transferred from the 21<sup>st</sup> British Division.<sup>28</sup> Ker, an artillery officer, was familiar to Canadians, as he was serving at RMC in Kingston, at the start of the war.<sup>29</sup> De Pree moved at the end of January 1916, and Ker took over as GSO 1.<sup>30</sup> The head administrative officer was Colonel P.E. Thacker, a PF, and Camberley trained staff officer.<sup>31</sup> He will be covered in more detail in Chapter 6.

The division crossed over to England starting in late April in convoys of 5,000 men and did not finish arriving until June 1915. The division moved into a recently constructed base at Shorncliffe near Dover on the English Channel.<sup>32</sup> This was the first time the division was concentrated.

Turner assumed command of the division on 17 August and he had less than a month to place his mark on the division before it crossed to France. According to Steele's aide, Captain F.F. Montague, the division was loyal to Steele, but Turner quickly won them over.<sup>33</sup> Captain Andrew Macphail, a doctor and noted Canadian literary figure, commented Turner "won instant devotion,

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<sup>27</sup> De Pree, a cousin of Douglas Haig, subsequently had an equivocal reputation, with some British officers wondering how he rose as far as he did, but he is also credited with planning the unregistered artillery fire plan at Cambrai that was so successful. French, "The 51st (Highland) Division During the First World War.," 301; Christopher Byrnley Hammond, "The Theory and Practice of Tank Cooperation with Other Arms on the Western Front in the First World War" (PhD, University of Birmingham, 2005), 403; Peter Simkins, "Somme Reprise: Reflections on the Fighting for Albert and Bapaume, August 1918," in Brian Bond (ed.), *Look to Your Front : Studies in the First World War* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), 153.

<sup>28</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, 1 May 1915, RG 9 III D3 v4841, LAC.

<sup>29</sup> Ker Correspondence File, RG 9 III A1 v167, LAC; Brigadier General Charles Arthur Ker, C.M.G., D.S.O., 6 August 1918, Folder 12 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4678, LAC.

<sup>30</sup> C. A. Ker Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 5109 - 28, LAC.

<sup>31</sup> Thacker was the Assistant Adjutant and Quartermaster-General of the 2nd Division.

<sup>32</sup> Diane Beaupré "En Route to Flanders Fields: The Canadians at Shorncliffe During the Great War," *London Journal Of Canadian Studies* 23(2007/2008): 47.

<sup>33</sup> Observations of Montague Relating to Turner Taking over 2nd Division; Undated, 19710147-015/DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.14, Turner Fonds; CWM.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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even from myself, who am not disposed to yield devotion upon first demand."<sup>34</sup>

One of the first changes Turner instituted was more pragmatic and realistic formation training. Under Steele, the brigades carried out tactical exercises as meeting engagements, with columns and advance guards as per *Field Service Regulations (FSR)*.<sup>35</sup> Turner instructed the brigades to conduct trench and open warfare training, and each brigade had to carry out a trench attack.<sup>36</sup>

Turner, initially, did not make any changes at the command level, as was often the case with a new divisional commander taking over a recently mobilised formation.<sup>37</sup> It was not necessary in this case, as Steele had already replaced one battalion and two brigade commanders. Steele's dismissal of Lieutenant-Colonel J. Allan of the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion caused a near riot in the battalion.<sup>38</sup> Turner was obviously worried about the battalion's discipline, as he requested the PF unit, the Royal Canadian Regiment (RCR), recently arrived from garrison duty in Bermuda, replace the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion. Turner subsequently changed his mind, as the RCR was not ready for active service, and he thought

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<sup>34</sup> Macphail Diary Entry, 17 August 1915, MG 30 D150 v4, Macphail Fonds; LAC. Macphail wrote the widely derided and sharply anti-Hughes Medical Official History. Andrew Macphail and Canada. Dept. of National Defence. Historical Section., *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-19. The Medical Services* (Ottawa,: F. A. Acland, printer, 1925).

<sup>35</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, Appendix A, June and July 1915, RG 9 III D3 v4841, LAC. Simkins characterised aspects of New Army formation training as appropriate for the Franco-Prussian war. Simkins, *Kitchener's Army : The Raising of Britain's New Armies, 1914-1916*: 307.

<sup>36</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, 7 and 8 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.

<sup>37</sup> Wholesale changes at the staff, brigade, and battalion level often followed the replacement of a division commander in the British Territorial and New Army divisions early in the war. For an account of the 36th Ulster Division and the changes resulting from the appointment of a new commander, see Nick Perry, "Politics and Command: General Nugent, the Ulster Division and Relations with Ulster Unionism 1915-1918," in Brian Bond (ed.), *Look to Your Front : Studies in the First World War* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), 108.

<sup>38</sup> David James Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force: In the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Stone & Cox Limited, 1935), 18.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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better leadership could salvage the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion, which it did under Lieutenant-Colonel C. Rogers.<sup>39</sup>

#### **In France**

The division, on 23 September 1915, took over the Wesoutre sector, south of Ypres, and overlooked by the Wytschaete-Messines Ridge. Unlike the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, there was no gradual introduction to the front-line and mentoring with an experienced division. The arrival of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division also meant the formation of the Canadian Corps, with Alderson as corps commander and Currie taking over the 1<sup>st</sup> Division.

The defences the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division took over were in deplorable shape, and the division expended enormous efforts to improve them. Constant rainfall and the Germans pumping water from their trenches on the ridge onto the Canadian positions thwarted their efforts, however.<sup>40</sup> The men had to stand up to their waists in water in the front-line trenches, and some communication trenches were impassable because of flooding.<sup>41</sup> All of this work meant the battalions in reserve could not train but had to supply work parties for repairs. The Canadian Corps instructed the division to not initiate actions with the Germans in this early period in the trenches, because of the need to work on the defences.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Turner to Carson, 9 September 1915, 8-5-8a, RG 9 III A1 v43, LAC.

<sup>40</sup> Cooper, *Fourth Canadian Infantry Brigade: History of Operations, April 1915 to Demobilization*: 9.

<sup>41</sup> Turner to Carson, 6 November 1915, 4-5-25, RG 9 III A1 v13, LAC.

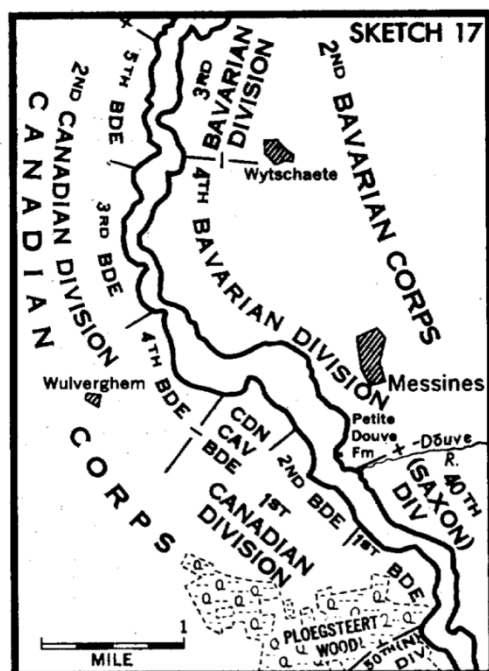
<sup>42</sup> 2nd C.I.D. Summary of Operations, 21 September - 7 October 1915, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.



### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Map 5      Wesoutre Sector, 23 September 1915



Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D. (1964) *Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919*

Sketch 17, *The Canadian Corps in the Line*, 23 September 1915, page 116

National Defence. Reproduced with permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2011

Strong leadership was required to keep the division working in these dispiriting conditions. One of Turner's great strengths was his constant visiting of the front, and he would endeavour to be the first officer to tour a new part of the line. In one eleven day period, Turner toured the trenches of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade on five separate days.<sup>43</sup> This is in contrast to some formations where senior officers seen in the front lines were rare. For instance, a British officer complained that in early 1915 over a five-month period, he never saw a member of the divisional staff in the front line.<sup>44</sup> Turner would spend hours investigating the situation, talking to the officers and men, and ensuring they knew their duties. He also

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<sup>43</sup> Watson Diary Entries, 23 September to 3 October 1915, MG 30 E69 Roll M-10, Watson Fonds; LAC.

<sup>44</sup> Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918*: 170.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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tasked his ADCs to always carry copies of illustrated newspapers to hand out to men on his tours.<sup>45</sup> This fitted the contemporary British model of man management.<sup>46</sup>

Like most new formations in the terrible weather conditions of the winter of 1915/1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division experienced its share of problems. The first was the poor response of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion to the Germans firing four mines on 8 October, which caused a partial panic in the company holding the affected sector. Some men fled but most rallied and denied the Germans a foothold in the Canadian line. Mines were a constant dread, a 'hovering horror,' and during this period, the Germans had an edge in mine warfare.<sup>47</sup> The only true protection was the trench; mines removed this last vestige of control and protection possessed by the soldier, hence the anxiety.<sup>48</sup>

That some men panicked indicated problems with the battalion, therefore, Watson promptly replaced the commander and the second in command.<sup>49</sup> The incident would have likely further lowered Alderson's confidence in Turner, given Alderson's antipathy towards him.

In November, Alderson was angered by the state of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade after inspecting their positions. Men in the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion were not wearing required

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<sup>45</sup> F. F. Montague Comments, 19710147-015/DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.14, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>46</sup> For more on the British model of man-management, see G. D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale, and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

<sup>47</sup> Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (New York, N.Y.: Holmes & Meier, 1980), 199.

<sup>48</sup> Donald George Scott Calder, *The History of the 28th (Northwest) Battalion, C. E. F. (October 1914-June 1919) from the Memoirs of Brigadier General Alexander Ross* (Regina, Sask.: Regina Rifle Regiment, 1961), 61.

<sup>49</sup> Robb to Carson, 21 October 1915, 8-5-8a, RG 9 III A1 v43, LAC; Watson Diary Entry, 14 October 1915, MG 30 E69 Roll M-10, Watson Fonds; LAC.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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equipment, their rifles were dirty, and the infantry was not in proper communications with the artillery. Turner assured Alderson that the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade was dealing with the problems.<sup>50</sup> Alderson, however, undoubtedly took note of the offending officers, including Turner, Ketchen, and Lieutenant-Colonel I. Snider of the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion, as all three would figure prominently at St. Eloi Craters.

The most damaging fault was prevalence of trench foot in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, in October and November of 1915, when conditions were at their worst. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had one of the highest incidence rates in the Second Army with seventy-seven cases in a two week period, while the more experienced 1<sup>st</sup> Division had only seventeen cases. GHQ used the rate of trench foot as an indication of the discipline and leadership of a formation. Both the Second Army and Alderson pressured Turner to address the problem.<sup>51</sup>

Turner responded by issuing a circular that emphasised prevention through supervision by regimental officers, with leave revoked for companies with high rates of trench foot. The officers commanding in the brigade with the highest rate would also lose their leave.<sup>52</sup> He also obtained boots, socks, and undervests for his troops through back channels from England. In one request to Carson, Hughes' 'special representative' in England and the de facto head of the administration in England, Turner asked socks be sent in small bales addressed

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<sup>50</sup> Instruction to 2nd Cdn. Division, G.284, 28 November 1915, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.

<sup>51</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 75-78.

<sup>52</sup> 2nd Cdn Div A&Q Circular, 12 December 1915, RG 24 v6991, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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to him to get around War Office regulations. Turner claimed he was following the Militia adage of 'the Lord helps those that help themselves,' as the British authorities and the Canadian Corps were not supplying these goods in sufficient quantity.<sup>53</sup> Turner's actions, the improvements to the trenches, and colder temperatures addressed the problem and rate of trench foot dropped to a more acceptable level.<sup>54</sup>

Turner and Alderson clashed over staff and command appointments. Turner quickly determined that Brooke, despite his being a favourite of Sam Hughes "did not have sufficient experience in this war."<sup>55</sup> According to Max Aitken, Sam Hughes' personal representative to GHQ and consummate fixer, Turner, Currie, and Alderson agreed to switch Brooke to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade with Garnet Hughes getting the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>56</sup> Garnet Hughes' selection to command a brigade was wholly unjustified by his experience and performance, but it is indicative of the influence Sam Hughes had in the promotion process.<sup>57</sup> Alderson, subsequently, changed his mind and assigned Garnet to command the 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade, as he believed Currie could keep Garnet out of trouble. Turner protested, as he was 'exceedingly anxious' that Garnet stay in

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<sup>53</sup> Turner to Carson, 6 November 1915, 4-5-25, RG 9 III A1 v13, LAC; Turner to Carson, 12 November 1915, File 4-2-3, RG 9 III A1 v8, LAC.

<sup>54</sup> Temperatures just above freezing were most likely to cause trench foot. John S. Jr. Haller, "Trench Foot-A Study in Military-Medical Responsiveness in the Great War, 1914-1918," *Western Journal of Medicine* 152, no. 6 (1990): 730.

<sup>55</sup> Brooke had no front-line command experience. Turner to Carson, 1 December 1915, 8-5-8b, RG 9 III A1 v43, LAC.

<sup>56</sup> Cable Aitken to Hughes, 28 September 1915, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

<sup>57</sup> Successful command of a battalion or a strong performance as a senior staff officer was a prerequisite for brigade command and Hughes had not commanded a battalion or acted as a senior staff officer.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, but was unsuccessful.<sup>58</sup> Brooke transferred to a training command in England to mollify Sam Hughes. In Brooke's place, on 17 November, Alderson appointed Robert Rennie, the commander of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Battalion. Rennie, a Militia officer and owner of a Toronto seed firm, would prove to be a safe pair of hands, as he commanded the brigade to September 1918.<sup>59</sup>

Turner complained to Aitken about the replacement of a Canadian administrative officer, Major Homer-Dixon, with a British officer.<sup>60</sup> In turn, Aitken lodged a complaint with the British authorities, which paid off, as Homer-Dixon was reappointed in January 1916.<sup>61</sup> Turner also battled Alderson over the appointment of Major J.L.R. Parsons, as his GSO 2 for Intelligence, because Alderson again wanted to appoint a British officer not trusting Turner's judgement in subordinates.<sup>62</sup> Turner won out, with Parsons' appointment. Parsons proved to be successful, because he was subsequently appointed the GSO 1 for Intelligence at the Canadian Corps on 25 September 1916.<sup>63</sup> These complaints were elevated to the highest levels in the British Government, when Sir George Perley, the acting High Commissioner, complained to the Colonial Secretary about the appointment of British officers when qualified Canadians

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<sup>58</sup> Hughes was a GSO 2 in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division at this time. Carson to Hughes, 29 October 1915, 8-5-8a, RG 9 III A1 v43, LAC.

<sup>59</sup> Biography Robert Rennie, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC.

<sup>60</sup> Homer-Dixon was the Deputy Assistant-Adjutant and Quartermaster General for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

<sup>61</sup> Cable Aitken to Hughes, 26 September 1915, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC; 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 17 January 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

<sup>62</sup> Turner to Carson, 1 December 1915, 8-5-8b, RG 9 III A1 v43, LAC; Parson Diary Entry, 24 November 1915, MG 30 E117 v3, Parson Fonds; LAC.

<sup>63</sup> Canadian Corps War Diary, 25 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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were available. The Colonial Secretary passed the protest to Kitchener, in December 1915, with the advice to treat the grievance seriously.<sup>64</sup> It appears to have had an effect, as there were fewer British officers selected over similarly qualified Canadians.

As a product of these complaints, Hughes waged a campaign to replace British Regular officers in the Canadian Corps. Alderson fought back by polling his divisional commanders on dispensing with Regular officers as brigade-majors. Both Mercer and Currie adamantly opposed the suggestion. Turner's answer was subtly different, as he wanted to retain the Regular officers until Canadian replacements were trained. Neither Mercer nor Currie referred to Canadians filling these positions.<sup>65</sup> This was also an early example of Turner's desire to produce more Canadian staff officers. Later when in command in England, Turner fostered an increase in Canadian staff officer training. This illustrates that Turner's strong Canadian nationalism was not a negative reaction to the British, but a confidence in what Canadians could accomplish. His view of the British became more jaundiced as the war progressed, and especially after the armistice.

Beginning in December, the division was able to shift some of its energies to training and to conducting raids. Turner established a series of schools at the division, brigade, and battalion levels to train troops in trench warfare and the

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<sup>64</sup> Perley to Bonar Law, 29 December 1915, 7/6/5, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.

<sup>65</sup> Alderson Extract, 1 March 1916, 39325-39333, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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new weapons, such as the Lewis Gun and Stokes Mortar.<sup>66</sup> Even in the worst conditions of October and November, the division pursued an aggressive scheme of patrolling no man's land at night. However, it was not until January that the division raided German trenches. The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade pulled off an impressive raid at the end of January, which was reported to be the first conducted without using artillery to cut enemy wire.<sup>67</sup> Turner sent Ketchen's analysis of the raid to Alderson over his signature, but in a dubious move did not credit Ketchen for writing the report.

#### **St. Eloi**

From 4 April, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division fought in the battle of St. Eloi Craters. This battle was the nadir of Turner's military career and his conduct in the battle became the focus of opprobrium by historians. It was also an example of the problems Canadians, like other inexperienced units, encountered when they could not operate within the confines of a structured and well-prepared operational scheme. When Canadian formations had to react to German actions and could not dictate the course of the battle, Canadian command and control floundered.<sup>68</sup> The problems encountered at Second Ypres, St. Eloi, and the opening days at Mount Sorrel, all demonstrate similar breakdowns. These issues were a symptom of the inexperienced Canadian commanders and staff.

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<sup>66</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 81.

<sup>67</sup> Deductions from Recent Minor Operations, GS 349, 3 February 1916, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC; Colin David Garnett, "Butcher and Bolt: Canadian Trench Raiding During the Great War, 1915-1918" (Masters, Carleton University, 2011), 46-49.

<sup>68</sup> Dan Jenkins, "Winning Trench Warfare: Battlefield Intelligence in the Canadian Corps, 1914-1919" (PhD, Carleton University, 1999), 168.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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The impetus for the battle stemmed from a desire by the commander of the Second Army, General Sir Herbert Plumer, to salvage his career by recovering a small salient that overlooked the British positions at the town of St. Eloi, four kilometres south of Ypres.<sup>69</sup> The Germans had seized this height of land in March 1915.<sup>70</sup> The new commander of the BEF, General Sir Douglas Haig, was expressing his grave reservations about Plumer to the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), Lieutenant-General Sir William Robertson in January 1916.<sup>71</sup> Haig was dissatisfied with the Second Army's defensive arrangements, and believed Plumer was insufficiently firm with his corps and divisional commanders, whom he thought were weak.<sup>72</sup> Haig was especially concerned with Lieutenant-General Hew Fanshawe, GOC V Corps, and Major-General Aylmer Haldane, GOC 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division, who would lead the initial attack at St. Eloi.<sup>73</sup> After losing and retaking a small position, the Bluff, in February 1916, Plumer was on a short leash with Haig, who decided to give Plumer another opportunity to prove himself.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> There was a compact rise of ground, call the Mound, resulting from spoil from a nearby brickyard that is visible in a panorama from March 1915. The mine explosions of 27 March 1916 destroyed the Mound. See Figure 6 St Eloi Panorama, 14 March 1915.

<sup>70</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations, France and Belgium, 1915*, 1: 31.

<sup>71</sup> Robertson to Haig, 7 January 1916, 7/6/10, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.

<sup>72</sup> Haig to Robertson, 17 February 1916, 7/6/23, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.

<sup>73</sup> 'Haig Diary, 18 February 1916,' Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters, 1914-1918*, 180.

<sup>74</sup> Peter Simkins, "Herbert Plumer's Second Army, 1915-1917," in I. F. W and Corvi Beckett, Steven J (eds.), *Haig's Generals* (Barnsley, South Yorkshire: Leo Cooper, 2006), 145.





### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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an untested colonial division, rather than a Regular Army unit.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division was selected because of its experience in crater fighting in 1915. Haldane, the divisional commander, did not welcome the assignment, as he was bitter about his experience with the small-scale attacks he had to make, because they inevitably led to high casualties for little gain.<sup>78</sup> Despite its expertise, the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division was a lamentable choice to make the attack, as it was tired, under strength, and unfit after its operations to retake the Bluff. It was reduced to one effective brigade, the 9<sup>th</sup> British, as the 76<sup>th</sup> British Brigade had lost 924 men at the Bluff, and the 8<sup>th</sup> British Brigade was crippled by 600 cases of trench feet, indicating a formation with severe leadership and morale problems.<sup>79</sup> Two of the brigade commanders, including the commander of the 9<sup>th</sup> British Brigade, the Commander, Royal Artillery (CRA), and the Commander, Royal Engineers (CRE) were all new, and the GSO 1 was sick for most of the battle, so the division's leadership was in a fragile state. During the battle, Haldane would also sack one battalion commander and a Brigade-Major.<sup>80</sup>

The key to the plan was exploding six mines under the German front-line positions. The resulting mine craters created an obstacle in the centre of the salient requiring the British to attack from each flank. The GSO 2 of 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division identified the flaw in the plan as "the attack was fitted to the mines and

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<sup>78</sup> James Aylmer Lowthorpe Haldane, *A Soldier's Saga: The Autobiography of General Sir Aylmer Haldane* (Edinburgh: W. Blackwood, 1948), 323.

<sup>79</sup> Official History, Draft Vol II Ch X Para 13, RG 24 v6992, LAC.

<sup>80</sup> 3rd Division Report to V Corps, 7 April 1916, WO 158/96, TNA.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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not the mines to the attack."<sup>81</sup> The 9<sup>th</sup> British Brigade was to advance with one battalion from each flank to capture and consolidate a line 200 metres south of the craters. Haldane after his experiences at Hooze in 1915 was adamant that craters were shell traps and should not be defended.<sup>82</sup>

The 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division attack on 27 March was a partial success. The right battalion quickly reached its objectives, but heavy machine-gun and artillery fire stopped the left battalion. The division reported "Great difficulty has been experienced in obtaining knowledge of the exact situation from those on the spot."<sup>83</sup> Heavy losses from artillery fire and exhaustion necessitated battalion reliefs every one to two days. Haldane had to commit first the 8<sup>th</sup> British Brigade and then the 76<sup>th</sup> British Brigade in relief. The division did not realise, until 30 March, that the Germans had infiltrated through a gap in the line and recaptured Crater 5. Once discovered, it took another four days before the division retook it.<sup>84</sup> It is evident from the results of post-battle enquiries that units were unable to ascertain what they held or even to advance in a planned direction.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Cmts. BOH, Harfund, 1 February 1929, CAB 45/130, TNA.

<sup>82</sup> Haldane to V Corps, 4 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.

<sup>83</sup> 3rd Division Report to V Corps, S.206, 30 March 1916, WO 158/96, TNA.

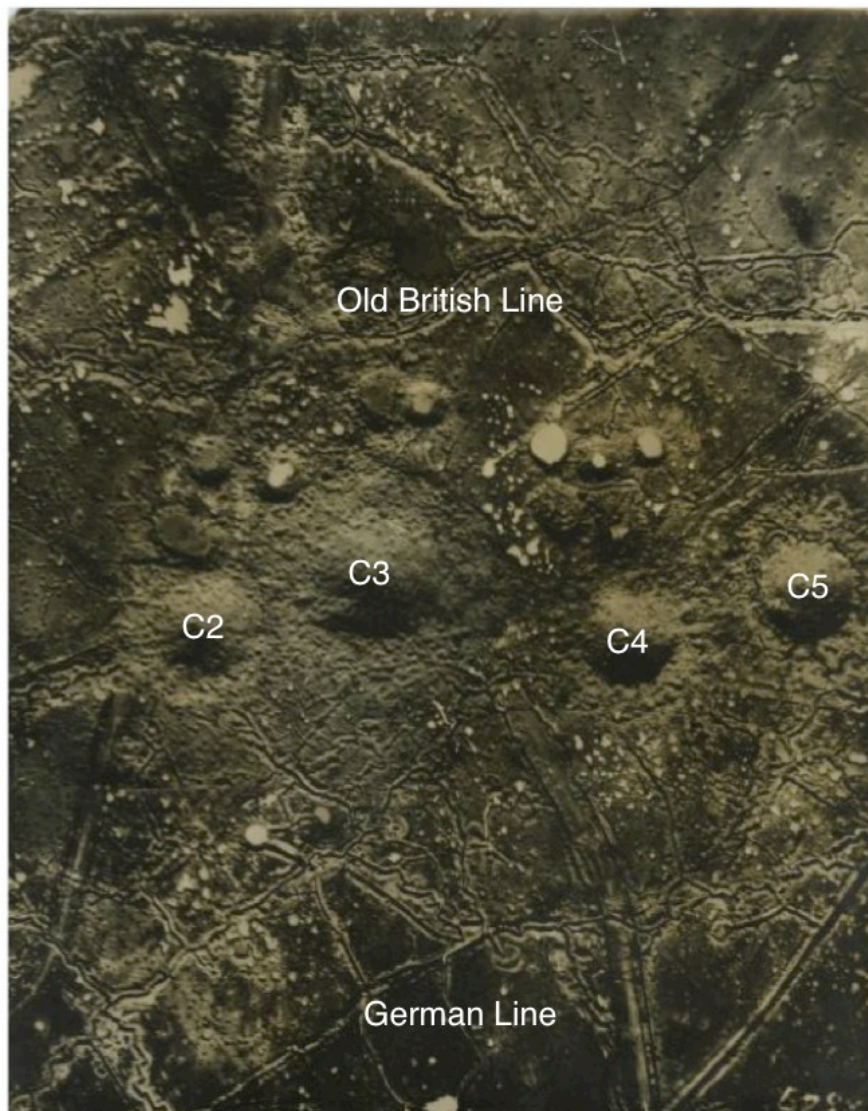
<sup>84</sup> A Brigade-Major and four men captured 4 German officers and 75 men in the crater. Summary Report of the Operations at St. Eloi - March 27th to April 18th, 1916, WO 158/96, TNA.

<sup>85</sup> St. Eloi Enquiry, WO 158/402, TNA.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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**Figure 7 St. Eloi Aerial Photograph, 31 March 1916**



Grid 28, 157WW1AIR.sid, [http://lt1.mcmaster.ca/ww1/wrz4mp.php?grid=28&photo\\_id=157](http://lt1.mcmaster.ca/ww1/wrz4mp.php?grid=28&photo_id=157), McMaster University Library

The 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division was rapidly becoming debilitated, so Plumer ordered the planned relief to be accelerated by three days to the night of 3/4 April. Haldane and Fanshawe asserted that every effort was made to facilitate the handover, including leaving behind Haldane's GSO 1, twenty-four Lewis Guns,

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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trench mortars, and three communication trenches complete to the front lines.<sup>86</sup> The reality was far different, as only one communication trench existed and it was one metre deep and filled with water. The 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion found only four of the twelve expected Lewis Guns and these were not fully functional.<sup>87</sup> The information handed over was inaccurate, incomplete, or entirely absent, because of the state of the ground and the exhausted state of the division.<sup>88</sup> What is more, the ground had changed so much that Haldane's GSO 1 twice lost his way in guiding the Canadians into position.<sup>89</sup> Turner accused the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division of making no efforts to consolidate.<sup>90</sup> The British had tried, but the Germans kept destroying the defences. The British were so exhausted that the Canadians had to evacuate the British wounded and dead. This was almost unheard of and was an indication of just how shattered and fatigued was the British division.

Haldane also left recommendations on how to hold the line, with the key notion to avoid the craters.<sup>91</sup> As Leppard states "Incredibly, Turner had received no orders or instructions from 2<sup>nd</sup> Army, V Corps, or Canadian Corps."<sup>92</sup> Unfortunately, Turner implemented the flawed advice of Haldane – the 'expert' on crater warfare. Plumer's principles of defence agreed with Haldane, so Turner

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<sup>86</sup> Haldane, *A Soldier's Saga: The Autobiography of General Sir Aylmer Haldane*: 326; V Corps to Second Army, G.X. 5303/22, 19 April 1916, WO 158/96, TNA. The artillery of the 3rd British Division was also left in place until 12 April, as it was not thought wise to have to re-register new artillery.

<sup>87</sup> Bradley Report, 18 May 1917, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.

<sup>88</sup> R.O. Alexander Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC; Interview, G. Scott, 29th Battalion, RG 41 v12, LAC.

<sup>89</sup> Macintyre Diary Entry, 4 April 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC.

<sup>90</sup> Turner Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC.

<sup>91</sup> Haldane to V Corps, 4 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> Leppard, "Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi," 38.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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was also executing the Army commander's intent.<sup>93</sup> On 3 April, Haig criticised this policy, and called for units to hold craters, but this was not communicated to Turner.<sup>94</sup> Subsequently, the BEF doctrine for consolidating craters changed to a fundamentally different policy than that recommended by Haldane.<sup>95</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division took over a sector where the terrain shaped the course of the battle. The battlefield lay on a band of impermeable clay that meant rain remained where it fell, if not drained off.<sup>96</sup> The mines and shelling destroyed the complex German drainage system, so the heavy rain during the battle pooled creating a virtually impassable sea of mud.<sup>97</sup> There are repeated references to men having to move through water and mud up to their waists and even armpits.<sup>98</sup> The salient was the scene of incessant mine warfare, with thirty-three mines fired and seventeen large craters in the immediate vicinity of Craters 2 to 5, making orientation and movement difficult.<sup>99</sup> The Germans on Wytschaete Ridge, 1500 meters south and southeast of St. Eloi, and 40 meters higher than St. Eloi, dominated the battlefield. The Germans had an observation advantage

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<sup>93</sup> Army Commander Principles of Defence for Newly Captured Ground, Proceedings of Corps Commanders Conference, 4 April 1916, Folder 6/File 11, RG 9 III C1 v3827, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> GHQ to 2nd Army, 3 April 1916, RG 9 III C1 v3842, LAC.

<sup>95</sup> The new doctrine was released shortly after St Eloi, as War Office General Staff, *S.S. 112 Consolidation of Trenches, Localities and Craters after Assault and Capture, with a Note on Rapid Wiring*, (General Staff, War Office, 1916).

<sup>96</sup> Peter Doyle and Matthew R. Bennett, "Military Geography: Terrain Evaluation and the British Western Front 1914-1918," *The Geographical Journal* 163, no. 1 (1997): 12.

<sup>97</sup> 3rd Division Report to V Corps, 7 April 1916, WO 158/96, TNA.

<sup>98</sup> Rennie wrote Turner later in April "Men doing wiring work last night were continuously thigh deep in mud and water. Under such exceptionally adverse conditions progress is not rapid." Rennie to 2nd Division, 23 April 1916, Folder 41/File 16, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC; Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi, 18 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC; Notes on a Conversation with Major A. Styles, D.S.O., 18 August 1922, GAQ 5-76, RG 24 v1826, LAC; Haldane to V Corps, 4 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.

<sup>99</sup> AH Bell Comments, Scanlon File 94, RG 24 v1862, LAC; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 158.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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throughout the battle, especially as overcast skies kept the Royal Flying Corps grounded through most of the engagement. The Germans could fire from an arc of 270° into the salient. In addition, the salient was compact; measuring approximately 250 meters deep with a width of 600 meters. As a result, the Germans were able to concentrate observed artillery and mortar fire into the contested zone.

The most crucial factor was the six mines exploded on 27 March, their craters, and the resulting disorientation of the British and Canadians in the battle. The mines fundamentally changed the landscape, such that the officers of the 9<sup>th</sup> British Brigade, who had occupied the sector for months, were unable to recognise it.<sup>100</sup> The lips of the resulting craters were five to six metres high, which blocked observation of the forward positions from the Canadian lines. The four mine craters in the centre, Craters 2 to 5, were so close together that they created an impenetrable barrier to movement.<sup>101</sup> The craters themselves were a formidable obstacle with a width of forty-five to fifty-five metres and a depth of eighteen metres.<sup>102</sup> In addition, the mines badly damaged the British front line trenches, which diverted resources from the consolidation of the front line positions to repair the damage. As late as 14 May, the defensive line was not continuous in the St. Eloi sector, because of the damage.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> Cmts. BOH, Buchanan, 18 February 1929, CAB 45/130, TNA.

<sup>101</sup> Maps of the battlefield are misleading, as it appears that there are passages between the craters, but the mud and spoil made them impassable. Points Regarding the Operations of March 27th, 1916, WO 158/96, TNA; Haldane, *A Soldier's Saga: The Autobiography of General Sir Aylmer Haldane*: 323.

<sup>102</sup> The Fight for the Craters D.E. Macintyre, 1936?, GAQ 5-67, RG 24 v1825, LAC.

<sup>103</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, Summary of Operations May 7th –14th, 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4843, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade officially took over the line at 4:15 a.m. on 4 April, with the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the right covering the majority of the salient and the 31<sup>st</sup> the right from Point 77 to the Yser Canal. The units were using the iconic steel helmets, for the first time, with fifty issued per company.<sup>104</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division report characterised the front as little more than a line on the map.<sup>105</sup> The conditions were so bad that carrying parties had to be roped together to prevent them vanishing in shell holes.<sup>106</sup> The ubiquitous mud and water meant movement was slow, arduous, and exhausting. There was little to no cover available, and the rain filled depressions with mud and water.

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<sup>104</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 140.

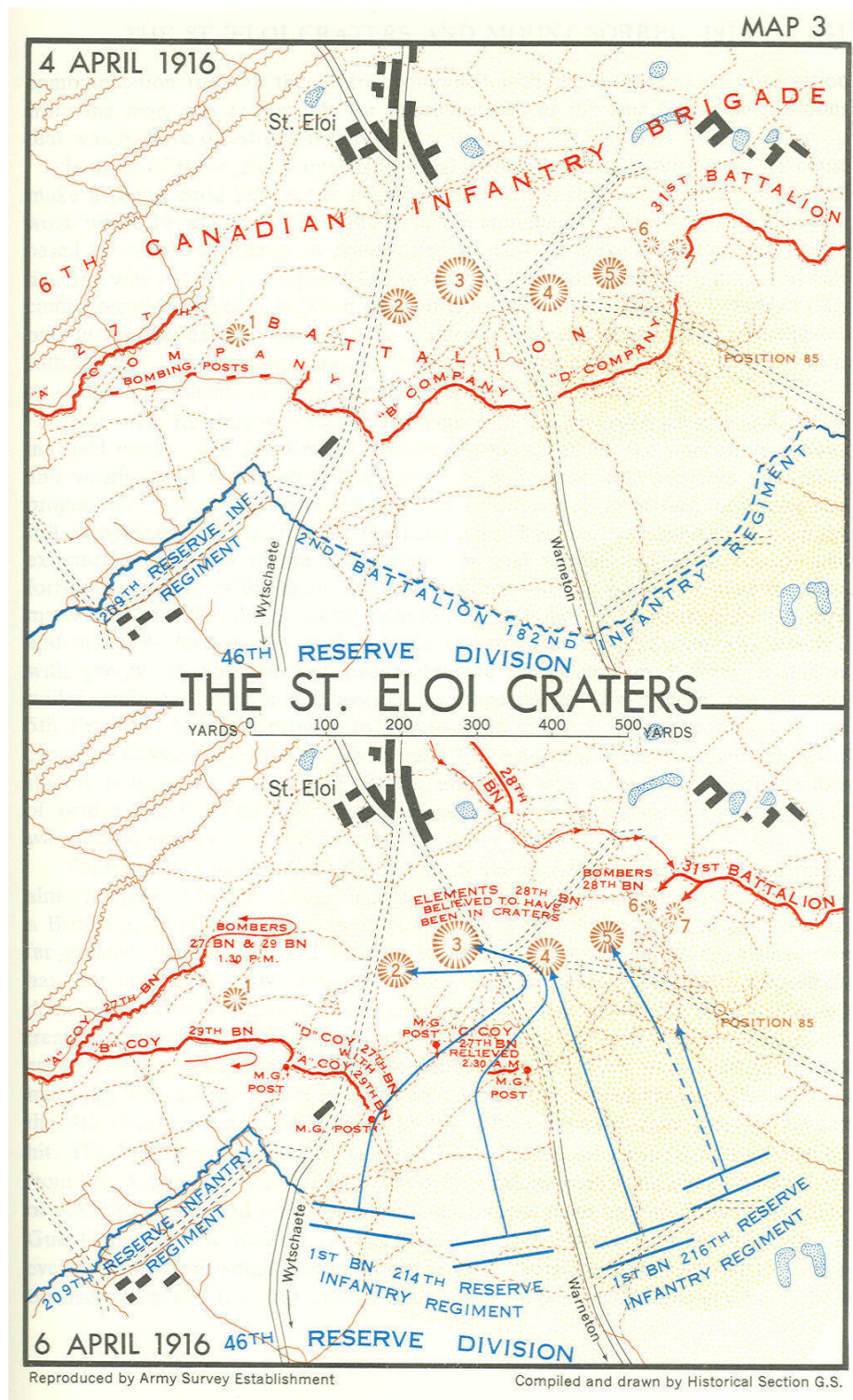
<sup>105</sup> Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi, 18 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.

<sup>106</sup> C.A. Ker Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC.



### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

Map 6 St. Eloi Craters, 4 and 6 April 1916



Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D. (1964) Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919

Map 3, St. Eloi Craters, 4 and 6 April 1916, page 140

National Defence. Reproduced with permission of the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, 2011. Scans by Richard V. Laughton, <http://www.censol.ca/research/greatwar/nicholson/maps/Map%203.jpg>.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Both Turner and a staff officer claimed the British did not allow a daylight reconnaissance of the positions, so the troops took over their positions in the desolation without proper preparation.<sup>107</sup> There was confusion about the number of craters in the battle area.<sup>108</sup> In addition, the division ordered the two front-line battalions to swap positions at the last minute, thus negating any preparations they had made.<sup>109</sup> The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade's Brigade-Major toured the front line and reported the "line was in very bad condition being waist deep in water and very much choked with both enemy dead and our own."<sup>110</sup>

Turner, worried about the dire reports from the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade, toured the entire front line. He was probably the only senior officer to do so during the battle. During his tour, he encountered a private of the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion who recounted Turner "telling us what good cover we had in compared to the other boys down further in the trench. He did the front line troops, he did the front line."<sup>111</sup> Turner's biggest concern was the poor state of communications through the centre of the line, as all movement had to pass through the flanks around the craters. Given enough time, he thought the division could develop a 'pretty good line,' but it would require a lot of work and it was an 'ideal target' for German artillery fire.<sup>112</sup> Turner was all too accurate in this last assessment.

During the daylight hours on 4 and 5 April, the Germans methodically

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<sup>107</sup> Macintyre Diary Entry, 4 April 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC.

<sup>108</sup> Notes on a Conversation with Major A. Styles, D.S.O., 18 August 1922, GAQ 5-76, RG 24 v1826, LAC.

<sup>109</sup> There was no explanation in the divisional account as to why the Turner ordered this change.

<sup>110</sup> Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi, 18 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.

<sup>111</sup> Interview J.M. Fryday and G. Gibson, 27th Bn, RG 41 v11, LAC.

<sup>112</sup> Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi April 3rd to April 16th, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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destroyed any progress the Canadians made in constructing defences. The shelling was so severe that one company of the 27<sup>th</sup> had to be relieved after suffering fifty per cent losses. In reaction, Snider of the 27<sup>th</sup> thinned out his front line to minimise losses, because of the lack of cover. Rather than remain in his battalion headquarters, Snider moved to the front line to share the misery of his troops.<sup>113</sup>

Ketchen tried touring his line on 5 April, but German shelling pinned him and his party, so that he was unable to proceed.<sup>114</sup> Ketchen was concerned about the situation, and recommended pulling the line back to the craters, in expectation of a German counterattack.<sup>115</sup> Turner did not believe, however, it was feasible to shift the men and resources from the existing plan. The Germans continued to pound the 27<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Battalions on 5 April, and this weakened them. In reaction, Turner ordered small parties to the four central craters to make obvious efforts at work to force the Germans to expend shells on the craters.<sup>116</sup>

The Germans started a drumfire bombardment of Canadian lines between 2:45 and 3 a.m. on 6 April causing heavy losses and damage. Two battalions, *I/214<sup>th</sup> Reserve Regiment* and *I/216<sup>th</sup> Reserve Regiment* of the *46<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division*, attacked at 3:30 a.m.<sup>117</sup> The defenders were caught in a vulnerable position. A delayed exchange of two companies of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion for two

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<sup>113</sup> I. Snider Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, 22 May 1929, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC.

<sup>114</sup> Ketchen to Aitken, 28 July 1916, Folder 42/File 14, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC.

<sup>115</sup> The Actions of St. Eloi Craters, Extracts from Ketchen Diary, GAQ 5-41, RG 24 v1823, LAC.

<sup>116</sup> This was one of Haldane's recommendations. These parties were wiped out in the German attack. 28 Bn Report St Eloi. April 3rd to Night of April 7th/8th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>117</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 142.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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companies of the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion was not progressing well, so the defenders were not set.<sup>118</sup> As a result only isolated detachments defended the central sector of the salient and they were not in contact with the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion on their left. The defenders had to rely on hand grenades, as mud jammed most of their machine guns and rifles.<sup>119</sup> The Canadians called down a SOS barrage, but it was ragged, and the Germans were able to work their way through it to overwhelm the defenders.<sup>120</sup> The Germans were slowed down by resistance from the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, but were able to retake Craters 2 to 5.

Communications with the battalions, already intermittent, were quickly severed, so the situation was obscure. Initial information from the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade was misleading, such that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division optimistically reported conditions to the corps at 6:25 a.m. as “not quite clear at present but is considered quite favourable.” This was another example of Turner’s tendency to accept initial reports uncritically. Ketchen, after communicating with both forward battalions, had to admit the craters were lost, but stated the battalions were launching counterattacks with bombers to retake them. Turner had to amend his earlier situation report to Canadian Corps, which would have further affected his

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<sup>118</sup> Cook suggests the German attack was impromptu to take advantage of the delayed exchange. This is doubtful given nature of the artillery support and extent of forces committed. The commitment of two battalions from separate regiments with a massive barrage in support was unlikely to be extemporised to take advantage of a fleeting opportunity. Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 329.

<sup>119</sup> Many of the reports indicate the machine guns and rifles were inoperable. The Lewis Guns did not have protection to cover the firing mechanisms. MG at St Eloi Report, Lieut. S. Brown to O.C. 22nd Battalion, 7 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC; Plain Narrative of the St Eloi Defence, Comments Lt Bradley, 17 May 1916, CID-11, RG 9 III D1 v4770, LAC.

<sup>120</sup> The Fight for the Craters D.E. Macintyre, 1936?, GAQ 5-67, RG 24 v1825, LAC; 2nd Division GS.721, 7 May 1916, RG 9 III C1 v3859, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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credibility with Alderson.<sup>121</sup>

Ketchen ordered all four of his battalions to counterattack. They made weak attacks based primarily on bombers in improvised units. The abundance of specialists, such as bombers, scouts, and snipers, broke up the battalion structure, such that the platoon was little more than an administrative convenience.<sup>122</sup> The post battle accounts are replete with commanders assigning men to ad hoc units to conduct counterattacks, rather than fighting in an established platoon structure. The pernicious effects of specialists withdrawn from the company robbed it of much of its firepower and ability to conduct operations on its own. This was not a problem unique to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, but was one that affected the British army of 1916.<sup>123</sup>

The 27<sup>th</sup> and 29<sup>th</sup> Battalions were to retake Craters 2 and 3, while the 28<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup> Battalions were to recapture Craters 4 and 5. Heavy German artillery fire stopped the attack on Craters 2 and 3 before the bombers could close with the enemy. On the left, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, reinforced with bombers from the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion, captured what they thought was Craters 4 and 5, but were actually Craters 6 and 7.<sup>124</sup> They made the same mistake as the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division. The brigade and division accepted this faulty positioning and it became the baseline

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<sup>121</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, Messages Received 6 April, Appendix 159, April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4842, LAC.

<sup>122</sup> In the 1st Division, during the Somme, each battalion had 42 NCOs and 354 men as specialists or roughly 40% of the battalion manpower. William Stewart, "Attack Doctrine in the Canadian Corps, 1916-1918" (Masters, University of New Brunswick, 1982), 99. See also Christopher Pugsley, "Learning from the Canadian Corps on the Western Front," *Canadian Military History* 15, no. 1 (2006): 14.

<sup>123</sup> Byrson, "The Once and Future Army," 49; Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War*: 163; Dominick Graham, *Against Odds: Reflections on the Experiences of the British Army, 1914-45* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999), 29; Pugsley, "Learning from the Canadian Corps on the Western Front," 14.

<sup>124</sup> Crater 7 was the result a previous mine explosion.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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for orientation for all subsequent units. It also meant that the Germans were able to consolidate their hold on Craters 4 and 5 without interference from shellfire. The difficulty of moving in the daylight, the unfamiliarity with the size of the craters, their misidentification, destruction of front-line trenches, lack of maps, and the desolation of the battlefield made it extremely challenging to navigate and made errors inevitable.<sup>125</sup>

Once the scope of the problem emerged, Turner released two reserve battalions to Ketchen at 7:55 to support his counterattacks. Turner then met with Ketchen at 8:50, once communications with the two forward battalions were restored and the initial results of the counterattacks known.<sup>126</sup> Ketchen and Turner decided to launch a more prepared counterattack supported by artillery on Craters 2 and 3 for 1:30 p.m. Turner subsequently postponed the attack to the night in reaction to the losses already suffered from German shelling.<sup>127</sup> A report from Major Parsons at the front-line of "very heavy casualties and men very much shaken by bombardment," undoubtedly influenced this decision.<sup>128</sup> The postponement did not reach all the attackers in time, and more men were lost. Turner learned that it was impossible to attack the craters in daylight because of the German observation and artillery advantage.

Leppard has criticised Turner regarding the supposed lack of preparations for a German counterattack and for not taking a more active role on the day of

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<sup>125</sup> H.C. Singer, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.* (Knight's Bindery, 1939), 84; Jenkins, "Winning Trench Warfare: Battlefield Intelligence in the Canadian Corps, 1914-1919," 174.

<sup>126</sup> 6th CIB at St Eloi Appendix No. 1, 12 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>127</sup> Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi April 3rd to April 16th, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>128</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, Messages Received 6 April, Appendix 159, April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4842, LAC.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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the attack.<sup>129</sup> It is difficult to sustain these charges, in all but one instance. Turner was chided over not anticipating a German attack. This is a perplexing criticism, as all the elements of a proper defensive scheme were in place and operated, albeit not as effectively as expected. The front-line forces did call for the SOS barrage, which responded, and the front line units made prompt counterattacks. An earlier order had stressed the importance of immediate counter-strikes and "situations will arise when local counter-attacks may have to be organised without waiting for superior orders."<sup>130</sup> In the early stages of the German attack, the information received by Turner was positive but inaccurate, so it did not indicate the need for a major intervention. Once the situation was clarified, Turner took appropriate measures.

The primary cause of the failure was the weak state of defences in the salient's central sector. This was a combination of too few defenders in position armed with little more than bombs to repel the Germans. Snider's decision to thin out his lines meant fewer casualties but also fewer defenders. The Germans adopted a better policy of fully manning their positions at night and reducing them during the daylight hours.<sup>131</sup> Reports of survivors indicate the Germans advanced in a mass, so a stronger defensive line would have forced the Germans to deploy to deal with the defenders and allowed more time for the artillery to

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<sup>129</sup> Leppard, "Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi," 57, 64.

<sup>130</sup> Counterattacks; H. De Pree General Staff, Undated, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.

<sup>131</sup> Attacks in the salient were almost always at night, so the German policy resulted in a more effective defence in the dark, while minimising losses during the day. Proposal for Retaking St Eloi by 6th CIB, 25 June 1916, Folder 43 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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intervene.<sup>132</sup> Snider subsequently paid the price for his decision with his dismissal.

Turner decided and Alderson agreed that the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade was exhausted and Rennie's 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade replaced it, at noon on 7 April. A factor in the accelerated relief was Turner's dissatisfaction with Ketchen's 'methods,' as Turner complained to Watson.<sup>133</sup> Turner was under a great deal of pressure, and he uncharacteristically and inappropriately complained to one officer about another.

Turner, realising the futility of the current operations, proposed two alternatives to Alderson to negate the overwhelming German artillery advantage. One was to evacuate the craters and pound the Germans with shells. The second was to double the attack frontage to dilute the German artillery concentration.<sup>134</sup> Alderson, in turn, proposed to the Second Army to widen the attack front even more. Plumer, after briefly considering Turner's second option, visited 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's headquarters on 8 April and rejected all three alternatives, in part believing the Canadians held Craters 4 and 5.<sup>135</sup> While there, Plumer dictated how the battalions in the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade were to hold the trenches.<sup>136</sup> Plumer's intervention into details four levels below his own indicates the duress Plumer was under to succeed, his lack of confidence in the command echelons of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, and an unwarranted interference into command

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<sup>132</sup> MG at St Eloi Report, Lieut. S. Brown to O.C. 22nd Battalion, 7 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>133</sup> Watson Diary Entry, 7 April 1916, MG 30 E69 Roll M-10, Watson Fonds; LAC.

<sup>134</sup> Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi April 3rd to April 16th, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>135</sup> Warning Order from Cdn Corps G.37, 7 April 1916, Folder 42 File 3, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.

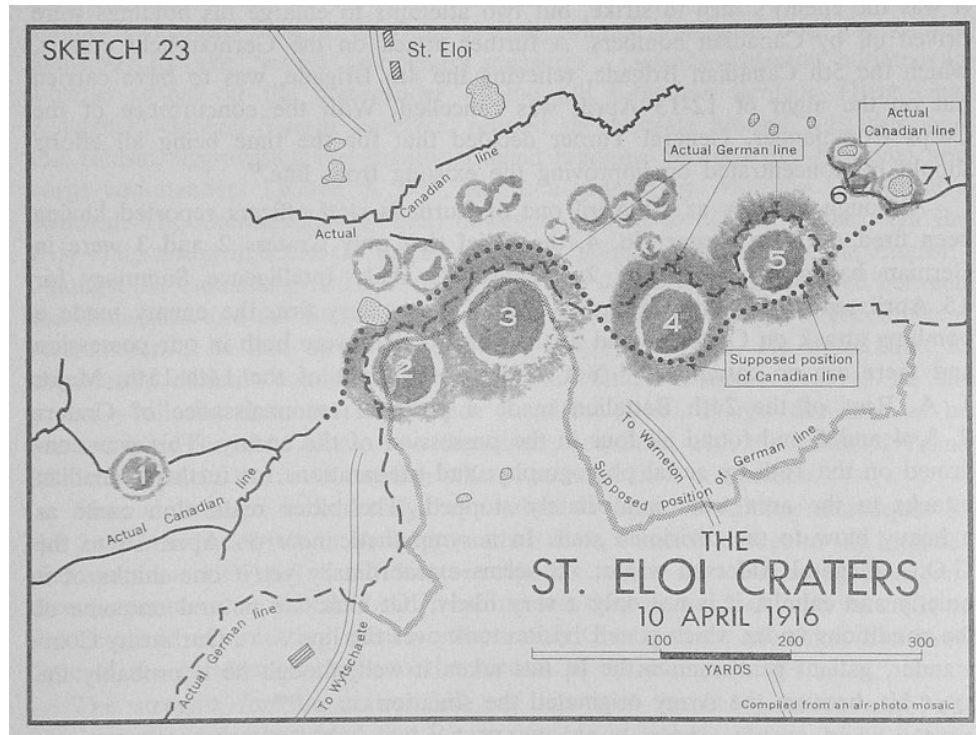
<sup>136</sup> 2nd Cdn Division to 4th Brigade G.571, 8 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4843, LAC.



### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

prerogatives.<sup>137</sup>

#### Map 7 St. Eloi Craters, 10 April 1916



Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D. (1964) Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919

Map 3, St. Eloi Craters, 10 April 1916, page 143

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With the rejection of the alternatives, Turner instructed Rennie to retake Craters 2 and 3. On successive nights, the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade launched attacks with small parties that reported reaching the northern lips of Craters 2 and 3. These attacks consisted of fifty or fewer men for each crater, indicating the restricted scope of the terrain and the limited scale of the attacks.<sup>138</sup> It was not until the morning of 11 April that engineering work parties discovered the truth that the

<sup>137</sup> Plumer as GOC, Second Army was bypassing the corps, division, and brigade commanders to dictate battalion operations.

<sup>138</sup> Attack on Crater #3, 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade 9 April 1916, Folder 42/File 16, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC; Extract from Report by Major Elmitt, 10 April 1916, Folder 42/File 16, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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4<sup>th</sup> Brigade had captured two of the ubiquitous pre-existing craters, and not Craters 2 and 3.<sup>139</sup>

Originally, Watson's 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade was to replace the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade that evening, but Turner ordered Rennie to capture the two craters. Rennie and his battalion commanders protested that the men were in 'no fit state' to attack successfully. Demonstrating moral courage, especially given the pressure he was under, Turner agreed and persuaded Alderson and Plumer to cancel the attack. The relief proceeded, as planned.<sup>140</sup>

Alderson now had to explain the situation to Plumer, and Alderson claimed the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was solely responsible for the inaccurate information. Alderson chose to ignore any responsibility of the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division for its poor information hand-over. Plumer was angry and made his dissatisfaction apparent to Alderson.<sup>141</sup> No longer trusting the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's reports, Alderson tasked Lieutenant S.A. Vernon, a Canadian Corps intelligence and British Regular Army officer, to tour the front. Vernon, making the same mistakes in orientation, as did everyone else, confirmed Craters 2 and 3 were lost, but reported Craters 4 and 5 held.<sup>142</sup> Alderson would later claim Vernon was misled by his guides, but Vernon, as an intelligence officer, should not have had to rely on guides to discern the location of forces.

Alderson, undoubtedly frustrated with his least favourite divisional commander, sent his BGGs, Brigadier-General 'Tim' Harington to rectify the

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<sup>139</sup> Canadian Corps Operations, 12 April 1916, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>141</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>142</sup> Lt. S.A Vernon's Reconnaissance Report, Night 11/12th April, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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situation. Harington met with Turner, his staff, and the brigade commanders. At the conference, Turner, again, proposed two options of a counterattack supported by trench mortars or to withdraw and shell the German positions. Reports from the field, such as from Lieutenant-Colonel E. Hilliam of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion, of the abysmal field conditions made a successful attack 'an impossibility.'<sup>143</sup> There was also a fear of a German attack to retake the purportedly held Craters 4 and 5. All during the battle, the Germans launched small-scale attacks that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division invariably repulsed inflicting heavy losses, so the fear of a further German attack was legitimate. Plumer visiting the division again next day, rejected both alternatives, in part because of shell shortages, and the British penchant for holding on meaningless strips of territory, and ordered the existing positions be consolidated.<sup>144</sup>

Alderson visited the divisional headquarters in the afternoon of 12 April to emphasise his vexation. In an order that captured his lack of confidence in Turner and his commanders, Alderson demanded, "that all work must be supervised and constantly visited by the Staff Officers of the Division and Brigade, and that reports were to be rendered daily as to the progress made."<sup>145</sup> Alderson's continued distrust of Turner and his staff is evident with another visit Alderson made to the trenches on 14 April, without first stopping at the divisional headquarters as was proper protocol.<sup>146</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> Report by Col. Hilliam 25th Bn., 12 April 1916, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.

<sup>144</sup> Report on 2nd Canadian Division's Operations at St. Eloi April 3rd to April 16th, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC; Simon Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18: Defeat into Victory* (Frank Cass, 2005), 27.

<sup>145</sup> Canadian Corps Operations, 12 April 1916, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.

<sup>146</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, 14 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4842, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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During the battle, Turner had Ker issue an order to address the problems encountered during the battle. Turner wanted subordinates to be “prepared to act on their own initiative. The one unforgivable sin when in difficulties is to do nothing and wait for orders.”<sup>147</sup> Units were not to withdraw from positions without reference to superior authorities, in reaction to the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion’s actions before and during the battle. In addition, there were multiple references to passing information, including negative information, back early and often. Clearly, Turner wanted to address the problem of poor communications to the rear. Interestingly, Turner’s demand for more initiative was at odds with Haig’s requirement that superiors impose tighter control over subordinates, because of the untrained nature of the army and officer corps.<sup>148</sup>

The Royal Flying Corps was finally able to take photographs of the battle area on 16 April showing the Germans holding Craters 2 to 5 and having done so from 6 April. The discovery that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had not known its own positions for ten days kicked off a bitter battle over responsibility. Both Alderson and Harrington wrote notes to Turner on 16 April to commiserate with him and to set his mind at rest. Both notes mentioned that Plumer and his chief staff officer had accepted the news in the ‘right spirit.’<sup>149</sup> Alderson and Harrington’s letters, however, were quickly overtaken by events, as Haig ordered Plumer to investigate the reasons for the failure. Haig wrote in his diary, “I fear that Canadian officers are not only indifferent leaders, but many of them have strange

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<sup>147</sup> 2nd Cdn Division G.685, 12 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>148</sup> Campbell, ““A Leap in the Dark” – Intelligence and the Struggle for the St. Eloi Craters: Reassessing the Role of Major-General Richard Turner,” 35.

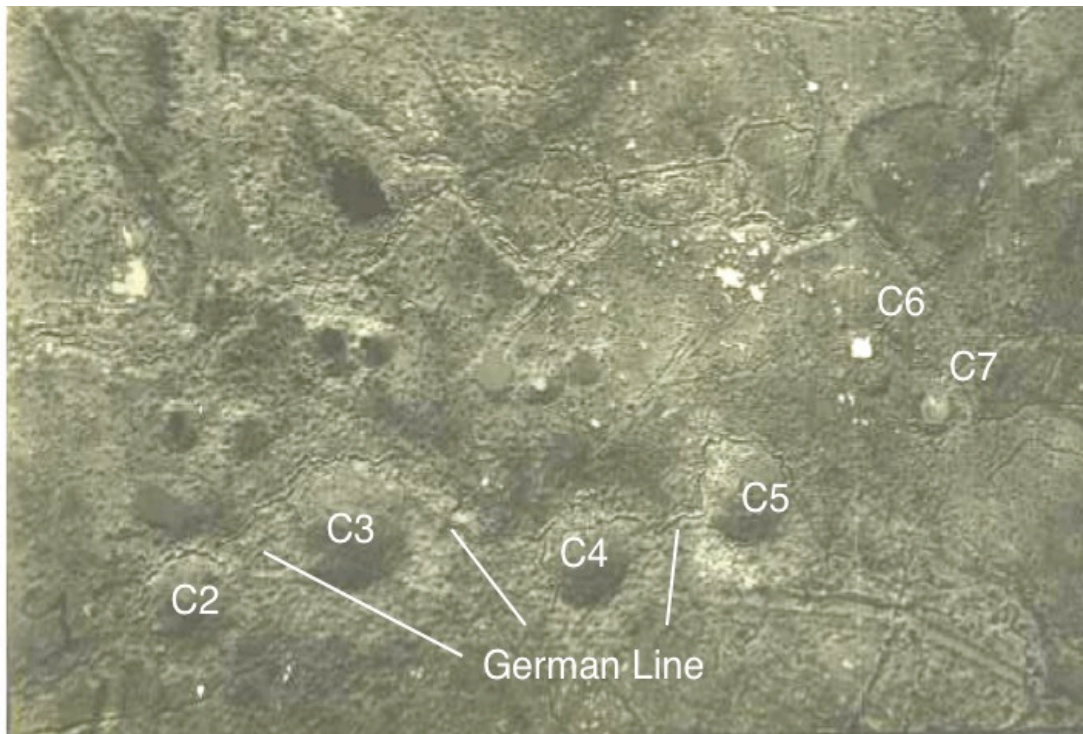
<sup>149</sup> Alderson to Turner; Harrington to Turner, 16 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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ideas of what is honest and straightforward. Turner is not quite fit for his work."<sup>150</sup>

**Figure 8 St. Eloi Aerial Photograph, 16 April 1916**



Grid 28, 158WW1AIR.sid, [http://lt1.mcmaster.ca/ww1/wrz4mp.php?grid=28&photo\\_id=158](http://lt1.mcmaster.ca/ww1/wrz4mp.php?grid=28&photo_id=158), McMaster University Library

### Analysis

Owing to the loss of ground and the casualties, the battle of St. Eloi Craters has been called the “first and the worst Canadian setback of the war.”<sup>151</sup> How valid is that characterisation? The division suffered 1,372 casualties versus only

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<sup>150</sup> Haig was also reacting to the discovery that a senior staff officer in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was secretly relaying the division’s position to his wife. Scans of Haig’s diary kindly provided by Dr. David Campbell. Haig Diary Entry, 17 April 1916, Part 1 No. 96, Part 1: Haig's Autograph Great War Diary, Haig Papers; National Library of Scotland.

<sup>151</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 72.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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483 for the Germans.<sup>152</sup> Over the thirteen days of the battle from 4 to 16 April, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's loss rate was 101 men per day. By the standards of the First World War, this was low. In month of April 1916, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division suffered 1,953 casualties and in June, during the Mount Sorrel battle, it suffered almost the same total of 1,949 men.<sup>153</sup> As a percentage of forces engaged, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division suffered a loss rate of 8%, which was markedly lower than even the most successful engagements at Amiens at 13% and Vimy 16%.<sup>154</sup>

**Figure 9 Canadian Battle Loss Percentage 1915-1918<sup>155</sup>**

Battle	Loss Percentage
2 <sup>nd</sup> Ypres	37%
<b>St. Eloi</b>	<b>8%</b>
Somme	31%
Vimy	16%
Passchendaele	20%
Amiens	13%
Arras	15%
Drocourt-Queant	15.5%
Canal du Nord	20%

If compared to the first major engagements of the 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> Canadian and the 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Divisions, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's first action, while a failure, was not markedly worse than the others. At Second Ypres, despite the performance of the regimental officers and men, the 1<sup>st</sup> Division was driven from its positions and suffered 37% casualties, 6,036 men, or roughly 1,200 men per day over the

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<sup>152</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 144.

<sup>153</sup> 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, April and June 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

<sup>154</sup> The 8% figure was derived by dividing the 1,373 casualties against a nominal strength of the 2nd Division of 17,000 men.

<sup>155</sup> Chartrand, *Canadian Military Heritage*, III: 104.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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five days the Canadians fought.<sup>156</sup> At Mount Sorrel, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was surprised and forced from its positions. In the immediate and unsuccessful counterattack after the Germans captured the front line positions, the Canadians suffered 1,700 casualties; more than were lost during the entire St. Eloi battle.<sup>157</sup>

The 5<sup>th</sup> Australian Division, whose commander, Major-General James McCay, followed a similar career trajectory to Turner's, suffered a severe defeat in its first engagement at Fromelles in July 1916.<sup>158</sup> It lost 5,500 men in a two-day battle and required nine months of recuperation. Unlike Turner, McCay lost the confidence of his division.<sup>159</sup> By these measures, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's first action was not the unparalleled disaster portrayed in many histories.

Both Tim Cook and Thomas Leppard in their works on St. Eloi, amongst other historians, sharply criticised Turner for failure to accurately determine the position of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.<sup>160</sup> This has become the dominant complaint regarding Turner's performance in the battle. These scholars base their critique on contraindications of the division's claims that should have triggered doubts and further investigation. A close examination of the information available to Turner, however, suggests the critics are taking advantage of hindsight. As David

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<sup>156</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 92.

<sup>157</sup> Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography*: 71.

<sup>158</sup> McCay moved to an administrative post in England after Fromelles to a mixed success. See Wray, *Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life*.

<sup>159</sup> Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 113; Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War*: 171, 253.

<sup>160</sup> Leppard, "Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi."; Cook, "The Blind Leading the Blind - the Battle of the St. Eloi Craters," 30-31; Leppard, "The Dashing Subaltern - Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect," 26; Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory: The Canadian Corps in World War I*: 103. It should be noted that Cook's treatment in his *At the Sharp End* is less condemnatory and attaches more importance to the conditions. Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 323-334.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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Campbell phrased it, "A scan of references in the Divisional war diary and daily intelligence summaries turns up over twenty reports between April 7 and 15 that claim Canadian possession of Craters 4 and 5, with no clear reports to the contrary."<sup>161</sup> With the vast preponderance of information supporting the claims of holding these craters, Turner had no good reason to doubt their veracity. Vernon's report on the night 11/12 April would have further reinforced the confidence that the division held Craters 4 and 5. The evidence from the engineering parties on 11 April was sufficient for Turner to recognise the division did not hold Craters 2 and 3, which indicates Turner did not ignore all contrary evidence.

Critics refer to three reports, which should have initiated an investigation: Captain D.E. Macintyre's reports from the field, prisoner statements, and air photographs taken on 8 April. Macintyre, the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade's Intelligence officer, stationed in a church steeple overlooking the battlefield, reported the Germans capturing and holding Craters 2 to 5 on 6 April. In a post-war statement, Macintyre claimed he informed the division that the German still held all four craters after the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade supposedly recaptured Craters 4 and 5.<sup>162</sup> Macintyre's 9 April 1916 report to Turner, however, does not support this claim, as it suggests the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade had retaken Craters 4 and 5.<sup>163</sup>

Statements of prisoners taken on 6 April clearly indicate the Germans

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<sup>161</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 130.

<sup>162</sup> Campbell, "'A Leap in the Dark' – Intelligence and the Struggle for the St. Eloi Craters: Reassessing the Role of Major-General Richard Turner," 40.

<sup>163</sup> Report of Capt D.E. Macintyre Staff Captain, 6 Canadian Infantry Brigade to GOC 2nd Canadian Division, 9 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.



### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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holding all four craters. The Canadian Corps intelligence summary for the 7 April, however, assumed they were referring to the period before the craters were retaken by the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade counterattacks.<sup>164</sup>

The most powerful complaint used to assail Turner was the failure to properly interpret aerial photographs taken on 8 April.<sup>165</sup> The photographs show Craters 2 to 5 are dry with trenches on the north lip of Craters 2 and 3, while most of the other craters were filled with water. This is the basis for critics to claim Turner should have realized the division did not hold the craters. There are three problems with this argument. First, the art of photo interpretation was still evolving and the division did not have a manual on how to analyse photos.<sup>166</sup> Second, the corps passed the photographs to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and it is likely they would have analysed them first. As the corps did not raise any concerns, this would have influenced the division's view, and suggests the corps shares in the culpability.<sup>167</sup> Finally and most importantly, the 8 April photographs were not in themselves sufficient evidence to overturn the prevailing view. An officer needed to scout the craters held to see if they were dry as shown in the photographs. The trenches shown on the north lip of Craters 2 and 3 corresponded to the positions reportedly captured by the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade. Even

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<sup>164</sup> Jenkins, "Winning Trench Warfare: Battlefield Intelligence in the Canadian Corps, 1914-1919," 175.

<sup>165</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 142.

<sup>166</sup> GHQ did not issue a complete manual until later in 1916. James Beach, "British Intelligence and the German Army, 1914-1918" (PhD, University College London, 2004), 76. Macintyre also reported the division was not skilled with photograph interpretation. Campbell, "'A Leap in the Dark' – Intelligence and the Struggle for the St. Eloi Craters: Reassessing the Role of Major-General Richard Turner," 40.

<sup>167</sup> Campbell, "'A Leap in the Dark' – Intelligence and the Struggle for the St. Eloi Craters: Reassessing the Role of Major-General Richard Turner," 38.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Lieutenant Vernon, who would have undoubtedly seen the photographs, did not recognise the discrepancy. The 16 April photographs were fundamentally different; as it was self-evident that the trenches at the crater edges were German, as they led back to German lines. This was not the case for the 8 April photographs.

The problems with intelligence at St. Eloi are best understood in the context of the concepts of signal to noise ratio, confirmation bias, and irrational primacy effect. Roberta Wohlstetter first introduced the notion from the physical sciences of the signal to noise ratio, where a signal hides within the background noise of a system and is only explicable with the wisdom of hindsight.<sup>168</sup> At St. Eloi, the flow of contradictory, incomplete, and inaccurate information made the true situation far less evident than it is to critics after the event. Confirmation bias, the human tendency to interpret ambiguous data to support a previously held belief and to dismiss or discount contradictory information, exacerbated the problem. Further, the irrational primacy effect places greater credence on information received initially. All this reinforced the comfortable illusion that the division was holding more ground than it actually was. It required unambiguous information, such as the reports from the engineering parties or the 16 April photographs, to overcome these biases.

Where Turner, his staff, and the Canadian Corps can be censured is in not making extra-ordinary efforts to confirm reports from the field in light of the conditions and the earlier difficulties experienced by the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division. The

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<sup>168</sup> Roberta Wohlstetter, *Pearl Harbor; Warning and Decision* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1962), 398-401.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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staff needed to treat all reports with a degree of scepticism, especially positive ones. The division and corps staff were too inexperienced to realise how perverse and pervasive was the fog of war at St. Eloi.

The factors of the ground conditions, intelligence failures, and consolidation and communication difficulties all played significant roles in the defeat at St. Eloi. The major reason 2<sup>nd</sup> Division failed at St. Eloi, however, were the Germans. As General George Pickett quipped when asked why his eponymous charge at Gettysburg failed, "I've always thought the Yankees had something to do with it."<sup>169</sup>

The German artillery dominated the battlespace. It is instructive to compare St. Eloi with the British offensive at the Somme on 1 July. At the Somme, the British massed 1,413 artillery pieces to bombard a 20,000 metre front to a depth of 2,500 metres.<sup>170</sup> At St. Eloi, the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division reported engaging forty German batteries or 160 guns on the first day of the battle. This is probably a conservative estimate of the guns available, as it does not include the very effective German Minenwerfers.<sup>171</sup> Doubling the width and depth of the salient to account for the German interdiction fire, still meant the Germans concentrated over nine times the firepower available to the British at the

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<sup>169</sup> James M. McPherson, "American Victory, American Defeat," in G. S. Boritt (ed.), *Why the Confederacy Lost* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 19.

<sup>170</sup> Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson, 1914-18*: 168-170.

<sup>171</sup> V Corps Report on the Operations at St Eloi - March 27th, 1916, WO 158/96, TNA; 2nd Division GS.721, 7 May 1916, RG 9 III C1 v3859, LAC. German batteries consisted of four guns per battery.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Somme.<sup>172</sup> This, also, does not account for the German observation advantage, as Graham and Bidwell phrased it “effective fire was observed fire.”<sup>173</sup>

There was apparently no shell shortage limiting the German fire. Snider of the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion claimed the Germans pounded an area of 60 metres by 15 metres with 900 High Explosive and 2000 other shells during the attack on 6 April.<sup>174</sup> A British artillery officer claimed he had not seen such heavy artillery fire, in a year in the Ypres Salient.<sup>175</sup>

In contrast to the forty batteries supporting the Germans, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had twenty-three and half batteries on call and they were limited by restrictive daily shell allowances.<sup>176</sup> Army commanders needed permission from GHQ to fire more than their per diem allotment. Given Plumer’s situation, he would not risk raising Haig’s ire by requesting more shells.<sup>177</sup> During the battle, Plumer instructed the corps to curtail shell consumption and to only use one of the most effective pieces, the 6” Howitzer, in special circumstances.<sup>178</sup> Aitken reported to Borden that the Canadian artillery daily allotment was three and half rounds per gun, while the Germans had an unlimited supply.<sup>179</sup> The result was the German

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<sup>172</sup> This was calculated by multiplying the width and depth of the Somme and St Eloi divided by the number of guns. The relevant figures for St Eloi were a front of 1200 metres and depth of 500 metres divided by 160 guns. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division reported the Germans concentrated fire on the old and new front lines, with some shelling of reserve positions. 2nd Division GS.721, 7 May 1916, RG 9 III C1 v3859, LAC.

<sup>173</sup> Radley, *We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918*: 91.

<sup>174</sup> Leppard, "Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi," 47.

<sup>175</sup> Plain Narrative of the St Eloi Defence, Comments Lt Bradley, 17 May 1916, CID-11, RG 9 III D1 v4770, LAC.

<sup>176</sup> Can. Corps Summary of Operations 1st April 21st April 1916, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>177</sup> Ian Malcolm Brown, *British Logistics on the Western Front, 1914-1919* (Westport, Conn. ; London: Praeger, 1998), 109.

<sup>178</sup> Official History, Draft Vol II Ch VII, RG 24 v6992, LAC.

<sup>179</sup> Cable Aitken to Borden, 17 April 1916, 112840, MG 26 H1 v202, Borden Fonds; LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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artillery advantage was insurmountable.

The German artillery destroyed the defences faster than the Canadians could build them. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division assigned large working parties of up to 1,000 men to consolidate the defences, but their efforts were stymied by three factors. First, the universal confusion of location and the impediments of mud and water slowed down the working parties, so they had to expend most of their energy and time in getting to their work location.<sup>180</sup> This problem of transit time was exacerbated by the distance the reserve units were located from the front. The corps rebuffed attempts by the division to obtain more transportation.<sup>181</sup> Finally, Canadian officers and NCOs were unable to get the same amount of work out of their troops, as did the Germans. Alderson's replacement as GOC, Canadian Corps, Byng, claimed Canadians "will fight, and die, if necessary, in the last ditch, but by God, gentlemen, I cannot get them to dig that ditch."<sup>182</sup> Watson also complained that the Germans were able to get more work out of their troops.<sup>183</sup> The Canadian Corps lamented in July 1916 that the Germans had done more work in their ten-day occupation of Mount Sorrel, despite Canadian artillery fire, than had the Canadians in two months of holding the position.<sup>184</sup>

The German artillery's constant interruption of communications contributed to the difficulty in managing the battle. The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade Signal

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<sup>180</sup> For instance, see the comments of Major A. Style who claimed a movement of just 800 metres exhausted his party. Notes on a Conversation with Major A. Styles, D.S.O., 18 August 1922, GAQ 5-76, RG 24 v1826, LAC.

<sup>181</sup> 2nd Division St Eloi Defensive Scheme G.S. 577 4 April 1916, Folder 42 File 3, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.

<sup>182</sup> The Fight for the Craters D.E. Macintyre, 1936?, GAQ 5-67, RG 24 v1825, LAC.

<sup>183</sup> Report of 5th CIB, 11 April to 18 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>184</sup> Report on Operations of Canadian Corps July, 1916, Folder 6/File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4677, LAC.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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Officer reported, on taking over the line, only a single line to the 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the division functioned. During the German counterattack, these lines were knocked out.<sup>185</sup> Effectively, there were no links forward of the battalion headquarters. In order to provide some semblance of communications, commanders used runners, with many falling victim to German fire. Ketchen reported losing eighteen runners killed during the German counterattack.<sup>186</sup> Battalion scouts provided most of the runners, which prevented them from reconnoitring enemy positions, which further contributed to the intelligence failure.<sup>187</sup>

Plumer's plan was ill conceived and mismanagement compounded this. The fundamental flaw of Plumer's plan was the Germans could bombard the attackers out of any position at St. Eloi, unless Plumer was able to commit far more artillery resources than were available to him. The German observation, artillery, and shell advantages meant overwhelming firepower superiority. No manner of brilliant leadership on the part of Haldane or Turner could overcome such a profound disadvantage.

Plumer's selection of the 3<sup>rd</sup> British Division could only be justified on the assumption that the Germans would accept the loss of the St. Eloi salient and not make strenuous efforts to recover the ground. Launching a division reduced to one effective brigade into a narrow salient, down a slope, and exposed to

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<sup>185</sup> Report on Signal Service from the Night of April 3rd to the Morning of April 7 1916, Folder 5. File 3, RG 9 III C3 v4442, LAC.

<sup>186</sup> Bradley Report, 18 May 1917, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.

<sup>187</sup> Report on Action of 2nd Canadian Division Scouts for April 6th to April 12th 1916, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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observation and fire from three sides, in the extreme mud conditions was an imprudent decision. In addition, the placement of the mines was an error. All of which suggests that the Second Army leadership had not learned much from their experiences in 1915 and continued to make the same mistakes.<sup>188</sup>

It is facile for historians to suggest a better general would have found a way to win without presenting a plausible alternative course of action. Turner took all the steps that could reasonably be expected in the situation. He presented, on three separate occasions, alternatives that Plumer rejected.<sup>189</sup> Turner was denied necessary additional artillery and shell support. It is instructive to compare the situation at Mount Sorrel, only six weeks later, where there was an unlimited supply of artillery and shells for the battle, which played a material role in the Canadian success.<sup>190</sup>

An intriguing notion is how committed was Turner to recapturing the strategically unimportant craters, once lost. From the start of the battle, Turner had serious reservations regarding the plan. The limited scope of the counterattacks and their frequent postponements and cancellations also points to a disinclination to fully commit to the craters' recapture. This, and the relatively low loss rate of the division, suggests Turner was going through the motions to satisfy Alderson and Plumer without risking significant casualties. He may have been carrying out a senior officer version of the system described by Tony

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<sup>188</sup> Turner was happy to report to his wife after the Somme that the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was not returning to the Second Army. Turner Diary Entry, 8 October 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>189</sup> Turner presented alternatives before the battle, on 7 April, and 12 April.

<sup>190</sup> Interview with General Burstall, HQ 650-52-7 v5 f.133, RG 24 v6990, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Ashworth in *Live and Let Live*, also termed 'consent and evade' by Professor Gary Sheffield.<sup>191</sup> This was the type of action that would leave no evidence and Turner could not admit to it during or after the war, but it is strongly suggestive that Turner was pulling his punches.

Two contemporary witnesses support the notion that Turner was not fully dedicated to the recapture of the craters. Lieutenant Bradley, from Aitken's Canadian War Records Office, who interviewed all of the participants immediately after the battle and was a perceptive observer, asked did "the Brigade and Divisional Commanders really grip the situation firmly, or were they halfhearted and unwilling to make great sacrifices to hold a line they thought, as Brig-Gen Ketchen did, untenable. I do not profess to answer these questions but I have doubts."<sup>192</sup> Alderson in his later adverse report on Turner indicated Turner did not have "'the thing had got to be done' spirit," which strongly suggests Alderson recognised Turner's efforts to retake the craters were a sham.<sup>193</sup>

### Hunt for Scapegoats

What is extraordinary about the battle of St. Eloi Craters is that while a failure, it had no strategic or operational ramifications, but resulted in a remarkable number of officers being threatened with or losing their positions.<sup>194</sup>

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<sup>191</sup> Ashworth, *Trench Warfare, 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System*; Professor Gary Sheffield, 'Consent and Evade,' Interview, 12 March 2012.

<sup>192</sup> Plain Narrative of the St Eloi Defence, Comments Lt Bradley, 17 May 1916, CID-11, RG 9 III D1 v4770, LAC.

<sup>193</sup> Alderson to AMS 2 Army, G.271, 18 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v5075, LAC.

<sup>194</sup> In the hunt for scapegoats, two corps commanders, one Major-General General Staff (MGGS), one GSO 1, one Brigade-Major and five battalion commanders lost their positions. Two division GOCs and one brigade GOC were at risk. See references below. These totals include



### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Haig was still a relatively recent appointee and needed to demonstrate he was running a tight ship. In addition, he was concerned about the state of the army, as evidenced by his order to strengthen control, and he undoubtedly wanted to send a message that he would not tolerate failure. Haig proved to be ruthless in sacking commanders, with reportedly one hundred brigadiers removed during the war.<sup>195</sup> Plumer was under even greater pressure, as he had to show Haig that if he could not win a battle, he could demonstrate a strong grip in the aftermath. As a result, there was a strong impetus to find scapegoats.<sup>196</sup>

Even before the inquiry, the battle claimed its first commander with Ketchen's relief of Snider. Snider's error to thin out the front line positions, the withdrawal of a post without permission during the battle, and a breakdown in Snider's health led to his relief on 14 April, along with his second in command, and all the company commanders.<sup>197</sup> This indicates considerable dissatisfaction with the battalion and its command structure. Snider's removal was unpopular with his troops but was necessary.<sup>198</sup> Major G. Daly of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, who had performed well during the battle, was tasked with rebuilding the battalion.<sup>199</sup>

Alderson's inquiry response, on 18 April, attributed the failure to the dreadful conditions and explained all the steps he took to ensure accurate

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the battalion commander and Brigade-Major Haldane removed during the battle. 3rd Division Report to V Corps, S.206, 30 March 1916, WO 158/96, TNA; 3rd Division Report to V Corps, 7 April 1916, WO 158/96, TNA.

<sup>195</sup> Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918*: 218.

<sup>196</sup> For one explanation for the reasons for the replacement of senior commanders see, Timothy Travers, "The Hidden Army: Structural Problems in the British Officer Corps, 1900-1918," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17(1982).

<sup>197</sup> Snider Correspondence File, RG 9 III A1 v218, LAC; Patrick Brennan, "Good Men for A Hard Job: Infantry Battalion Commanders in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Army Journal* 9, no. 1 (2006): 7.

<sup>198</sup> Interview Graham Pain and V.C.H. Pinkham, 27th Battalion, RG 41 v11, LAC.

<sup>199</sup> 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 15 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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reporting. He also censured Turner's method of consolidation, but demonstrating his passivity during the battle, he did not intervene and order a different approach. Alderson deeply regretted the failures and concluded, "I am of the opinion that it should not have taken 10 days for the division concerned to have ascertained the exact situation of its troops."<sup>200</sup> Clearly, Alderson was attempting to avoid blame for the failure.

Turner had earlier voiced his dissatisfaction about Ketchen to Alderson and Watson. Alderson met Turner in the morning of 18 April and demanded Turner put these doubts into writing, which Alderson claimed he should have done earlier. Turner requested time to consider the matter. In the afternoon, when confronted again by Alderson, Turner admitted that he could not get as much out of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade as other units, but it did not justify Ketchen's dismissal.<sup>201</sup> This took considerable courage on Turner's part, as he would know his actions would likely lead to his dismissal.

Alderson responded with a letter to the Second Army requesting Ketchen's relief. Alderson claimed he had nothing against Ketchen, but he thought the brigade should have done more and it had generated the initial mistaken locations.<sup>202</sup> Turner, when shown Alderson's letter, wanted Alderson to rephrase a statement attributed to him. When Alderson refused, Turner replied, "I wish to protest most strongly against misrepresentations of my views in the matter."<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Report to 2nd Army Canadian Corps G.265, 18 April 1916, RG 9 III C1 v3842, LAC.

<sup>201</sup> Alderson to Second Army G284, 18 April 1916, WO 158/296, TNA.

<sup>202</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>203</sup> Cable Aitken to Hughes, 24 April 1916, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Alderson also wrote an adverse report on Turner.<sup>204</sup> Most historians suggest it resulted from Turner's reaction to the Ketchen report. From its reference number, it appears Alderson sent or at least wrote this letter before Ketchen's, indicating he was already planning to remove Turner.<sup>205</sup> The language Alderson used in Turner's letter was indirect and the charges vague. He made no specific complaints about Turner's conduct of St. Eloi and in fact claimed it was insufficient grounds for Turner's dismissal. Alderson based his request on his earlier adverse report on Turner in 1915 and that he would not be satisfied to place the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in a difficult situation, unlike the 1<sup>st</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> Divisions. Plumer agreed and requested Haig dismiss Turner.<sup>206</sup>

The next day, Turner, learning Plumer was to meet with him in the morning and knowing it meant his sacking, requested permission from the corps to visit Haig before any decision was rendered.<sup>207</sup> He was refused, but moves by Aitken derailed Turner's relief. News of the inquiry quickly reached Aitken. On 17 April, Aitken's representative at GHQ informed him that that blame may fall on 'Brigadiers or higher.'<sup>208</sup> Aitken's contact at GHQ kept him fully informed of developments, and he reported to Hughes that Turner was at risk. He asked for directions from Hughes and Borden, so that he could make the appropriate

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<sup>204</sup> Alderson to Second Army G271, 18 April 1916, WO 158/296, TNA.

<sup>205</sup> The Ketchen report is numbered G.284 and the Turner report is numbered G.271. Typically, the reference numbers are in sequential order.

<sup>206</sup> Haig Diary Entry, 21 April 1916, Part 1 No. 96, Part 1: Haig's Autograph Great War Diary, Haig Papers; National Library of Scotland.

<sup>207</sup> Turner to Canadian Corps, 19 April 1916, RG 9 III C1 v3842, LAC.

<sup>208</sup> The letter is unsigned but was most likely from Lieutenant-Colonel Manley Sims, Aitken's representative at GHQ. Sims is discussed further in Chapters 6 and 7. Unknown to Aitken, 17 April 1916, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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representations to the British authorities.<sup>209</sup>

Knowing Hughes' loathing of Alderson and Hughes' appreciation of Turner, Aitken, who moved freely in the highest circles of British society, contacted members of the British Army Council to plead Turner's case. Aitken counselled Borden, as early as December 1915 that trouble was brewing between Alderson and Turner.<sup>210</sup> The repeated clashes of Hughes and Alderson over Alderson's conduct of Second Ypres, the appointments of British officers to staff positions, and the battle over the Ross Rifle convinced Aitken that as he admitted to a subordinate "I fear Alderson must lose his command."<sup>211</sup>

Aitken positioned Turner's removal to the Army Council members as exacerbating tensions between the Canadians and the British and was not favoured by the Canadian government. He may have also argued that Alderson was prejudiced against Turner. The Army Council passed these concerns to Haig, who being far more responsive to Dominion sensibilities than is generally credited, decided to retain Turner and reserve his decision on Ketchen. Haig wrote in his diary, on 21 April, that the two officers were 'not very efficient;' in fact he called them incompetent. His reasoning, nonetheless, was that there was no Canadian officer with sufficient experience and knowledge to replace Turner, and he did not want to upset the Canadians.<sup>212</sup> One interesting aspect of this analysis is Haig's implicit assumption that only a Canadian officer would

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<sup>209</sup> Cable Aitken to Hughes, 20 April 1916, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

<sup>210</sup> Aitken to Borden, 15 December 1916 (sic for 1915), v5, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>211</sup> Beckles Willson, *From Quebec to Piccadilly and Other Places: Some Anglo-Canadian Memories* (London: J. Cape, 1929), 213.

<sup>212</sup> Haig Diary Entry, 21 April 1916, Part 1 No. 96, Part 1: Haig's Autograph Great War Diary, Haig Papers; National Library of Scotland.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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command a Canadian division.<sup>213</sup>

Both Turner and Ketchen continued to work their contacts to save their careers. Ketchen protested Alderson's adverse report and refuted its claims to Turner. Alderson's disparagement of his men particularly incensed him.<sup>214</sup> Ketchen contacted his political protector, Robert Rogers, to ask for the 4<sup>th</sup> Division or the command of the Canadian Training Division at Shorncliffe.<sup>215</sup> He knew of the manoeuvres to displace the incumbent at Shorncliffe.<sup>216</sup>

Turner wrote Aitken explaining that St. Eloi was the result of the "ill advised operation of exploding the mines on a narrow front; pulling out the Vth Corps before the line had been consolidated, and establishing such an acute salient, on which the enemy could concentrate all his artillery fire."<sup>217</sup> He had also passed Alderson and Harington's commiseration letters to Aitken, which angered both, as they regarded the letters as private and probably because it exposed Alderson's hypocrisy in calling for Turner's removal.<sup>218</sup> Turner pointed out that Alderson made no direct charges and had not showed Turner his earlier adverse report, as required. Turner was enraged by Alderson's attack on his men; calling it a 'base charge.'

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<sup>213</sup> Supporting this assertion was after Major-General Malcolm Mercer, GOC 3<sup>rd</sup> Division's death at Mount Sorrel in June 1916, a British Regular officer serving in the Canadian Corps, Brigadier-General L. Lipsett replaced him. This again indicates the dearth of experienced Canadian officers ready for divisional command.

<sup>214</sup> Ketchen to 2nd Division G.284, 22 April 1916, Folder 42/File 14, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC.

<sup>215</sup> Ketchen to Rogers, 24 April 1916, 31815-31817, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>216</sup> In England, the authorities were making moves in the event Turner was relieved, including trying to persuade the current commander of the Canadian Training Division at Shorncliffe to move to France. If Turner was relieved, Hughes wanted Turner to command in England. MacDougall to Aitken, 19 April 1916, 6-Mc-153, RG 9 III A1 v184, LAC; Cable Hughes to Aitken, 21 April 1916, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

<sup>217</sup> Turner to Aitken, 24 April 1916, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.

<sup>218</sup> The letter is unsigned but is probably from Sims. Unsigned to Aitken, 25 April 1916, A1765, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Turner also instigated one and possibly two additional actions to save his career. In a letter shortly after the armistice, William Hughes, Sam Hughes' brother and commander of the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion at St. Eloi, referred to a political mission he carried out for Turner during the engagement. He claimed, "I fixed the matter very effectively."<sup>219</sup> Turner possibly sent Hughes to Aitken to arm him with the information on the battle needed to defend Turner's position. The second possible instance was Colonel E.W.B. Morrison, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division CRA, sending a trusted staff officer to England to discuss 'current events' that Morrison did not want to put into writing.<sup>220</sup>

Aitken travelled to Haig's headquarters on 23 April to save Turner – he was unaware of Haig's early decision to retain Turner.<sup>221</sup> Aitken informed Haig that Borden would consider it a personal favour to keep Turner, but would accept Haig's decision. Haig agreed to save Turner, but it was apparent that Alderson and Turner could not both remain in the Canadian Corps. Haig demanded the Canadian authorities find a way of disposing of Alderson that was not demeaning. Haig was not prepared to sack Alderson, but neither was he willing to employ Alderson elsewhere in France. Haig's actions demonstrate Haig's lack of confidence in Alderson dating back to the clashes at Festubert. If Haig had respected Alderson's abilities, he would have found him a command. One of

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<sup>219</sup> Hughes was on leave from 3 to 12 April, so he could have carried out the mission. W. Hughes to Turner, 24 January 1919, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC; William St. Pierre Hughes Service Jacket, RG 150 ACC 92-93 v4601, LAC.

<sup>220</sup> Morrison was the same officer who commanded the artillery at Lilienfontein. Morrison to Carson, 25 April 1916, 6-M-181, RG 9 III A1 v176, LAC.

<sup>221</sup> Haig Diary Entry, 23 April 1916, Part 1 No. 96, Part 1: Haig's Autograph Great War Diary, Haig Papers; National Library of Scotland. Beckles Willson, an Aitken subordinate at this point, has Aitken visiting Haig on 21 April. Willson, *From Quebec to Piccadilly and Other Places: Some Anglo-Canadian Memories*: 216.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Haig's concerns throughout the war was the supply of competent divisional and corps commanders, so bypassing Alderson was clear evidence of Haig's opinion of him.<sup>222</sup>

Aitken's solution was to appoint Alderson the Inspector-General of Canadian forces in England.<sup>223</sup> It had the merit of appearing to be a meaningful position and a lateral move. It would also seemingly, address problems in the administration and organisation of Canadian forces in England.<sup>224</sup> Haig recommended Alderson accept the offer, and Alderson interpreted it as an order.<sup>225</sup> Lieutenant-General Sir Julian Byng, who would have a positive effect on the corps and Turner's relationship with the Canadian Corps, replaced Alderson on 28 May.<sup>226</sup> Byng and his impact will be introduced in more detail in Chapter 4.

Alderson treated his role as Inspector-General seriously and diligently identified myriad problems with the Canadian training organisation in England. He did not realise that the position was a sinecure and that the Canadian authorities in England, who all owed their positions to Sam Hughes, were hostile to Alderson's findings.<sup>227</sup> As a result, Alderson transferred back to the British Army in September 1916 and continued to serve in England, as an Inspector-

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<sup>222</sup> Travers, "The Hidden Army: Structural Problems in the British Officer Corps, 1900-1918," 533.

<sup>223</sup> Extract Cable Aitken to Borden, 26 April 1916, 31808, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>224</sup> Haig Diary Entry, 23 April 1916, Part 1 No. 96, Part 1: Haig's Autograph Great War Diary, Haig Papers; National Library of Scotland.

<sup>225</sup> Alderson was careful to position the move as his obeying an order in both his final address to the troops and in correspondence with Borden. Alderson to Borden, 12 July 1916, 31825, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>226</sup> 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 28 May 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

<sup>227</sup> For instance, Carson wrote in reference to Alderson "I would like the interference stopped," and "Don't you think he [Alderson] should be shown where he is?" Carson to Aitken, 11 July 1916, 8-1-87c, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC. See also, Steele to CIGS, 4 September 1916, 8-5-10f, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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General.<sup>228</sup>

Turner learned from Aitken on 27 April that he was safe.<sup>229</sup> Turner, however, was not convinced and was still expressing concern in early May that “action is being delayed too long as regard Alderson.”<sup>230</sup> Turner unfairly blamed Alderson for a lack of support during the battle.<sup>231</sup> Alderson had tried to arrange for extra resources and presented Turner’s alternatives to the high command, but Alderson’s lack of credibility meant his requests were denied. Turner’s anger was misplaced, and he continued to carry a grudge against Alderson for the rest of his life.<sup>232</sup> Regarding Alderson, Turner claimed, “I am not easily made angry, but I am slow to forget.”<sup>233</sup> He refused to shake Alderson’s hand in the presence of Perley during a later attempted reconciliation.<sup>234</sup> Alderson, on the other hand, remained a gentleman and wrote a note congratulating Turner on receiving his knighthood in 1917.<sup>235</sup> Turner did not acknowledge it.

Alderson provided useful service in preparing the 1<sup>st</sup> Division for its initial battle but was miscast in his dual responsibilities as a combat commander and head of a national contingent. Whether because of age or incapacity, Alderson was not a success as a divisional or corps commander, as demonstrated by the lack of trust placed in him by his superiors. He lacked the political sense or

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<sup>228</sup> Alderson to Carson, 21 September 1916, 8-1-122, RG 9 III A1 v36, LAC. The CIGS briefly considered Alderson for the Irish Command. Robertson to Sec. of State for War, 26 October 1916, 7/4/18, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.

<sup>229</sup> Cable Aitken to Turner, 27 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>230</sup> Turner to Carson, 5 May 1916, 4-5-13b, RG 9 III A1 v12, LAC.

<sup>231</sup> Turner Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC.

<sup>232</sup> For instance, see Turner to Hetty, 16 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

<sup>233</sup> Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.

<sup>234</sup> Ibid.

<sup>235</sup> Alderson to Turner, 5 June 17, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.6, 19710147-007, Turner Fonds; CWM.



### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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sagacity to deal with the mercurial Sam Hughes, unlike Byng. Alderson faced the challenges of satisfying two different masters – GHQ and Sam Hughes – and he failed at both. He was also at times unfair and underhanded in his treatment of Turner, such as not showing the earlier adverse report.

If Turner could not be touched, Ker his GSO 1 could, and Lieutenant-Colonel Norman 'Ox' Webber replaced Ker on 24 May.<sup>236</sup> Ker said of Turner, "I am more sorry than I can say, to leave the Canadians, and particularly General Turner."<sup>237</sup> Turner, in his typical way of looking out for his subordinates, later requested Carson help out Ker by moving Ker's effects to England from Canada.

Webber was a thirty-five year old British *psc* officer, who greatly improved the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and must receive some of the credit for its increased effectiveness at the Somme. Unlike Ker, who at times micro-managed the brigades, Webber was efficient, organised, and struck the right balance between control and initiative.<sup>238</sup> Webber did so well that he became the Canadian Corps BGGS in April 1918.<sup>239</sup>

Turner later claimed he replaced the battalion commanders of the 18<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, and 27<sup>th</sup> Battalions, because of St. Eloi.<sup>240</sup> This is somewhat disingenuous, as Alderson was responsible for writing the adverse report on

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<sup>236</sup> The discussions by the British authorities of what to do with Ker started in late April, and he ended up as the GSO 1 of the 63<sup>rd</sup> Royal Naval Division and later the Head of the British Mission with the Portuguese Forces. 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 24 May 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC; Brigadier General Charles Arthur Ker, C.M.G., D.S.O., 6 August 1918, Folder 12 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4678, LAC.

<sup>237</sup> Ker Correspondence File, RG 9 III A1 v167, LAC.

<sup>238</sup> For an example of Ker's too tight control, see Harington to 2nd Canadian Division G.650, 2 May 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4843, LAC.

<sup>239</sup> Biography Norman William Webber, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC.

<sup>240</sup> Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Lieutenant-Colonel J. McAvity of the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion on 6 May that resulted in McAvity's return to Canada.<sup>241</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel E. Wigle of the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion returned to Canada after his wife was diagnosed with cancer, leaving him to care for a young family.<sup>242</sup> Hughes recalled Lieutenant-Colonel J. McLaren of the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion to Canada for instructional duties, but this was probably a cover for his relief.<sup>243</sup> It is likely Lieutenant-Colonel H.S. Tobin, of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, was relieved at the same time as McLaren, as Tobin transferred to England and held no important position there.<sup>244</sup>

The search for scapegoats was not restricted to just Canadians. Haig was already dissatisfied with Fanshawe and Haldane, and he pressured Fanshawe to dismiss Haldane. Fanshawe refused, and Haig removed Fanshawe instead.<sup>245</sup> Haig explained, as he could not remove Turner, someone else needed to pay the price.<sup>246</sup> This speaks to Tim Travers' notion of the 'almost ritualistic quality' of dismissals.<sup>247</sup>

Haig decided to retain Plumer, but he was not satisfied with the operations of the Second Army and removed Plumer's chief staff officer, Major-General H.B. Williams. Williams' replacement was Harington, the Canadian Corps' BGGS, who "was probably the biggest single factor in creating its [Second

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<sup>241</sup> McAvity was subsequently court-martialled in Canada, but the details of the trial are unavailable. McAvity Correspondence Files, 6-Mc-284, RG 9 III A1 v186, LAC.

<sup>242</sup> Wigle Correspondence File, 6-W-204, RG 9 III A1 v234, LAC.

<sup>243</sup> McLaren Correspondence Files, 6-Mc-169, RG 9 III A1 v186, LAC.

<sup>244</sup> 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 17 July 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

<sup>245</sup> Haldane called Fanshawe a 'real sahib' for this refusal. Cmts. BOH, Haldane, 28 July 1929, CAB 45/130, TNA.

<sup>246</sup> Timothy Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 23.

<sup>247</sup> Travers, "The Hidden Army: Structural Problems in the British Officer Corps, 1900-1918," 528, 535.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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Army's] particular ethos and widespread reputation for operational efficiency."<sup>248</sup>

A combination of Sam Hughes' faith in Turner, Hughes' loathing of Alderson, the lack of an obvious replacement, and Turner's own marshalling of Canadian political support, saved his career.<sup>249</sup> Turner demonstrated he was an accomplished military politician in his campaign to retain his division. Turner's actions were consistent with the contemporary ethos of leveraging political contacts in the Canadian Militia.

Should Turner have been removed? If Turner and Ketchen had been in a British division, Haig would have undoubtedly sacked them. Their removal, however, would be as scapegoats and not because of their failures. As Alderson put it, the St. Eloi operations were not a sufficient reason to remove Turner.<sup>250</sup> Turner was responsible but not culpable for the failure at St. Eloi. As the divisional commander, Turner bears responsibility for the battle, but he took all the reasonable steps available to salvage an unwinnable engagement. The errors in the reported position of the division were unfortunate but explicable given the conditions. It is difficult to plausibly argue that any other divisional commander given the conditions and the relatively raw state of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division would have done much better. The failure lies with Plumer and his staff in launching such an ill-considered action.

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<sup>248</sup> Simkins, "Herbert Plumer's Second Army, 1915-1917," 146.

<sup>249</sup> Perley, the acting High Commissioner, also intervened and cabled Borden that Turner should be retained as he was 'evidently not specially to blame.' Cable Perley to Borden, 26 or 27 April 1916, v5, File 3, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>250</sup> Alderson to Second Army G271, 18 April 1916, WO 158/296, TNA.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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#### Ross Rifle

There was one last clash with Alderson over Turner's support of the Ross Rifle. The fundamental problem of the Ross Rifle was that it had a tendency to jam, especially in bad conditions or if fired rapidly. The British standard rifle, the Short Magazine Lee-Enfield (SMLE), was more resistant to jamming in poor conditions or with low-tolerance ammunition than was the Ross Rifle.<sup>251</sup> Sam Hughes headed the committee that selected the Ross, and he continued to play a central role in its evolution.<sup>252</sup> As a result, Hughes believed in its superiority, and its success at the Bisley rifle matches further reinforced Hughes' belief.<sup>253</sup>

Turner was a staunch defender of the Ross, unlike the other divisional commanders. Turner worked hard to convince the division of its efficacy through trials, training by the divisional Armourer officer, and banning the SMLE, but his efforts were insufficient to change the prevailing view.<sup>254</sup> Turner's support was a combination of reaction to Alderson's disdain for the weapon, a belief that British officers had a bias against Canadian products, the desire to loyally support the Government's policy, and the need to sustain the Minister, who

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<sup>251</sup> Roger F. Phillips, *The Ross Rifle Story* (Sydney, N.S.: J.A. Chadwick, 1984), 33; Ronald Haycock, "Early Canadian Weapons Acquisition: The Damned Ross Rifle," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 14, no. 3 (1984): 53-56.

<sup>252</sup> The GOC, Canadians, Earl Dundonald called the selection process a 'put up job.' Dundonald, *My Army Life*: 204.

<sup>253</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 41.; Haycock, "Early Canadian Weapons Acquisition: The Damned Ross Rifle," 49-52. For more on the Ross, see Phillips, *The Ross Rifle Story*.

<sup>254</sup> Turner praised the Armourer officer, as 'one of the most useful in the division' and tried to get him a promotion. Turner to Carson, 28 March 1916, 6-M-188, RG 9 III A1 v176, LAC; Turner to Carson, 29 March 1916, 4-5-13b, RG 9 III A1 v12, LAC; Report on Test of Ross Rifle, 16 October 1915, Folder 2 File 4, RG 9 III C3 v4083, LAC; 2nd Canadian Division, RO 1313, 21 October 1915, RG 9 III B3 v3789, LAC.

### 3 We Are in Desolate Places

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supported him.<sup>255</sup> This last factor became especially important after St. Eloi.

Sir John French ordered the 1<sup>st</sup> Division to convert to the SMLE in June 1915, because of the problems at Second Ypres. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division crossed to France with the Ross, because the British could not provide sufficient SMLEs without delaying the division's crossing.<sup>256</sup> Alderson wanted the Ross replaced and he and Hughes engaged in a bitter battle over it.<sup>257</sup> In the aftermath of St. Eloi, Alderson astutely arranged to get the unfettered opinion of the commanding officers for indisputable evidence of the dissatisfaction with the Ross.<sup>258</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's response gave at best an equivocal reaction to the questions, with the company commanders more opposed than the senior ones.<sup>259</sup> There is, however, strong evidence that Turner, after viewing the initial opinions, placed pressure on his commanders to make the results more favourable.<sup>260</sup> With Alderson's removal, the file passed to Haig, who ordered the SMLE replace the Ross, because of the troops' lack of confidence in it.<sup>261</sup>

Turner was in a difficult situation between the need for the Minister's unqualified support to retain his position and the evident loss of faith in the Ross

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<sup>255</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 155; Turner to Carson, 5 May 1916, 4-5-13b, RG 9 III A1 v12, LAC.

<sup>256</sup> Carson to Hughes, 31 August 1915, 4-5-13b, RG 9 III A1 v12, LAC.

<sup>257</sup> Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 250.

<sup>258</sup> 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, May 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

<sup>259</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 148.

<sup>260</sup> Gibsons to Duguid, 22 October 1932, HQ 683-1-30-1, RG 24 v1502, LAC; Sims to Aitken, 9 May 1916, A1765, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC. Post-war, Turner claimed he was sending a safety deposit box to Duguid with evidence that disproved he applied pressure. The box contents could not be found. Turner to Duguid, 9 September 1933, HQ 683-1-30-1, RG 24 v1502, LAC.

<sup>261</sup> The Corps notified the 2nd Division that the Ross was to be replaced on 31 July 1916. 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 31 July 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

### **3 We Are in Desolate Places**

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Rifle. It was, however, at this point that Turner's actions are no longer defensible in the guise of defending the Government's policy. Regardless of the relative merits or demerits of the Ross, the fact that the majority of the men had lost confidence in it, meant it had to be replaced. Turner's continued attempts to sway the results were a serious lapse of judgement and a failure of character.

Turner's career was saved but blighted. Under a far more effective and sympathetic Canadian Corps commander, in Byng, and with a superior GSO 1, in Ox Webber, Turner would significantly improve the effectiveness of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. This increased efficiency would culminate in Turner's greatest victory as a commander, the Battle of Courcellette, on the Somme. Turner's actions leading up to Courcellette, the battle, and follow-on engagements are the subject of the next chapter.

## 4

# ‘WON BY MY INFANTRY:’ TURNER’S SOMME CAMPAIGN

*Too much credit must not be placed on to the tanks yet. Courcelette  
was won by my infantry.*

R.E.W. Turner, 17 September 1916<sup>1</sup>

Turner and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division won the principal Canadian victory in the Somme campaign at the Battle of Flers-Courcelette on 15 September 1916. Showing marked prowess, efficiency, and fieldcraft, the division repelled a German attack, captured all of its objectives, and then successfully launched an ordered follow-on assault that same day capturing the village of Courcelette. This was in a campaign where orders for successful assaults normally required a minimum of twelve to twenty-four hours to pass from a corps to the front-line forces.<sup>2</sup> Courcelette, a ‘forgotten victory,’ demonstrated Turner’s maturation as a combat commander, ability to prepare his division for the Somme, and improved battle management.<sup>3</sup> Turner’s development of the division is why the Germans rated the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, prior to the Somme, as one of the top eight divisions in the British Army.<sup>4</sup> This chapter will examine the training leading to the battle, the victory, and the two less successful

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<sup>1</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 22 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>2</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18: Defeat into Victory*: 25.

<sup>3</sup> Campbell, "A Forgotten Victory: Courcelette, 15 September 1916."

<sup>4</sup> The 1<sup>st</sup> Division was also rated as one of the top eight divisions. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was rated in the middle tier of British divisions. Christopher Duffy, *Through German Eyes: The British and the Somme 1916* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2006), 51.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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attacks on 26 September and 1 October. It will also analyse Turner's decisions, the factors leading to the victory, and the reasons for the successful operations.

### **Command Changes**

In the aftermath of St. Eloi, Turner was in a difficult position, as he had little recourse if confronted with a duty to make the right choices versus his obligation to Sam Hughes. The peculiar case of the thwarted promotion of William Hughes, Sam Hughes' brother and commander of the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, highlights this problem.<sup>5</sup> On 19 or 20 April, Turner discovered Lieutenant-Colonel Hughes had withdrawn the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion from Crater 1 and the nearby trenches, believing them indefensible. Turner immediately ordered Hughes to re-occupy the positions, and Turner wrote an adverse report on Hughes. Turner did not need any further failures to tarnish his reputation.<sup>6</sup> Subsequently, Haig rejected Hughes' June nomination to command the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade, because of Turner's adverse report.<sup>7</sup> Turner's volte-face incensed Carson, as earlier; Turner had confirmed Hughes was the best battalion

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<sup>5</sup> Stephen J. Nichol, *Ordinary Heroes: Eastern Ontario's 21st Battalion C.E.F. In the Great War* (Stephen J. Nichol, 2008), 70.

<sup>6</sup> Sims to Aitken, 16 June 1916, A1765, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC. A senior British officer had complained to the Corps about the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's discipline and appearance in the camps after St. Eloi. Maj-Gen Chichester DA & QMG to Cdn Corps, 28 April 1916, Folder 1/File 8, RG 9 III C3 v4118, LAC. In addition, Harington sent a scathing letter to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division about the poor performance of the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade in its counterattacks on 19 and 20 April. Harington to 2nd Canadian Division, G.305, 20 April 1916, RG 24 v6992, LAC.

<sup>7</sup> Francis Davie Military Secretary to Carson, 8 June 1916, 8-5-8F, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC.



#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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commander in the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade.<sup>8</sup> Carson complained Turner had “certainly burned his boats behind him with that statement.”<sup>9</sup>

Carson asked Turner in a veiled threat why he had changed his mind.<sup>10</sup> Turner reversed his opinion again; claiming that while he was displeased with Hughes over the incident, Hughes’s subsequent performance was significantly better, and Hughes now deserved the appointment.<sup>11</sup> Hughes received the 10<sup>th</sup> Brigade in July 1916.<sup>12</sup> Turner’s explanation of his reversal was somewhat plausible, but more likely Carson’s pressure changed Turner’s attitude. It is unlikely Hughes’ ensuing performance was so noteworthy that it was sufficient to overcome his earlier failure. This illustrates one of Turner’s flaws in buckling under political pressure.

On 17 April, Watson left the division to take command of the 4<sup>th</sup> Division in England.<sup>13</sup> In Watson’s place, Alderson selected Archibald Hayes Macdonell, nicknamed ‘Long Archie’ to distinguish him from his cousin, Archibald Cameron Macdonell, later commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. What was intriguing was that Alderson did not believe any battalion commander in

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<sup>8</sup> Turner rated Hughes second after Lieutenant-Colonel J. Embury of the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade for promotion to Brigade GOC. Turner to Carson, 23 March 1916, 8 8-1-70, RG 9 III A1 v31, LAC.

<sup>9</sup> Carson to Aitken, 9 June 1916, 8-5-8F, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC.

<sup>10</sup> Carson to Turner, 12 June 1916, 8-5-8F, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC.

<sup>11</sup> Turner to Carson, 15 June 1916, RG 9 III A1 v154, LAC.

<sup>12</sup> Watson, then the 4<sup>th</sup> Division commander, sacked Hughes shortly after Sam Hughes resigned as the Minister of Militia in November 1916. 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 14 July 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC; Watson to Perley, 26 November 1916, v7/File 3, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC. William Hughes was bitter about the removal, but was unable to secure another position, and the Canadian authorities returned him to Canada. W. Hughes to Turner, 24 January 1919, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC; Return of Officers Who Have Served Overseas with No Employment Available, AG 1a 7-3-18, 0-76-33 v1, RG 9 III B1 v2885, LAC.

<sup>13</sup> 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 17 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was suitable for promotion.<sup>14</sup> Long Archie was a PF officer with twenty-seven years experience in the Canadian military. He served in South Africa and later West Africa – earning a DSO. He was a Camberley trained staff officer and was the GSO 2 in Military District 1, at the start of the war.<sup>15</sup> He took over command of the RCR in England and took them to France, as part of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.<sup>16</sup> He later earned Currie's ire, with Currie removing him in July 1917, ostensibly because of exhaustion.<sup>17</sup>

The division went to the Somme five months later with a significantly different command structure than at St. Eloi. Six of the twelve battalion commanders were new, as was a brigade commander and the GSO 1. The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade experienced the greatest turnover, with three of the four battalion commanders replaced after St. Eloi, and Turner wanted the one holdover, Lieutenant-Colonel C.H. Rogers of the 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion, transferred as well. Turner tried having him replaced in April 1916, because of Roger's repeated leaves during operations, including during St. Eloi.<sup>18</sup> In August, Turner again complained to Carson about Rogers' incessant solicitation for a promotion and asked if there were a training brigade in England for Rogers. If Ketchen were sacked, Turner wanted Lieutenant-Colonel J. Embury of the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion

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<sup>14</sup> Subsequently, four of the battalion commanders in the 2nd Division at that time – Bell, Embury, Hughes, and Tremblay – commanded brigades in the Canadian Corps.

<sup>15</sup> Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914)*: 11, 413.

<sup>16</sup> Biography AH Macdonell, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC.

<sup>17</sup> Currie complained about the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade not knowing its position at Arleux on 28 April 1917. Currie's comment was "Long Archie wrong as usual." Currie Diary Entry, 28 April 1917, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC. Macdonell's removal caused a minor stir as Turner asked that Macdonell received a position in Canada, in consideration of his long service. There were no positions available, and he retired. Macdonell Correspondence File, 10-MC-37, RG 9 III A1 v306, LAC.

<sup>18</sup> Turner to Carson, 15 April 1916, 6-R-13, RG 9 III A1 v205, LAC.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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promoted and not Rogers.<sup>19</sup> Turner tried to complete the task of cleaning out the dead wood in the division, but there was no position in England for Rogers.<sup>20</sup>

**Figure 10 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Command Changes – September 1915/November 1916**

Position	Officer	Fate
GSO 1	Lieutenant-Colonel H. De Pree	Transferred
GSO 1	Lieutenant-Colonel C. Ker	Transferred*
4 <sup>th</sup> Brigade GOC	Brigadier-General Lord Brooke	Transferred*
5 <sup>th</sup> Brigade GOC	Brigadier-General D. Watson	Promoted
18 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel E. Wigle	Compassionate
–	Lieutenant-Colonel H. Milligan	Compassionate
19 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel J. McLaren	Removed
20 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel C. Rogers	Transferred*
21 <sup>st</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel W. Hughes	Promoted
22 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion	Colonel F. Gaudet	Removed
–	Lieutenant-Colonel T. Tremblay	Injured
24 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel J. Gunn	Transferred*
25 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel G. LeCain	Removed
26 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel J. McAvity	Removed
27 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel J. Snider	Removed
28 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel J. Embury	Wounded <sup>21</sup>
29 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	Lieutenant-Colonel H. Tobin	Transferred*
–	Lieutenant-Colonel J. Tait	Injured <sup>22</sup>

\*Indicates a case where the transfer was a removal but in a politically expedient fashion.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was indirectly involved in the engagement at Mount Sorrel in June 1916 that so battered the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division. This action could be used to criticise Turner for the loss of more ground. To free up units for a planned counterattack, Byng assigned the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, and

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<sup>19</sup> Turner to Carson, 21 August 1916, 6-E-45, RG 9 III A1 v142, LAC.

<sup>20</sup> Turner had Rogers transferred to England in November 1916.

<sup>21</sup> Calder, *The History of the 28th (Northwest) Battalion, C. E. F. (October 1914-June 1919) from the Memoirs of Brigadier General Alexander Ross*: 89.

<sup>22</sup> H.R.N. Clynne, *Vancouver's 29th* (Tobin's Tigers Association, 1964), 17.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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it replaced the 7<sup>th</sup> Brigade in line on the night of 5/6 June.<sup>23</sup> At 2:00 p.m. on 6 June, the Germans fired four mines under the front-line of the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion, annihilating the defenders.<sup>24</sup> The Germans seized 60 metres of the Canadian front-line with a mass-formation attack supported by a powerful barrage. Rifle and machine gun fire from the few survivors in the front-line and from reserve positions stopped the Germans and inflicted heavy casualties. The attack on the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion failed entirely, but the two front-line battalions, the 28<sup>th</sup> and 31<sup>st</sup>, suffered sizeable losses.<sup>25</sup> Byng, who was more pragmatic than Alderson, decided against retaking the position.<sup>26</sup> What is sometimes overlooked in the description of this engagement was that the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade was under the command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division and not Turner.

### **Preparing for the Onslaught**

Turner and the division spent the summer preparing for the likely commitment of the Canadian Corps to the Somme campaign. Turner ordered a rigorous training program, instituted an aggressive raiding policy, and the division received supernumerary officer reinforcements.

All units in reserve conducted training, with the 24<sup>th</sup> Battalion spending

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<sup>23</sup> The two battalions of the 6th Brigade, the 28th and 31st Battalions, replaced four battalions of the 7th Brigade.

<sup>24</sup> Calder, *The History of the 28th (Northwest) Battalion, C. E. F. (October 1914-June 1919) from the Memoirs of Brigadier General Alexander Ross*: 68.

<sup>25</sup> The 6th Brigade reported suffering losses of 10 officers and 307 men. The 28th Battalion's regimental history reported losses of 300 men in the battle. 6th Brigade War Diary, 6 June 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4888, LAC; Calder, *The History of the 28th (Northwest) Battalion, C. E. F. (October 1914-June 1919) from the Memoirs of Brigadier General Alexander Ross*: 72.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 158-159.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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nine days in July undergoing intense instruction.<sup>27</sup> The division ordered each brigade to send 200 men for a Lewis Gun course and 8 NCOs and 32 other ranks for a Trench Mortar course.<sup>28</sup> In expectation of heavy officer losses, each battalion received fourteen supernumerary subalterns in July and August.<sup>29</sup> Turner also held two conferences with his principal staff officers, advisors, and brigadiers on 2 and 8 August to further preparation and training for the offensive.<sup>30</sup>

As always, Turner continued his early morning inspections of the trenches, and he was systematic and organised while doing so. He took down reminders in a notebook during these tours, and he or his staff would follow up on the resulting tasks, orders, and observations.<sup>31</sup>

The new corps commander, Byng, was an ideal fit for the Canadian Corps and played a critical role in its development. Born the seventh son of the second Earl of Strafford in 1862, Byng joined the Militia in 1879, because a shortage of funds did not allow him to join the Regular Army.<sup>32</sup> An offer from the Prince of Wales resulted in Byng's transfer to the prestigious 10<sup>th</sup> Royal Hussars, in 1883. He served in India, the Sudan, and in South Africa;

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<sup>27</sup> R. C. (Robert Collier) Fetherstonhaugh, 1892-1949., *The 24th Battalion, C.E.F., Victoria Rifles of Canada, 1914-1919* (Montreal: Gazette Print. Co., 1930), 70.

<sup>28</sup> 2nd Canadian Division, RO 2642, 10 August 1916, RG 9 III B3 v3789, LAC.

<sup>29</sup> This was a policy for all the divisions in the Canadian Corps. Supernumerary officers were an addition to the normal officer complement of a battalion. Carson to Major-General R.W. Wigham, July 31 1916, 8-1-87c, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC. The division received reinforcements of ninety-nine officers in July and ninety-eight in August, when it averaged only twenty-eight per month in the previous two months. 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, July and August 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.

<sup>30</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, 2 and 8 August 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.

<sup>31</sup> F. F. Montague Comments, 19710147-015/DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.14, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>32</sup> Byng's father while wealthy believed himself unable to support another son in the military. Jeffery Williams, *Byng of Vimy, General and Governor General* (Secker & Warburg, 1983), 4-6.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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where he raised and successfully commanded a regiment of colonial irregulars. He graduated from the staff college in 1894. After the Boer War, he commanded a cavalry regiment, cavalry brigade, and a Territorial division. He led the 3<sup>rd</sup> Cavalry Division in the opening stages of the war and later the Cavalry Corps, the IX Corps at Gallipoli, and the XVII Corps on the Western Front. He enjoyed considerable success in all of his positions, including the casualty-free evacuation from Gallipoli. His experiences with the colonial irregulars, the Territorial division, and command on the Western Front resulted in a uniquely qualified officer to deal with the special circumstances of the Canadian Corps.<sup>33</sup>

Byng did not fit the stereotype of a conventional blue-blood British officer, with his rumpled appearance, hands in his pockets, and a casual demeanour that suited Canadian sensibilities.<sup>34</sup> Photographs, however, show the intensity that was behind the façade of affability. He had an incisive mind, self-confidence, strong political skills, and ruthlessness when necessary. He placed his stamp on the Canadian Corps and worked effectively to rid it of political influence, the divisional cliques, and infighting that Alderson had been unable to correct.<sup>35</sup> Byng played a decisive role in the increasing capability and effectiveness of the Canadian Corps.<sup>36</sup>

He was successful in navigating the intricacies of a national contingent

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<sup>33</sup> For Byng's only biography, see *ibid*; "Sir Julian Byng," in *Oxford Dictionary Of National Biography : In Association With The British Academy: From The Earliest Times To The Year 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

<sup>34</sup> Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 345.

<sup>35</sup> Radley, *We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918*: 160.

<sup>36</sup> For more see, Brennan, "Julian Byng and Leadership in the Canadian Corps."

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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and dealing with GHQ and Sam Hughes. Byng was able to exploit Sam Hughes's soft spot for aristocrats to win him over and thus avoid the conflict with Canadian authorities that characterised Alderson's regime.<sup>37</sup> One of Byng's first actions was to declare that he was not going to respond to any of Carson's letters, unless they came through official channels.<sup>38</sup> He also affirmed that he was going to be responsible for recommendations for appointments and promotions.<sup>39</sup> These steps significantly reduced Hughes' ability to interfere in the corps.

In response to Haig's demands for forces outside of the Somme front to maintain pressure on the Germans, Turner ordered each battalion to plan and conduct one raid during each front-line rotation. Each battalion was responsible for developing the plan and presenting it to the brigade for approval.<sup>40</sup> This decision is of interest because of its consequences and nature. According to David Campbell, the units of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division planned twenty-five raids, with twenty-two attempted and eleven rated as completely or partially successful. The losses suffered were approximately fifty-seven with only three dead and two missing, so the loss rate was not prohibitive.<sup>41</sup> Raids were controversial as to their utility.<sup>42</sup> Raids could be costly, and the losses

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<sup>37</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 154.

<sup>38</sup> Carson wrote the Corps commanders repeatedly with demands and requests from Hughes and others. See RG 9 III A1 v109-240

<sup>39</sup> Sims to Aitken, 8 June 1916, A1765, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

<sup>40</sup> Raids, GS 1096, 6 August 1916, Folder 43 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.

<sup>41</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 168-169.

<sup>42</sup> Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918*: 61. For a favourable assessment of raiding, see Garnett, "Butcher and Bolt: Canadian Trench Raiding During the Great War, 1915-1918."

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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disproportionally fell upon the most aggressive elements in a battalion.

Constant raiding would increase German alertness levels, resulting in higher losses and exhausted units. On the other hand, raids inflicted casualties on the Germans and captured prisoners. Most importantly, they helped train units in battle preparation, all-arms coordination, and conducting operations.<sup>43</sup> In the case of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, these raids were beneficial in developing the combat readiness of the battalions with minimal losses.

The other aspect of the raiding policy was Turner's determination to push down the planning responsibility to the battalion, which ran counter to Haig's strictures of tighter control over subordinates. There was a tension in the British Army at this point in the war, between the instructions of the *FSR* and the reality of a 'top down' prescriptive command policy in some formations.<sup>44</sup> *FSR* stipulated superiors were to dictate the objective, but subordinates determined the means to achieving it. The rapid expansion of the BEF and CEF resulted in unqualified commanders and staff – a problem especially prevalent in the Canadian Corps. Some superiors, as a result, were loath to give subordinates too much responsibility.<sup>45</sup> Some senior commanders, such as General Sir Hubert Gough, commander of the Reserve Army at the Somme, were prone to dictate and micro-manage subordinates,

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<sup>43</sup> Turner's view in his notes for preparing for the Somme was consolidation was the most challenging aspect of the attack, but raids taught little about consolidation. Notes on Fighting in Somme, 21 August 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>44</sup> Gary Sheffield, "An Army Commander on the Somme: Hubert Gough," in Gary Sheffield and Daniel Todman (eds.), *Command and Control on the Western Front: The British Army's Experience, 1914-1918* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 2004), 84; Ian F.W. Beckett, "Hubert Gough, Neil Malcolm and Command on the Western Front," in Brian Bond (ed.), *Look to Your Front : Studies in the First World War* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1999), 7-8.

<sup>45</sup> Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18: Defeat into Victory*: 34.



#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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because of this lack of confidence.<sup>46</sup>

The division pulled out of the line starting 24 August and moved to training areas to ready for the Somme offensive. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had the opportunity to prepare thoroughly for its first battle at the Somme, unlike the unfortunate divisions that attacked on 1 July and that did not have sufficient training time.<sup>47</sup>

Turner assembled notes on preparation for the Somme that Webber, the new GSO 1, converted into an eight-page set of instructions for company commanders showing Turner's intelligent steps to prepare his division.<sup>48</sup> Turner's handwritten notes were based on a visit to the Somme, after-action reports and lessons learned from brigades, divisions, and corps engaged at the Somme.<sup>49</sup> Turner also visited the Australian Corps to learn of their experiences on 26 August.<sup>50</sup> Turner's instructions emphasised the need for initiative and bold leadership, as the battle was now a mix of trench and semi-open warfare. The critical factor was getting troops to the enemy lines before the German artillery intervened. Troops were to reach the German lines just as the barrage jumped. Units were to plan for a maximum of three waves in an attack, with the first wave going to the final objective. The instructions reflected Turner's pragmatic and practical orientation and bias to

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<sup>46</sup> Sheffield, "An Army Commander on the Somme: Hubert Gough," 82-83.

<sup>47</sup> Major-General Ivor Maxse, GOC 18th Division, complained that his unit was unable to train before 1 July 1916, because of the time spent on labour details. Byrson, "The Once and Future Army," 48.

<sup>48</sup> Notes on Fighting in Somme, 21 August 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>49</sup> The notes show the source of the information in the margins. Handwritten Notes on Lessons from Somme, Undated, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>50</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 26 August 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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decentralisation. Webber issued further instructions on 25 August that training was to build progressively from section to company with attention to musketry, route marching, and training of Lewis Gun teams. In recognition of the limitations of signalling technology, each battalion was to train additional runners.<sup>51</sup> A critical aspect of this training was the opportunity for all levels of the organisation to train under the officers that would lead them into battle.<sup>52</sup>

Byng was more involved in lower-level training than was Alderson. He met with all the brigade and battalion commanders on 29 August and manoeuvred 'B' Company of the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion to demonstrate what he expected.<sup>53</sup> The training was advanced in several respects. The exercises simulated losses amongst officers and NCOs to engender initiative and give leadership experience to junior NCOs and even privates. The training emphasised troops advancing to their objective and fighting on regardless of officer and NCOs losses.<sup>54</sup> Another noteworthy change was as one soldier later remembered

This was the first time that the rank and file had been fully briefed as to what was expected, so we felt encouraged as senior divisional officers took part in the exercise and gave confidence that the preparations were so thorough that the prospect of the attack a few days hence did not seem at all frightening.<sup>55</sup>

Tactics were simplified and reduced to an advance in waves following as close as possible to the creeping barrage. Some senior British commanders,

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<sup>51</sup> 2nd Canadian Division G.930, 25 August 1916, Folder 46/File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4114, LAC.

<sup>52</sup> Hew Strachan, "Training, Morale and Modern War," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 2 (2006): 216.

<sup>53</sup> Calder, *The History of the 28th (Northwest) Battalion, C. E. F. (October 1914-June 1919) from the Memoirs of Brigadier General Alexander Ross*: 85.

<sup>54</sup> Campbell, "A Forgotten Victory: Courcellette, 15 September 1916," 28.

<sup>55</sup> Mcintyre Hood Interview, Transcript 76/169/1, IWM, 8.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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especially in the Reserve Army, thought 'Fire and Movement' tactics were beyond the capabilities of the Kitchener divisions and mandated linear tactics – which would apply to the Canadian divisions, as well.<sup>56</sup> The attack was subordinated to the artillery plan, whose primary objective was to destroy the enemy.<sup>57</sup> As Bidwell and Graham put it, fire effect was achieved through "quantity not quality of fire."<sup>58</sup> The creeping barrage regulated the infantry advance, so the infantry could progress only as fast and as far as the barrage could take it. Losing the barrage was usually fatal to an attack.

Mark Humphries questions the notion of a significant difference in the training for the Somme or Vimy Ridge. He argues the training prior to the Somme demonstrated many of the characteristics of the instruction prior to Vimy Ridge, such as progressive training, informing troops of their objectives, and simulating losses of leaders.<sup>59</sup> In one crucial aspect – platoons – the pre-Somme instruction differed fundamentally from Vimy. At the Somme, the company was the primary fighting formation, while at Vimy, the fundamental combat unit was the all-arms platoon. At the Somme, specialists were still a significant portion of the fighting strength of the battalion and did not slot into the platoon structure. For instance, a sample attack formation for training

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<sup>56</sup> John A. English, "Perspectives on Infantry" (Masters, Royal Military College of Canada, 1981). For an example of the Reserve Army's views on tactics, see Handwritten Notes on Lessons from Somme, Undated, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>57</sup> William Sanders Marble, "The Infantry Cannot Do with a Gun Less: The Place of the Artillery in the BEF, 1914-1918" (PhD, King's College, London, 1998), 45.

<sup>58</sup> Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945* (London ; Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1982), 114.

<sup>59</sup> Mark Osborne Humphries, "Myth of the Learning Curve: Tactics and Training in the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade, 1916-1918," *Canadian Military History* 14, no. 4 (2005). See also Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 26, 62.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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shows company and battalion bombers as separate from the normal organisation.<sup>60</sup>

Overall, despite the simple tactics taught, Turner and the division were far better prepared for the challenges at the Somme than for St. Eloi, and their performance at Courcellette demonstrated the progress.

### **Apotheosis: Courcellette 15 September**

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division attack was part of a much larger assault, known as the Flers-Courcellette offensive, stretching across a sixteen kilometre front and involving both the Reserve and Fourth Armies.<sup>61</sup> Since the initial attack on 1 July, the British had ground through, at great cost, the German First and Second Positions, with each position a complex of trenches and strongpoints deployed in depth. Haig intended the offensive to be decisive with General Sir Henry Rawlinson's Fourth Army breaking through the German Third Position, and Gough's Reserve Army protecting the Fourth Army's left flank. Rawlinson had reservations about the likelihood of a great success, but Haig over-ruled him.<sup>62</sup> Haig was counting in part on a greater concentration of artillery and a secret weapon – tanks.<sup>63</sup>

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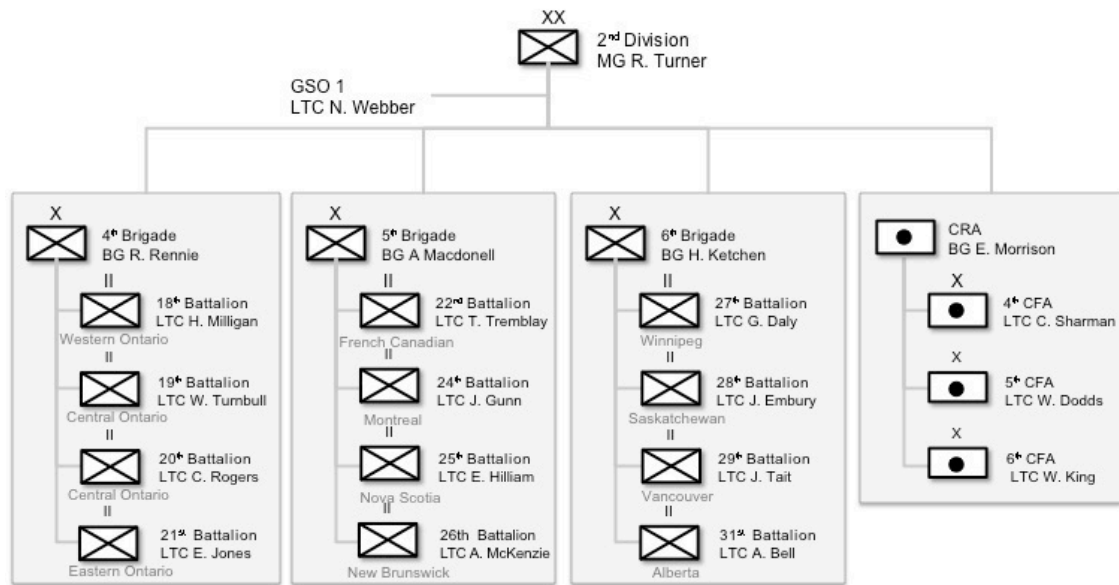
<sup>60</sup> Notes on Fighting in Somme, 21 August 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 167.

<sup>62</sup> Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army*. 189; Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson, 1914-18*: 217-219.

<sup>63</sup> Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918*: 178-184.

**Figure 11 2<sup>nd</sup> Division Organisation Chart – Courcellette, 15 September 1916**



The Canadian Corps anchored the juncture of the Reserve and Fourth Armies, where the British line-running east bent south. As a result, Canadian Corps' attacks would be on diverging lines. The corps was to attack with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division on the left and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division on the right. The selection of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division to make the primary attack at Courcellette signalled Byng's estimation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had the more difficult task and Byng could have just as readily chosen the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division to make the main thrust. Byng's decision, therefore, to rely on Turner and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division suggests Byng had confidence in the division's abilities.

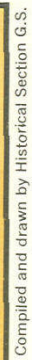
The battle took place on the reverse slope of the Pozières Ridge, won at such high cost by the Australians.<sup>64</sup> The Ridge ran gently down slope to the village of Courcellette that in turn overlooked a valley curving around it to the

<sup>64</sup> The Australian Corps suffered 23,000 casualties at the Somme and the majority were lost in taking and holding Pozières Ridge. Millar, "A Study in the Limitations of Command: General Sir William Birdwood and the A.I.F., 1914-1918," 141.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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north and east. The battle zone extended across a kilometre and half front and reached to a depth of two kilometres to encompass Courcellette.



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#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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The German defences consisted of a front-line trench, another intermediary trench running diagonally across the left front of the attack, and second line trenches, named Sugar and Candy. Sugar Trench, on the left, slanted across the front, such that the advance on the division's left was 400 metres, while Candy Trench, on the right, ran parallel with the front-line and was approximately 1,000 metres from the Canadian forward position. Located in front of Candy Trench was the strongpoint and battalion headquarters, the Sugar Refinery.<sup>65</sup> The Refinery was a sugar beet processing facility built of cement and brick that was critical in three respects.<sup>66</sup> The Germans had heavily fortified it, like the village of Courcellette, with deep dugouts impervious to all but the heaviest shells. It commanded the entire zone of the attack and was the sector's key defensive position. Finally, it was a valuable water source. The Somme generally had a shortage of surface water, so it was necessary to rely on water pipes or deep wells.<sup>67</sup> Water supply was repeatedly referred to in preparation for the battle and in after battle reviews.<sup>68</sup> The refinery was located over a deep well with an abundant water supply, because sugar beet processing required copious amounts of water. Local stories suggest the Germans piped water from the well, as far away as

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<sup>65</sup> It was also referred to as the Sugar Factory.

<sup>66</sup> Canadian Corps War Diary, Summary of Intelligence, 13 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

<sup>67</sup> Wells had to be as deep as 20 metres, Today the Somme countryside is dotted with water towers. Bennett, "Military Geography: Terrain Evaluation and the British Western Front 1914-1918," 14.

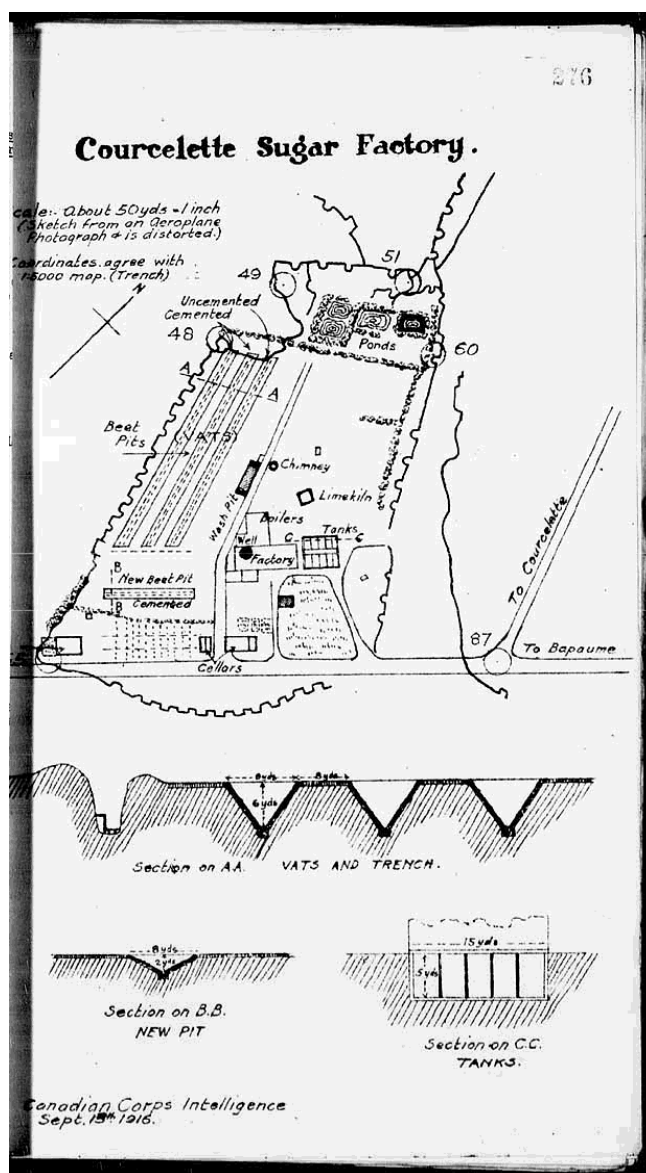
<sup>68</sup> Handwritten Notes on Lessons from Somme, Undated, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC; A.A.&Q.M.G. Branch - 2nd Canadian Division Report - Operations in the Somme, September 12th to 18th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.



#### 4 Won By My Infantry

Mouquet Farm, over two kilometres distant.<sup>69</sup> As a result, the refinery was critical to the German's hold on the sector, as its loss would appreciably increase the logistical burden of supplying water.<sup>70</sup>

Figure 12 Courcellette Sugar Refinery Intelligence Diagram<sup>71</sup>



<sup>69</sup> Paul Reed, *Courcellette* (London: Leo Cooper, 1998), 130. Paul Reed lived in the village, so was aware of the local stories.

<sup>70</sup> The nearest water source was probably Miraumont close to four kilometres north of Courcellette.

<sup>71</sup> Canadian Corps War Diary, Summary of Intelligence, 13 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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The 45<sup>th</sup> *Reserve Division*, the sister division to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's nemesis at St. Eloi the 46<sup>th</sup> *Reserve Division*, defended the sector. The division was formed in August 1914, and it was rushed to the front in October to take part in the First Battle of Ypres, where it suffered heavy losses. It remained in the Messines area afterwards, but moved to the Somme, in early September, with elements entering the line on 7 September. The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade, the left formation of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, attacked the II/210<sup>th</sup> *Reserve Regiment* and the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the right assaulted the II/211<sup>th</sup> *Reserve Regiment*, with the III/211<sup>th</sup> *Reserve* defending the Sugar Refinery. Garrisoning Courcellette was the remainder of the 210<sup>th</sup> *Reserve Regiment*, plus elements of the 133<sup>rd</sup> *Reserve Regiment* sent during the day to reinforce the badly battered 45<sup>th</sup> *Reserve Division*. Trench strength of the four companies in each battalion was approximately 200 men. A later report rated the division's morale as indifferent, although further in the war it was more highly regarded.<sup>72</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was to protect the shoulder of the Fourth Army and gain observation over the German Third Position and German artillery batteries in the valley running, to the south, behind Courcellette to Martinpuich.<sup>73</sup> Turner's objectives were to capture the German second line trenches Sugar and Candy, and the Sugar Refinery. The Reserve Army also wanted the Canadian Corps to probe Courcellette and capture it if possible.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Narrative of the Enemy's Side I. Battles of the Somme 1916, War Narrative Section CEF, July 1920, MG 30 E40, Erlebach Fonds; LAC; General Staff Intelligence Section, *Two Hundred and Fifty-One Divisions of the German Army Which Participated in the War (1914-1918)* (Government Publishing Office, 1920), 465.

<sup>73</sup> The Reserve Army, unlike the Fourth Army, had not reached the German Third Position.

<sup>74</sup> Reserve Army Preliminary Operations Order, 8 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v5069, LAC.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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Turner ordered his brigadiers to submit plans on 10 September with the suggestion that the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade attack with two battalions and the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade with three battalions because of its greater attack frontage and depth of advance.<sup>75</sup> Turner's initial plan, submitted on 11 September, was noteworthy in three respects.<sup>76</sup> First, he planned to dig jump-off trenches 100 to 200 metres closer to the German front-line before the attack to reduce the assault distance – this was by now a standard policy in the British Army on the Somme. Second, Turner resisted corps' wishes to probe Courcelette. Turner's reluctance stemmed from his concerns about German counterattacks from the village. Probing the village meant stopping the protective barrage, which would weaken the defences against a counterattack. Turner preferred making a prepared assault rather than counting on a German collapse.

Finally, Turner's planned use of tanks differed from that of the Fourth Army. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division received all six tanks assigned to the Reserve Army owing to the importance of its attack, and one group of three was assigned to each of the attacking brigades. The tanks were slower than infantry, vulnerable to shellfire, awkward, and prone to breakdowns and bogging down. The Fourth Army planned to use their tanks in the battle for the front-line. To accommodate their slow speed, the Fourth Army had the tanks advance before the infantry left their trenches, so the tanks reached the German front-line five minutes before the infantry. In a poor decision, each tank or group of tanks was protected by a 100-metre gap in the barrage,

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<sup>75</sup> 2nd CID Preliminary Orders GS 1166. 8 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>76</sup> 2nd CID Orders GS 1174 11 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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resulting in those portions of the German line escaping shelling. This was particularly fatal in those many cases when the tanks were incapacitated. Turner's plan called for the tanks to assist mopping up, so the tanks left at zero hour. This meant they would trail the infantry and could not intervene in the initial stages of the attack, but would not interfere in the infantry advance. There was a gap in the barrage on the front of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade but not the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade, possibly because of the shallowness of the advance.<sup>77</sup>

In reaction to Turner's proposed plan, the corps' final operational order explicitly ordered the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division to send patrols into Courcellette and that, thirty minutes after reaching the final objective, the protective barrage before Courcellette would lift to allow patrols to enter the village.<sup>78</sup> As the corps controlled the heavy artillery – critical for success – the corps tended to control the battle with the divisions having to accommodate themselves to the corps' plan.<sup>79</sup>

The Canadian Corps also provided detailed orders for the tanks that were wildly at variance with their actual capabilities. No one from the Reserve Army, including the Canadian Corps, attended the meetings with the

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<sup>77</sup> David J. Childs, "British Tanks 1915-18, Manufacture & Employment" (PhD, Glasgow University, 1996), 147-148; Peter Hart, *The Somme* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005), 371; Trevor Pidgeon, *The Tanks at Flers: An Account of the First Use of Tanks in War at the Battle of Flers-Courcellette, the Somme, 15th September 1916*, 2 vols. (Cobham [England]: Fairmile Books, 1995), 126-128; Hammond, "The Theory and Practice of Tank Cooperation with Other Arms on the Western Front in the First World War," 60-68.

<sup>78</sup> Canadian Corps Operational Order No. 46, 13 September 1916, Folder 30/File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4093, LAC.

<sup>79</sup> Radcliffe, the Corps BGGS, explained the narrow front and interdivisional reliefs meant the Corps was "the fighting unit to a great extent than has hitherto been the case." Canadian Corps Order G.612, 6 September 1916, Folder 43/File 2, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC; Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918*: 78.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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tank representatives to understand the tanks' actual capabilities, and the orders highlight this lack of experience.<sup>80</sup> There was no possibility for training with the tanks and select officers only saw the tanks on 10 September, described as a 'surreal August Bank Holiday.'<sup>81</sup>

The final version of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's operational order on 14 September reflected the corps' demands. It specified that seventy-three minutes after zero hour the barrage in front of Courcellette would lift and three patrols of one officer and thirty men from the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade would probe the village's defences.<sup>82</sup> Further, in the final conference at the Army headquarters, Gough agreed there was to be no organised attack on Courcellette until the Fourth Army was in position on the right, but he wanted the Canadians to push into Courcellette if they could do so without assistance.<sup>83</sup> Turner accurately anticipated the battle to be costly, as he warned the medical staff to plan for 3,000 wounded per day – the divisional medical units handled 3,250 men in the first thirty hours of the battle.<sup>84</sup>

Nine field artillery brigades supported the division's attack, with sixty-four heavy artillery pieces supporting the overall Canadian assault.<sup>85</sup> The resulting concentration was double that of the 1 July attack and, once the

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<sup>80</sup> Hammond, "The Theory and Practice of Tank Cooperation with Other Arms on the Western Front in the First World War," 59.

<sup>81</sup> 2nd Canadian Division G.345, 19 Sept 1916, Folder 107/File 8, RG 9 III C1 v3867, LAC; Christopher Campbell, *Band of Brigands: The First Men in Tanks* (London: HarperPress, 2007), 170.

<sup>82</sup> 2nd Canadian Division Operation Order No. 78, 14 September 1916, Folder 6/File 3, RG 9 III D1 v4677, LAC.

<sup>83</sup> Notes for Army Conference, 14 September 1916, Folder 43/File 13, RG 9 III C1 v3842, LAC.

<sup>84</sup> Macphail and Canada. Dept. of National Defence. Historical Section., *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-19. The Medical Services*: 89.

<sup>85</sup> Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916*, 2: 294; Campbell, "A Forgotten Victory: Courcellette, 15 September 1916," 31.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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attack depth is factored in, the concentration was five times.<sup>86</sup> Further, the artillery was firing on relatively less well-developed defences, with limited barbed wire in place, and the entire position was visible from Pozières Ridge. The artillery pounded German positions for three days before the attack and the constant pummelling degraded the German defences and defenders' morale and strength, as the battle's result demonstrates.

A creeping artillery barrage, a new tactic for the Canadians but the standard artillery tactic by this stage on the Somme, was the crucial element of the artillery support. The corps planned the barrage to lift at a relatively brisk rate of 100 metres every three minutes.<sup>87</sup> The creeping barrage was a response to the German practice of stationing machine guns and snipers in shell holes in the intervals between trenches.<sup>88</sup> The previous tactic of standing barrages on trench lines meant these forces were not hit.

As stipulated in Turner's initial plan, both brigades dug jump off trenches closer to the German lines. Despite heavy German artillery fire to disrupt the work, the brigades completed the trenches in time, albeit with losses. This ensured the first waves of the attack could reach the German front line in one to three minutes.<sup>89</sup>

The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the left attacked with the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion and the 27<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson, 1914-18*: 233.

<sup>87</sup> Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18*: 10. At Passchendaele the movement rate was lifts of 50 metres every four minutes. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 319.

<sup>88</sup> Jonathan Bailey, "British Artillery in the Great War," in Paddy Griffith (ed.), *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London: F. Cass, 1996), 25.

<sup>89</sup> Untitled (6th Brigade Report on Courcellette), 9 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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Battalion on the right and the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion responsible for mopping up. The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the right attacked with the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 20<sup>th</sup> Battalion, and the 18<sup>th</sup> Battalion on the right, and the 19<sup>th</sup> Battalion tasked with mopping up. The attack formation was deep, consisting of five or six waves.<sup>90</sup> This attack formation was potentially hazardous. It provided sufficient depth to supply considerable power to the attack, but it risked exposing the attackers to German artillery fire. If German resistance held up the initial waves, the German artillery would inflict heavy losses on the latter waves.

Before the Canadian assault, the Germans launched a surprise attack on the front of the 18<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> Battalions at 3:00 a.m. and again at 4:00 a.m. The 1<sup>st</sup> Division had captured sections of the German front-line in this sector, and the Germans were determined to retake them.<sup>91</sup> The trenches were quite close, so the Germans were able to enter at one point and capture a trench section. The two battalions quickly rallied, drove out the Germans, then attacked on schedule, and took all their objectives. As the Germans had planned to reinforce a successful attack, they packed the forward line with men, and these suffered severely from the Canadian bombardment.<sup>92</sup> It was, nevertheless, an impressive performance to recover from the attack and assault as planned. Turner's pride in his men shows in his later comment that

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<sup>90</sup> Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme, September 10th to 17th 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC; 6 CIB Report of Operations, September 15th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>91</sup> Translation of a German Document, 4th Brigade War Diary, September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4880, LAC.

<sup>92</sup> Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme, September 10th to 17th 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC; Corrigall, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force: In the Great War, 1914-1918*: 80.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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the attack “nearly upset the applecart and it was only the men’s determination and high spirits that saved the situation.”<sup>93</sup>

15 September dawned brightly with a light breeze blowing dust and debris in the face of the Germans.<sup>94</sup> Promptly at 6:20 a.m., the barrage commenced and the infantry advanced at 6:24. Within minutes, the first objectives fell, as the artillery had shattered the German defenders and their morale. The infantry pressed on in the face of heavy machine gun and rifle fire and overwhelmed the defenders.<sup>95</sup> Although the German protective artillery barrage came down within three minutes of the attack, the Canadians advanced so quickly they escaped the worst of the shelling.<sup>96</sup> By 6:55 a.m., the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade reached the Sugar Refinery and the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion skilfully launched an attack from three directions that captured the position, 125 prisoners, and a battalion commander.<sup>97</sup>

An hour after the start of the attack, the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade had captured all of its objectives. The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade’s 27<sup>th</sup> Battalion suffered heavily from machine gun fire from a strong point outside of its sector, but an officer, showing commendable initiative, led an attack from an unengaged side and knocked it out. Another company commander realising the advantage of a dominating position outside of his sector seized it.<sup>98</sup> Turner’s insistence on inculcating initiative was paying off.

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<sup>93</sup> R.E.W. Turner Comments BOH, DHS 3-17 (vol 5), RG 24 v1739, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 449.

<sup>95</sup> 21st Battalion War Diary, 15 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4930, LAC.

<sup>96</sup> 6 CIB Report of Operations September 15th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>97</sup> Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme September 10th to 17th 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>98</sup> 6 CIB Report of Operations September 15th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.



#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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The losses in the attack were primarily from rifle and machine gun fire, as the rapidity of the Canadian advance disrupted the German defensive arrangements. It is possible the swift Canadian advance forced the German field artillery batteries stationed between Courcellette and Martinpuich to retreat, thus interrupting the German artillery support. The situation was so dire that the German Army Group commander, Crown Prince Rupprecht, worried the whole sector would rupture.<sup>99</sup>

With the capture of all the objectives, the division needed to consolidate its gains and potentially exploit the weakened German defences. At 8:05, Turner learned the 15<sup>th</sup> Scottish Division had closed up to the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade's right flank, and at 8:20 the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade finally reported all of its objectives gained.<sup>100</sup> With this information and the knowledge the Germans were in considerable disarray, Turner made three critical decisions. At 8:35, he ordered the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade to capture Gunpit Trench, 300 metres further east. The corps heavy artillery would support the attack. At the same time, he issued a warning order to the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade to prepare to capture Courcellette later that day.<sup>101</sup> Finally, he refused a request from the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade to attack Courcellette. The 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion had pushed three patrols towards Courcellette and Ketchen was convinced he could capture the village. However, the standing barrage that was supposed to have lifted remained blocking the entry

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<sup>99</sup> Duffy, *Through German Eyes: The British and the Somme 1916*: 218.

<sup>100</sup> Reports from the 6th Brigade battalions took over an hour to reach division. Summary of Operations of 2nd Canadian Division September 15th, & 16th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC; 2nd Division GS War Diary, 15 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.

<sup>101</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, 15 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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into the village.<sup>102</sup> Turner refused Ketchen's request and this decision will be analysed later.<sup>103</sup>

The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade attack was aided by gaining contact with the front-line via visual communications, so messages did not have to be sent by runner. The hastily prepared attack with depleted forces was successful, because of the indomitable spirit of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and the broken state of the defences. The German front-line, support, and reserve forces for the sector were destroyed and only remnants were left to defend Gunpit Trench.<sup>104</sup>

In what William Philpott described as "an impressive display of fieldcraft and small-unit leadership" the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade seized Courcelette that same day.<sup>105</sup> At 11:10 a.m., the Canadian Corps, responding to Gough's wishes to take Courcelette, ordered Turner to capture the village. Gough was so anxious about the attack that he visited the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division headquarters in the afternoon for assurance that the division would succeed.<sup>106</sup> The corps did not confirm the attack and timing until 1:25 p.m., and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division only issued its operation order at 2:45. This left the brigade with limited time to conduct reconnaissance, prepare plans, and move into position before the planned attack at 6:00. The brigade had to start its advance at 5:00 p.m. down the Pozières Ridge to reach the start line in time for the attack, which required a

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<sup>102</sup> The 31st Battalion wanted the barrage lifted. It is unclear from the evidence if the barrage was ever lifted as per the Corps' artillery plan or was lifted and then restored.

<sup>103</sup> Untitled (6th Brigade Report on Courcelette), 9 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>104</sup> Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme September 10th to 17th 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>105</sup> William James Philpott, *Bloody Victory: The Sacrifice on the Somme and the Making of the Twentieth Century* (London: Little, Brown, 2009), 366.

<sup>106</sup> Turner to Hetty, 16 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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forty-five degree change of front from the division's earlier line of advance. It was a superb performance to attack on time and take its objectives.

The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion attacked on the left, with the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion on the right and the 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion to mop up the village. The two battalions punched through the German defences, advanced through the ruins in bitter hand-to-hand fighting, and pushed on to a line on the other side of the village.<sup>107</sup> The 26<sup>th</sup> Battalion had the difficult task of rooting out the German survivors from their underground defences – a task that took the night and most of the next day to complete.<sup>108</sup>

Once in position, the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade had to repel repeated, fiercely pressed counterattacks over the next three nights. The Germans were determined to retake the village and the Sugar Refinery. Their loss meant the Germans would have to abandon a considerable swath of territory, because of the observation advantages holding the village conveyed. The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was attacked four times on the night of 15/16 September and the 22<sup>nd</sup> seven times. The 22<sup>nd</sup> had to face another six counterattacks on the next two nights, as well.<sup>109</sup> Lieutenant-Colonel T. Tremblay of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion wrote in his diary "if hell is as bad as what I have seen at Courcellette, I would not wish my worst enemy to go there."<sup>110</sup>

The hard fighting for Courcellette was costly, with the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade

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<sup>107</sup> The orders called for an advance 300 metres beyond the village and the Brigade's report claimed that line was reached. Later map positions do not show such an advance.

<sup>108</sup> 5th CIB Operations Report B.M.L. 216, 20 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>109</sup> *ibid*; Serge Bernier, *The Royal 22e Regiment, 1914-1999* (Montreal: Art Global, 2000), 48.

<sup>110</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 171.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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reporting losses of 57 officers and 1,267 men. In compensation, the Germans lost more severely with the capture of 1,055 prisoners, including a battalion and regimental commander by the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. The brigade also captured three artillery pieces, seven machine guns, and seven trench mortars.<sup>111</sup>

Essentially, the brigade had destroyed the 210<sup>th</sup> Reserve Regiment, which had a loss rate of nearly 70%, and punished the 133<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Regiment.<sup>112</sup> The 211<sup>th</sup> Reserve Regiment, which faced the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, suffered 2,162 casualties or 72% of its strength. The German high command had to pull the 45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division out of the line because of these losses.<sup>113</sup>

Overall, the division had paid a high price for its success. Casualties reported for the period 10-19 September amounted to 163 officers and 3,790 men.<sup>114</sup> The division would only receive a handful of replacements before it was committed again, and these replacements received inadequate training in England for their coming ordeal.

While the weather was excellent for the attack, the shelling so smashed the battlefield that pack animals could not traverse the wasteland on the night of 15/16 September. It was not until the pioneers built a road the next night that the animals could bring supplies forward of Pozières Ridge. Rations, water, and, most importantly, ammunition had to be brought by carrying

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<sup>111</sup> 5th CIB Operations Report B.M.L. 216, 20 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>112</sup> Ian Passingham, *All the Kaiser's Men: The Life and Death of the German Army on the Western Front 1914-1918* (Stroud: Sutton, 2003), 123.

<sup>113</sup> Narrative of the Enemy's Side I. Battles of the Somme 1916, War Narrative Section CEF, July 1920, MG 30 E40, Erlebach Fonds; LAC.

<sup>114</sup> A.A.&Q.M.G. Branch - 2nd Canadian Division Report - Operations in the Somme, September 12th to 18th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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parties and the wounded evacuated by stretcher-bearers. As a result, there was no opportunity for exploitation of the gains of 15 September with such a tenuous supply line.<sup>115</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had a score to settle with the Germans, and it attacked with verve, skill, and a degree of brutality. The Canadians killed prisoners and Germans attempting to surrender, contributing further to their reputation for committing atrocities.<sup>116</sup> Turner admitted in a letter home to his wife "It was bayonet work - and some [battalions] took no prisoners."<sup>117</sup> Even official reports suggested prisoners were not taken. The 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade reporting "where the occupants promptly surrendered they were allowed to become prisoners." In another incident on the front of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, an officer was killed attempting to accept the surrender of a party of Germans resulting in the death of the entire party in retaliation.<sup>118</sup> Another consideration contributing to the deaths was a concern that surrendered Germans, if unguarded, might pick up discarded weapons and resume fighting. Units typically did not have sufficient men to provide escorts for German prisoners. Lance Cattermole, a private in the 21<sup>st</sup> Battalion, recounted later that the battalion ordered no prisoners taken until the final objective was consolidated.<sup>119</sup>

The main factor was revenge. Paul Hodges in his thesis on atrocities wrote "In soldiers' diaries and letters by far the most frequently-expressed

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<sup>115</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>116</sup> Paul Dominick Hodges, "The British Infantry and Atrocities on the Western Front, 1914-1918" (PhD, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2006), 7.

<sup>117</sup> Turner to Hetty, 16 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

<sup>118</sup> Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme September 10th to 17th 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>119</sup> Attack on the Somme - 15th and 16th September 1916, Lance Cattermole, 92/26/1, IWM.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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motivations for perpetrating atrocity were feelings of retaliation and revenge. These powerful feelings seem to have been endemic during the war."<sup>120</sup> The Germans had subjected the division to a year of misery, mining, sniping, and the wretchedness of St. Eloi, and now the division had a chance for revenge.<sup>121</sup> This combined with the heavy losses made the Canadians reluctant to take German prisoners, which makes the prisoner totals for the day all the more impressive.<sup>122</sup> Revenge was an understood and accepted mechanism on the Western Front, and the need to strike back would be that much greater because it was long delayed.<sup>123</sup> The division took full advantage of its opportunity, and it appears there was little to no attempt by commanders, including Turner, to restrain the troops – this would have carried the risk of inhibiting their offensive spirit.<sup>124</sup>

The Battle of Flers-Courcelette is famous for the first use of tanks in battle. Of the six tanks assigned to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, two were able to contribute to the battle, and they only assisted with the later stages of taking of the Sugar Refinery.<sup>125</sup> The division later recommended employing tanks for mopping up to free men for other duties, but Turner was cautious about their

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<sup>120</sup> Hodges, "The British Infantry and Atrocities on the Western Front, 1914-1918," 6.

<sup>121</sup> Hewgill Diary Entry, 16 September 1916, MG 30 E16 v1, Hewgill Fonds; LAC; A.A.&Q.M.G. Branch - 2nd Canadian Division Report - Operations in the Somme, September 12th to 18th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>122</sup> Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 451.

<sup>123</sup> Tim Cook, "The Politics of Surrender: Canadian Soldiers and the Killing of Prisoners in the Great War," *The Journal of Military History* 70(2006): 652; Hodges, "The British Infantry and Atrocities on the Western Front, 1914-1918," 37.

<sup>124</sup> The Canadians were not the only ones to not take prisoners. Lieutenant-General Jacob of the II Corps on the left flank of the Canadian Corps ordered no prisoners be taken in August. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18*: 72.

<sup>125</sup> Reports are unclear the extent to which the tanks contributed to the capture of the Refinery. Pidgeon, *The Tanks at Flers: An Account of the First Use of Tanks in War at the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, the Somme, 15th September 1916*: 128-130.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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value. Turner also suggested that a sufficient number of tanks be used to exploit success, as he believed the division could have captured Courcellette and Gunpit Trench by 10 a.m.<sup>126</sup> The tanks encouraged the infantry, discouraged the Germans, attracted German fire, and assisted in the later stages of the capture of the Sugar Refinery.<sup>127</sup> Of the four effects, the combat one was the least important. Turner's tank comments were based on the different tactical use of tanks on the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's front and were more in keeping with the actual capabilities of the tanks on the Somme. Turner was adamant that "Too much credit must not be placed on to the tanks yet. Courcellette was won by my infantry."<sup>128</sup>

Turner's responsibility for the attack consisted of the pre-battle preparation, the plan, and the conduct of the battle. The division's success illustrated the effectiveness of the training before the assault. A central thread running through all the training was initiative. There were ample examples of initiative and officers and men demonstrating flexibility and responsiveness to changing conditions. The division could not have achieved its victory without thorough preparation. Turner has to share the credit for the preparation with Byng and Webber, as well as having the opportunity to conduct two weeks of intense training.

The principal features of the attack plan – timing, objectives, and

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<sup>126</sup> 2nd Canadian Division G.345 19 Sept 1916, Folder 107/File 8, RG 9 III C1 v3867, LAC.

<sup>127</sup> Calder, *The History of the 28th (Northwest) Battalion, C. E. F. (October 1914-June 1919) from the Memoirs of Brigadier General Alexander Ross*: 94-99; Corrigall, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force: In the Great War, 1914-1918*: 83.

<sup>128</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 22 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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artillery support – were determined at the army and corps level, leaving divisions with limited scope for planning. Turner pushed much of the responsibility for the attack planning down to the brigades, including the selection of battalions and attack formation. Turner's primary contributions to the plan were ordering the digging of the jump-off trenches, assigning tanks to mopping up, and his thwarted attempt to avoid having to probe Courcelette.

Turner's three morning decisions demonstrated a balance between caution and aggressiveness. He showed wariness in not unleashing the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, until he knew all the objectives were taken and the British were up on the right. The attack of the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade was aggressive considering its casualties and disruption after an assault. The attack was only justified if Turner were confident the Germans were badly disordered – which they were. This is an indication of Turner's improved sense of the battle.

He was also cautious in refusing the request from the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade to capture Courcelette. Both Ketchen and Lieutenant-Colonel A. Bell of the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, who were closest to the situation, believed the village was ripe for seizure.<sup>129</sup> The issue, however, is whether the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion could have taken the objective and retained it. Turner was concerned about a German counterattack from Courcelette and so was loath to risk advancing even further with only minimal artillery support. Courcelette was a difficult objective – heavily fortified, the headquarters of the 210<sup>th</sup> Reserve Regiment, and garrisoned by at least portions of an unengaged battalion. The 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion would have attacked with limited

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<sup>129</sup> Untitled (6th Brigade Report on Courcelette), 9 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.



#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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artillery support, so the odds were against it. Even if the Alberta battalion had managed to take the village, it would have experienced considerable difficulties in consolidating its hold. It took the efforts of three battalions to capture and hold Courcelette later in the day, albeit after the village was reinforced. The many dugouts and cellars made consolidation a costly and time-consuming challenge. It is unlikely the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion could have held Courcelette, even if reinforced by units from the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade. On balance, therefore, Turner's decision, while cautious, was correct, especially given the later success of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade.

Communications improved significantly in the battle, but there were still the same problems with getting accurate and timely information from the forward battalions. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division 'Lessons Learned' document lamented "Battalion reports seemed to be invariably unreliable."<sup>130</sup> This was a problem that was universal and not unique to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.<sup>131</sup> What was different at Courcelette versus St. Eloi was the additional means of gathering intelligence. Aircraft contact patrols, visual communications, reports from Forward Observation Officers (FOO), and messages sent by pigeon that all provided useful data to Turner. For instance, a contact patrol dropped a message at 7:30 a.m. at the forward division headquarters regarding positions it had identified at 7:00 to 7:20.<sup>132</sup> Turner could now make decisions based on the

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<sup>130</sup> Lessons from Somme 2nd CID 2.C.D.-G.S.1254, 25 November 1916, Folder 20/File 5, RG 9 III C3 v4089, LAC.

<sup>131</sup> Prior and Wilson, *Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson, 1914-18*: 182.

<sup>132</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, 15 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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actual situation at the front and keep the corps accurately informed. Turner was still looking for improvements and ordered an enhancement in information transmission.<sup>133</sup>

Turner and his brigadiers were understandably jubilant at the division's success.<sup>134</sup> Turner wrote "For 12 months I have waited with the Division for this opportunity. God knows they [his men] acted in a magnificent way, nothing losses or anything else could stop them. They were out to even old scores of the Ypres Salient."<sup>135</sup> Congratulations poured in and included a warm letter from the former BGGH Harington.<sup>136</sup> Gough reported the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade attack "across the open without any jumping-off place in the nature of trenches is without parallel in the history of the present campaign."<sup>137</sup> Haig was pleased as well, writing in his diary "The two Canadian [Brigades] which took the Sugar Factory and joining trenches were those which were to have failed at St. Eloi in the spring. Sent a word of thanks and congratulations to them."<sup>138</sup> Rennie, writing to Turner well after the war, commented the attitude towards the division and its commanders improved because of the success.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> He wanted a reduction in verbiage, use of pre-printed sketch maps, and elimination of 'panic' messages that inevitably proved false. Information Improvements Needed, 2nd Canadian Division, G.379, 21 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>134</sup> Ketchen to Carson, 16 September 1916, 6-K-38, RG 9 III A1 v167, LAC.

<sup>135</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 17 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>136</sup> Harington to Turner, 17 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.6, 19710147-007, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>137</sup> Campbell, "A Forgotten Victory: Courcellette, 15 September 1916," 44.

<sup>138</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>139</sup> Rennie to Turner, 20 August 1938, GAQ 5-82, RG 24 v1826, LAC.

### **Futility: 28 September and 1 October**

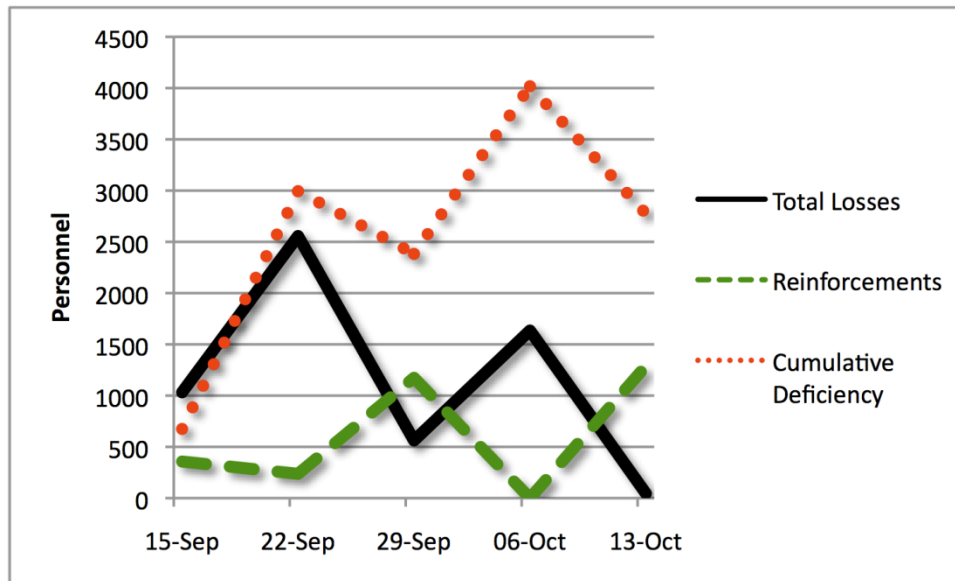
The division left the line on 18 September to rest and recover. However, it received only 594 replacements up to 22 September, against a total loss in the weeks ending 15 and 22 September of 3,589.<sup>140</sup> The officer situation was particularly dire as it only received 4 officers to replace 177 lost.<sup>141</sup> It received a further 1,174 essentially untrained other ranks the week ending 29 September, and the battalions would have had little opportunity to remedy their training deficiencies before their next battle. The reasons for the inadequate training are discussed in Chapter 5. The chart below shows the disastrous reinforcement state of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

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<sup>140</sup> These losses differ from those quoted for Courcellette because of the different reporting timeframe.

<sup>141</sup> This probably understates the problems as the total losses include only killed and evacuated wounded but not the lightly wounded, who might not be ready to return in time for the next engagement. The total wounded in this two-week period were 3,047 versus 2,036 evacuated and the evacuated figure would include the ill or injured in an accident. Casualties and Reinforcements, Appendix 493, 2nd Division GS War Diary, October 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.

**Figure 13 Losses, Reinforcements, and Cumulative Deficiency 2<sup>nd</sup> Division for Weeks Ending 15 September to 13 October 1916<sup>142</sup>**



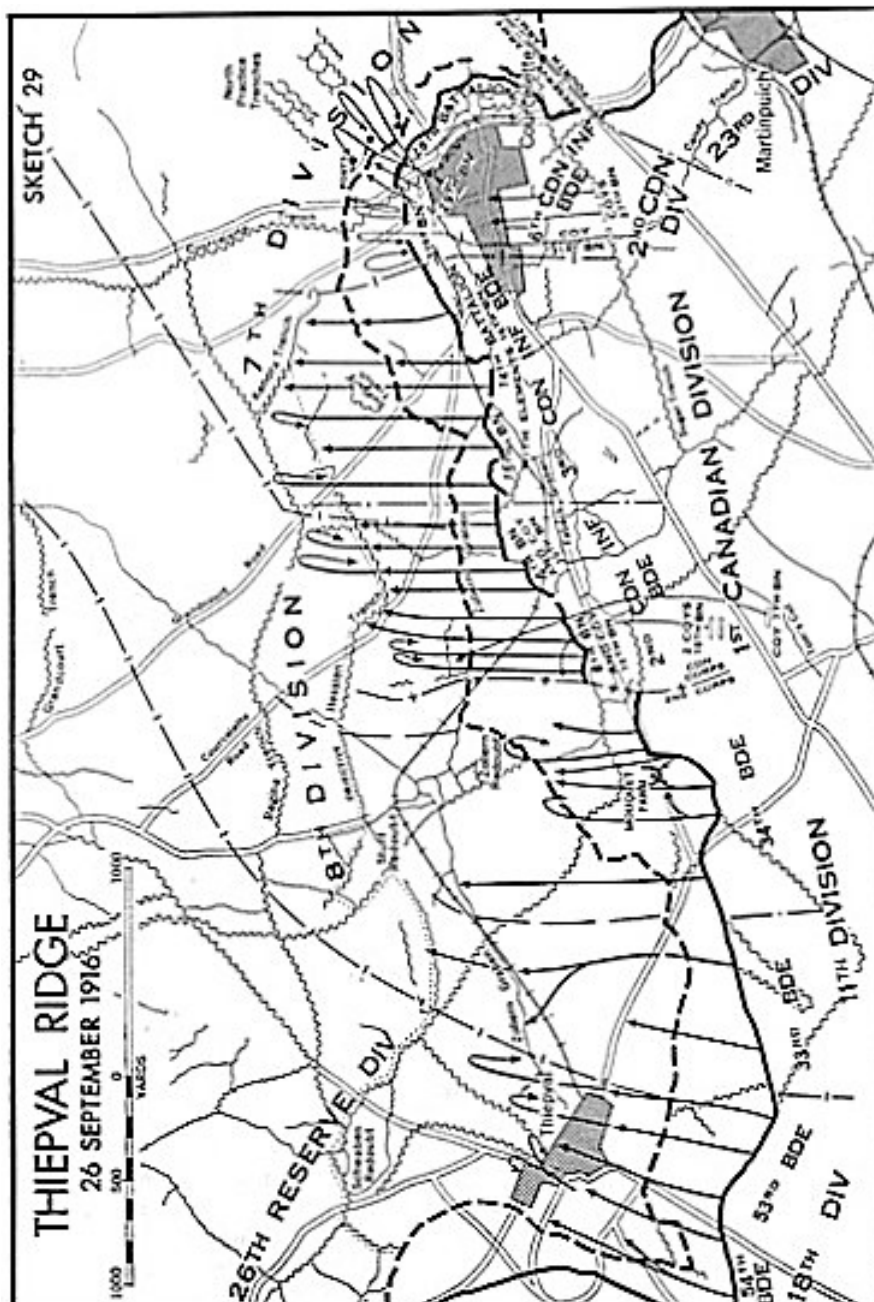
The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade returned to the line on 25 September just in time to participate in the Battle of Thiepval Ridge on 26 September. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was to anchor the shoulder of the Reserve Army's attack to the north. Unlike Courcellette, there was limited preparation time, as the Canadian Corps only issued its operational order on 24 September giving the division and brigade only two days to make arrangements.<sup>143</sup> Time was so short that the division could not prepare the jump-off trenches in time, and reported that it was experiencing problems in fitting troops into the forming up areas.<sup>144</sup> The German interdiction fire was troublesome, with the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion suffering twenty-five casualties just moving into line.<sup>145</sup>

<sup>142</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>143</sup> Operation Order No. 55, Canadian Corps War Diary, Appendix II/18, September 1916 RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

<sup>144</sup> Canadian Corps War Diary, 26 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

<sup>145</sup> Hewgill Diary Entry, 25 September 1916, MG 30 E16 v1, Hewgill Fonds; LAC.



Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D. (1964) Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919  
Sketch 29 Battle of Thiepval Ridge, 26 September 1916, Page 175  
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2011

The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade would attack, supported by two tanks, with the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion attacking a short distance on the right and the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion attacking on a longer advance of 400 metres on the right. The objective was to protect the right flank of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division, which was responsible for the

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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main Canadian attack.<sup>146</sup>

The attack was launched at 12:35 p.m., but the Canadian barrage did not hit the German front-line, and German artillery, machine gun, and rifle fire stopped the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, while the 29<sup>th</sup> captured their objective.<sup>147</sup> The German barrage isolated the Canadian front-line, indicating the ineffectiveness of the counter-battery fire. Captain D.E. Macintyre's award of a Military Cross for passing through the German barrage to reach the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion headquarters and return is an indication of the severity of the German artillery fire. The two tanks were singularly ineffective, with one knocked out when it attacked an hour early, because the commander forgot about a time change.<sup>148</sup>

The 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion made a second attack at 11:00 p.m., but only took the right half of its objective.<sup>149</sup> The situation was so confused that the next day, the battalion still did not have a clear idea of what it held.<sup>150</sup> This confusion travelled up the chain of command, so commanders had no firm notion of the situation, but the corps was insistent that the gap between the 1<sup>st</sup> Division and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division be closed.<sup>151</sup> The Canadian artillery, despite repeated shoots, was unable to suppress the German defences, and the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion, even reinforced, was too weak to capture the entire objective.

The situation changed, as the success of the British II Corps and the 1<sup>st</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Operational Order No. 83, 2nd Division GS War Diary, Appendix 433, 24 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.

<sup>147</sup> Singer, *History of Thirty-First Battalion C.E.F.*: 163.

<sup>148</sup> H.D.B. Ketchen Comments BOH, DHS 3-17 (vol 5), RG 24 v1739, LAC.

<sup>149</sup> 6th Brigade Report, C.241, 30 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>150</sup> Hewgill Diary Entry, 27 September 1916, MG 30 E16 v1, Hewgill Fonds; LAC.

<sup>151</sup> See the Canadian Corps War Diary for 26 and 27 September to see evidence of the confusion. Canadian Corps War Diary, 26 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC; Canadian Corps War Diary, 27 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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Division on the left unhinged the German line, compelling the Germans to fall back to the Regina Trench line. The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade notified Turner of the withdrawal in the late afternoon of 27 September. Turner ordered Ketchen to push out patrols and requested two reserve battalions from Byng to help add force to the follow-up.<sup>152</sup> Turner was, however, again wary and would not allow the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade to advance until the two battalions had closed up to the front-line early the next morning.<sup>153</sup> There was considerable uncertainty as to how far the Germans were withdrawing, with reports suggesting the German infantry had panicked and abandoned Regina Trench. At one point, the 31<sup>st</sup> Battalion incorrectly claimed to occupy Regina Trench.<sup>154</sup> Turner believed the Germans botched a formation relief and had left the line effectively empty.<sup>155</sup> But, by the time the brigade launched a more substantial effort, the Germans had re-occupied the trench. The division received conflicting reports over the next two days about the exact position of the Canadian and German positions. Probably this period provoked Turner's later criticism that battalion reports were invariably wrong.<sup>156</sup>

Complicating Turner's task was the Reserve Army's repeated orders to keep in touch with the 23<sup>rd</sup> British Division on its right flank.<sup>157</sup> The 23<sup>rd</sup> British Division was advancing east along the Albert-Bapaume road and was

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<sup>152</sup> Canadian Corps War Diary, 27 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

<sup>153</sup> H.D.B. Ketchen Comments BOH, DHS 3-17 (vol 5), RG 24 v1739, LAC.

<sup>154</sup> 5th CIB Operations Report, Night of September 26/27 to Night of October 1/2, B.M.L. 330, 7 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>155</sup> Turner Diary Entry, Undated (27 or 28 September 1916), 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>156</sup> Lessons from Somme 2nd CID 2.C.D.-G.S.1254, 25 November 1916, Folder 20/File 5, RG 9 III C3 v4089, LAC.

<sup>157</sup> Canadian Corps War Diary, 28 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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the left flank of the Fourth Army. The 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade's main attack axis was to the north, so it had to advance across a front of 120 degrees. This diverging axis of advance meant the brigade had to be vigilant to prevent gaps opening in the line.

During this period, Turner continued his policy of visiting the frontlines to see the conditions and be seen. Captain D.E. Macintyre wrote in his diary "Met Gen'l Turner in SUGAR trench. One was nearly always sure of seeing him up in the line somewhere."<sup>158</sup> Turner also worked long hours. He reported he laboured to 4 a.m. on 28 September and was back at work at 6:30 a.m. indicating his stamina and capacity for hard work was undiminished.<sup>159</sup> Indolence was not one of Turner's flaws.

The Canadian Corps ordered the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division to attack again on 1 October at 3:15 p.m., as part of another Reserve Army offensive. The order provoked Turner's reaction of "We have to attack again!!"<sup>160</sup> The two exclamation marks indicate Turner's frustration with the continued hasty attacks and destruction of his division. The ongoing probing attacks meant it took time for the division to locate the German front-line, with a resulting decrease in artillery fire accuracy and ability to suppress the defences.<sup>161</sup> The division was again hurried into an under-prepared assault.

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<sup>158</sup> Macintyre Diary Entry, 26 September 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC. For a good discussion of the impact of visits, see Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale, and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War*: 98.

<sup>159</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 28 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>160</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 30 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>161</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, 28 and 29 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.



#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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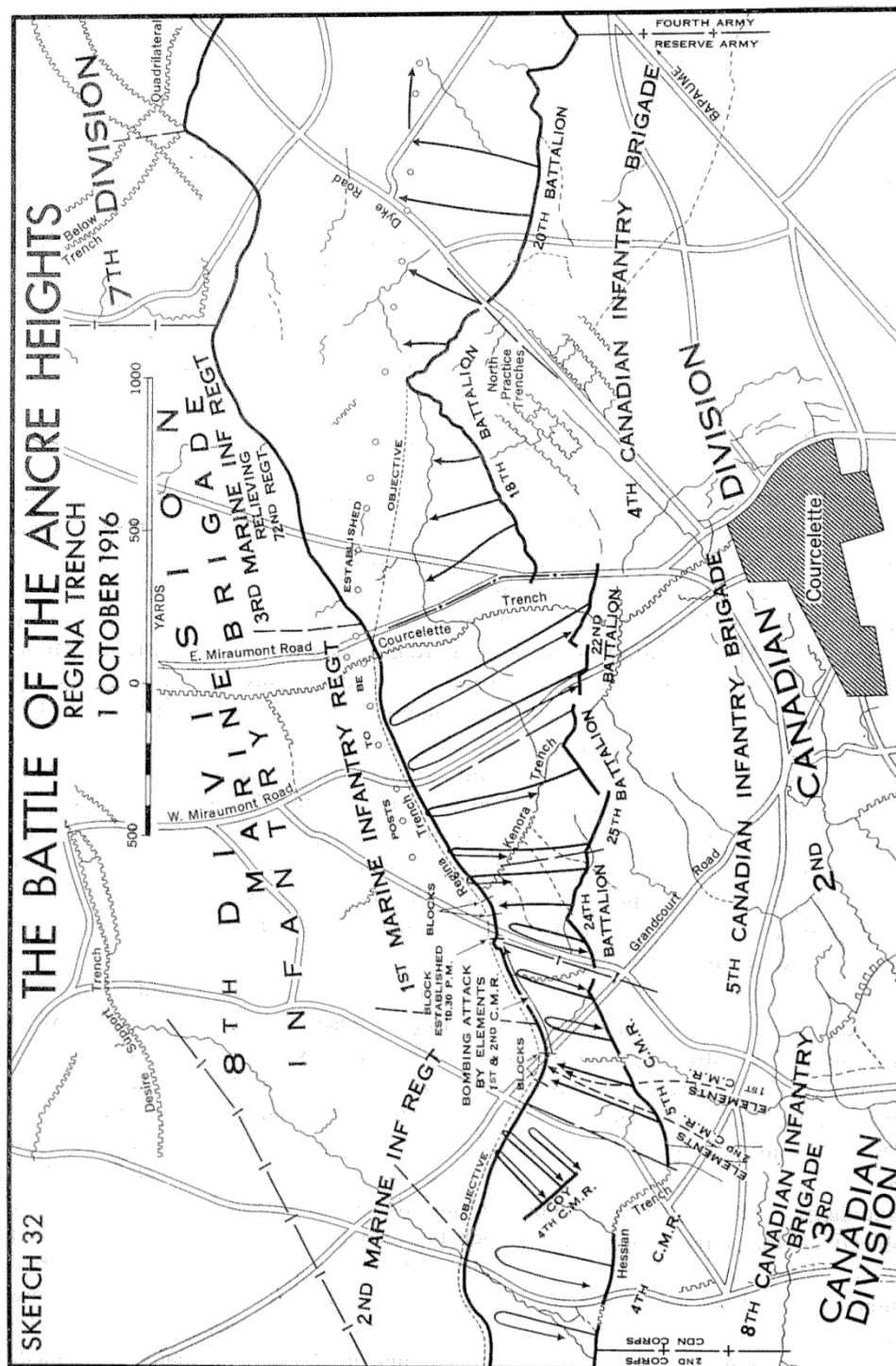
The attack was part of a larger engagement, the Battle of Ancre Heights, and was a component of a series of assaults designed to position the Reserve Army for a major offensive by mid-October.<sup>162</sup> The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Brigades in line, with the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade responsible for the primary attack to the north, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade on the right to advance east to keep in touch with the 23<sup>rd</sup> British Division.<sup>163</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Reserve Army Order, S.G.21/0/51, 28 September 1916, App I/1 Canadian Corps War Diary, October 1916 RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

<sup>163</sup> 2nd Division Operational Order No. 84, 30 September 1916, Folder 30/File 3, RG 9 III C3 v4093, LAC.

Map 10 Battle of Ancre Heights, 1 October 1916



Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, C.D. (1964) Canadian Expeditionary Force 1914-1919  
Sketch 30 Battle of Ancre Heights, 1 October 1916, Page 181  
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Regina Trench was a much more challenging defensive position than

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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that attacked on 15 September. Hidden on a reverse slope of a small ridge and protected by a three metre wide belt of wire, Regina Trench was a formidable obstacle. In addition, the Germans deployed troops and machine guns in front and behind the trench, which widened the zone the artillery had to suppress.<sup>164</sup> Without direct observation of the trench, the artillery bombardment was far less accurate and thus less effective than at Courcellette. The *Marine Division*, a higher quality unit than the *45<sup>th</sup> Reserve Division*, defended Regina Trench.<sup>165</sup> The *Marine Division*, formed from the *Naval Corps* defending the Belgium coast, had not seen much action, so it had a high percentage of pre-war active troops and NCOs that contributed to its élan.<sup>166</sup>

The exertions at Courcellette severely weakened the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, and it entered the line with a trench strength of just 1,717 men.<sup>167</sup> The 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was so attenuated that it consisted of only three weak companies all of which had to attack.<sup>168</sup> As a further burden, the assault distances ranged from 300 meters on the left to 800 metres on the brigade's right.

The exhaustion and weakened state of the brigade prompted protests by the battalion and brigade commander, on 30 September. Hilliam of the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion, in a carefully reasoned complaint, argued success was 'highly

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<sup>164</sup> Captain Macintyre's Report, 2 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>165</sup> Beach, "British Intelligence and the German Army, 1914-1918," 176-177.

<sup>166</sup> Narrative of the Enemy's Side I. Battles of the Somme 1916, War Narrative Section CEF, July 1920, MG 30 E40, Erlebach Fonds; LAC.

<sup>167</sup> It should have had a trench strength of close to 3,000 men. 5th CIB Operations Report, Night of September 26/27 to Night of October 1/2, B.M.L. 330, 7 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>168</sup> Report of 22nd (French Canadian) Battalion, 17 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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problematical.' In language seldom seen in official reports, Hilliam claimed the

Very serious gruelling and ghastly experience of the last two days particularly have produced the inevitable reaction of physical and moral lassitude. If ordered out they will of course obey orders but the spirit of 15<sup>th</sup> will not be there.<sup>169</sup>

Macdonell, the brigade commander, concurred and claimed the brigade's trench strength was reduced to less than 1,200 men.<sup>170</sup>

Turner agreed and escalated the matter to Byng on 1 October. Rather than basing the remonstrance on the weakness of the brigade, he did it on evidence of uncut wire. At 7:50 a.m., Turner, on receipt of air photos taken the previous day, complained to the corps that he "did not consider that artillery preparation on REGINA TRENCH and KENORA TRENCH as shown ... is sufficient."<sup>171</sup> Turner then called Brigadier-General H. Burstall, the corps artillery commander, again shortly after to emphasise the importance of the artillery preparation. Burstall assured Turner that the preponderance of the artillery fire was to take place that morning. Turner's complaints resulted in Byng agreeing at 9:10 a.m. to give the artillery more time to cut the wire, but added the admonition that the division was to remain in the line until it attained all of its objectives.<sup>172</sup> The Reserve Army was not so understanding and pressured Byng to make the attack, and so at 1:15 p.m., the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade

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<sup>169</sup> Field Message, Hilliam to 5th Brigade, 12:30 P.M., 30 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>170</sup> 5th Brigade, B.M. 357, 30 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>171</sup> 2nd Division GS War Diary, 1 October 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.

<sup>172</sup> *ibid.*

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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received the unwelcome news that it was to attack as planned.<sup>173</sup>

Once again, Turner demonstrated his moral courage in protesting an attack destined to fail, but the scenario is perplexing in two respects. Turner did not base his concerns on the weak state of the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade, but on the uncut wire. Possibly, he realised that no objection grounded on numerical weakness would be sustained, as witnessed by the 14<sup>th</sup> Battalion, having to attack when it could only muster seventy-five men.<sup>174</sup> Aerial photographs, however, were irrefutable. Byng's willingness to grant Turner additional time is puzzling, as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's attack was part of a larger offensive and even a corps commander had limited scope to derail a larger attack, so it is not surprising that Gough would impose the original plan.

Why did Byng keep the sorely weakened 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in the line for the 1 October attack? Four factors probably contributed to Byng's decision – the previous success of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, the uncertainty of what positions the Germans were holding, intelligence reports suggesting the Germans were faltering, and Gough's longer-range plans. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division had won a signal victory at Courcellette, and Byng likely overestimated its remaining combat power. The several days of confusion after the German 27 September withdrawal, meant it was not until 29 September that the requirement for an all-out attack was apparent. There was likely then insufficient time to replace the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division and attack on time.

Reports from Haig's chief intelligence officer, Brigadier-General John

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<sup>173</sup> Macintyre Diary Entry, 1 October 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC.

<sup>174</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 178.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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Charteris at this time showed his belief that the Germans were failing.

Charteris, writing to his counterpart at the War Office, on 1 October, claimed

We are getting very optimistic here with regard to the fighting. There is no doubt that the German is a changed man ... His tail is down, he surrenders freely, and on several occasions he has thrown down his rifle and ran away, and altogether there is hope that a really bad rot may set in any day.<sup>175</sup>

Further, the purported abandonment of Regina Trench suggested a German panic, leading Byng to suppose the Germans were not that formidable. Turner was less sanguine and more accurate in a letter to his wife that "I do not believe the statements current – the bosche is Not [sic] half beaten yet."<sup>176</sup>

The final and likely most critical factor was Gough's planned series of attacks. The Reserve Army issued an order on 28 September for a set of objective lines for attacks on 1, 4, and 10 October.<sup>177</sup> The plan was useful to provide advance notice of Gough's intent. What was objectionable was the unrealistic tempo of the attacks expected given the nexus of ground conditions, unit combat power, German defences, and time required to prepare attacks. As Gary Sheffield has argued "In his eagerness to push forward, Gough forced subordinate commanders to attack before they were ready with little allowance made for preparation time."<sup>178</sup> The aggressive schedule meant Byng had to use the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division in the 1 October attack if he were to have sufficient fresh troops to make the later attacks.

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<sup>175</sup> Beach, "British Intelligence and the German Army, 1914-1918," 178.

<sup>176</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 7 October 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>177</sup> Reserve Army Order, S.G.21/0/51, 28 September 1916, App I/1 Canadian Corps War Diary, October 1916 RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.

<sup>178</sup> Simkins, "Herbert Plumer's Second Army, 1915-1917," 85.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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The two brigades attacked on time, and the 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade, with the easier mission, reached its objectives after hard fighting.<sup>179</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade was repulsed and shattered, losing nearly 50% of its men. Hit indiscriminately by both German and Canadian artillery, German machine gun and rifle fire, the Brigade's three attacking battalions were only able to penetrate the German wire and reach Regina Trench in isolated sectors. The Germans promptly ejected or overwhelmed the scattered detachments. The 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was especially battered and Macdonell characterised it as destroyed in his report.<sup>180</sup>

The 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion subsequently suffered serious discipline and morale problems, because of the injuring of its inspiring commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel T. Tremblay, and the poor quality and training of replacements.<sup>181</sup> Only Tremblay's return and a tightening of discipline returned the battalion to full discipline – three members of the 22<sup>nd</sup> Battalion were executed from April to July 1917.<sup>182</sup>

These executions illustrate that discipline was one of the major differences between Turner, Currie, and Major-General H. Burstall, Turner's replacement as GOC 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Turner did pay attention to discipline,

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<sup>179</sup> Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme September 25th to October 4th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>180</sup> 5th CIB Operations Report, Night of September 26/27 to Night of October 1/2, B.M.L. 330, 7 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>181</sup> Shells buried Tremblay three times during Courcellette, aggravating a pre-existing condition, forcing his evacuation to England. Maxime Dagenais, "Une Permission!...C'est Bon Pour Une Recrue, Discipline and Illegal Absences in the 22nd (French-Canadian) Battalion 1915-1919" (Masters, University of Ottawa, 2006), 22.

<sup>182</sup> Andrew B. Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour?: The Story of the 25 Canadian Volunteers Executed in the First World War* (Nepean, Ont.: CEF Books, 1998), 41-46.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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dress, and deportment, as the multiple references in the routine orders attest, but he was not as zealous as Currie. Turner was less likely to take umbrage if a soldier had a button undone in the line than Currie. In comparison to Currie's and Burstall's commands, fewer men were executed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division under Turner. In Currie's 1<sup>st</sup> Division, during the same period Turner commanded the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, seven men were shot versus only one in Turner's division. Similarly, under Burstall seven men were executed in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.<sup>183</sup>

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was clearly played out and, after the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade did another tour of duty, the corps relieved the division on 4 October. It did not have to serve another tour at the Somme and departed for the Vimy sector on 10 October. The division lost another 42 officers and 975 men in the Battle of Thiepval Ridge and 56 officers and 1,368 men in the Battle of Ancre Heights.<sup>184</sup> It was a husk of the former division after the loss of 6,817 officers and men between 10 September and 10 October, more than four times the losses at St. Eloi.<sup>185</sup> Turner wrote that it was difficult in preparing recommendations for awards, as all the witnesses died in the battle.<sup>186</sup>

Surprisingly, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division did not produce an operations report for

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<sup>183</sup> *ibid.*, 38.

<sup>184</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 217.

<sup>185</sup> *ibid.*, 232.

<sup>186</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 30 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.



#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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the latter two operations and the one for Courcellette was perfunctory.<sup>187</sup>

Turner's response to the corps' questionnaire on lessons from the Somme was restricted to conventional matters and was not as searching as Currie's answers. For instance, his reaction to the question of troop density was to recommend two and half men per yard, as this was the figure at Courcellette and the later failures had a lower concentration. This analysis did not consider the other factors contributing to victory or defeat. Turner's comments existed within the context of the current doctrine, as practiced at the Somme, in part because of the nature of the questions posed by Byng.<sup>188</sup>

### **Analysis**

The discrepancy in performance between Courcellette and the latter two attacks was a function of an under-strength division attacking with exiguous preparation time, over too great a distance, and with inadequate, insufficient, and uncoordinated artillery support. The division had not replaced its losses before its recommitment, so it went into the line in an enfeebled state. What is more, the replacements received were little more than raw levies. For instance, the 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion in Currie's division received a draft of 154 men, who had no experience with the SMLE and were unfamiliar with the standard

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<sup>187</sup> It is not known why no reports were produced. It is surprising given Webber's professionalism. Summary of Operations of 2nd Canadian Division September 15th, & 16th, 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>188</sup> Lessons from Somme 2nd CID 2.C.D.-G.S.1254, 25 November 1916, Folder 20/File 5, RG 9 III C3 v4089, LAC.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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grenade.<sup>189</sup> As a result, the Reserve Army's inexorable demands forced Turner to task units with missions that exceeded their strength.

The Canadian Corps and the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division performed best in a structured combat environment where preparation time was crucial. Time to gather intelligence, to integrate the findings into plans, to coordinate with the artillery, and disseminate the results was imperative for success. Gough's tempo denied this time, and the results were costly failures.<sup>190</sup> At Courcellette, the division had seven days for this preparation cycle but only two days each for the latter two battles. The division could be likened to an archer that, if not given time to draw the bow and aim, will fire an arrow with insufficient energy or accuracy to strike and kill the target.

A significant factor in the length of the planning cycle was the relative inexperience of the staff and command structures of the division. At Courcellette, the 6<sup>th</sup> Brigade's operational order was five foolscap pages.<sup>191</sup> Orders to this level of detail took time to create and assimilate, which contributed to the interval needed to ready a successful attack. Andy Simpson argues in his thesis on the operational role of British corps that the *FSR* manual was a useful doctrinal guide throughout the war, but states it was intended for 'trained and experienced officers'.<sup>192</sup> It was of scant value, however, for the Canadians on the Somme, as it did not provide any insight

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<sup>189</sup> Evidence of Court of Inquiry Held at Bouzincourt on 11 October 1916, MG 30 E100 v35, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>190</sup> For a pithy discussion of preparation on the Somme, see Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18*: 74-75.

<sup>191</sup> 6th Brigade Operational Order No. 110, App. 6, 14 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4888, LAC.

<sup>192</sup> Andy Simpson, *Directing Operations: British Corps Command on the Western Front 1914-18* (Stroud: Spellmount, 2006), xvi-xvii.

#### 4 Won By My Infantry

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into the practical details of attack frontages, troop density, artillery preparation, and logistics.<sup>193</sup> The Australian, but Canadian born, Major-General W.T. Bridges captured the utility of the *FSR* when he described them "as useful to most Australian militia officers as cuneiform inscriptions on Babylonian brick."<sup>194</sup> What is more, Gough's command style did not follow the *FSR* doctrine regarding subordinate authority, but as Gary Sheffield described "He was a practitioner of the opposite: prescriptive, 'top-down' command."<sup>195</sup>

The distances the troops had to cover to reach the German front-line were excessive. Rather than the recommended 200 metres, the attacks were to cover 300 to 800 metres to reach the German front-line. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Division did not have the spare manpower or time to dig closer jump-off trenches – another negative consequence of Gough's accelerated tempo. Later, during the Passchendaele campaign, Currie would refuse to serve under Gough, because of the Canadian experiences at the Somme.<sup>196</sup>

The crucial factor was the artillery failure. In the days following the battle for Thiepval Ridge, the artillery continuously shelled the Regina Trench position and, at times, Canadian positions. The 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade reported, rather acidly, that on the 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> its forward positions underwent prolonged

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<sup>193</sup> GHQ was producing increasing number of manuals, the SS series that provided more concrete and practical proposals on how to conduct actions. Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945*: 19. For a different perspective of ethos versus doctrine, see Albert Palazzo, *Seeking Victory on the Western Front : The British Army and Chemical Warfare in World War I* (Lincoln, Neb.: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 11-17.

<sup>194</sup> Mallett, "The Interplay between Technology, Tactics and Organisation in the First AIF," 3.

<sup>195</sup> Sheffield, "An Army Commander on the Somme: Hubert Gough," 84.

<sup>196</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 206-207.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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shelling by the Canadian heavy artillery.<sup>197</sup> The heavy artillery needed observers to correct their fire, but Regina Trench was on a reverse slope, and thus unobservable. The German artillery received, at best, only a cursory treatment by the corps artillery. The British V Corps was developing methods of successful counter-battery work, but these had not yet reached the Canadian Corps.

The inexperience of its personnel and defective shells further hampered the artillery. The artillery was the most technical of the combat arms, and it took much longer to train, than the infantry.<sup>198</sup> A large percentage of the shells, so laboriously dragged forward, burst either prematurely or not at all. The rapid expansion of the munitions factories had lowered quality standards to the point that too many of the shells produced were defective. A more lethal aspect of the situation was the propensity of the 4.5" howitzer shell to explode prematurely, resulting in the nickname of suicide clubs for 4.5" howitzer batteries.<sup>199</sup>

There were also serious shortcomings in the cooperation between the infantry and the artillery. It appeared the two arms fought two separate battles

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<sup>197</sup> 5th CIB Operations Report, Night of September 26/27 to Night of October 1/2, B.M.L. 330, 7 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC; Report on Operations - 24th Canadian Battalion Victoria Rifles of Canada, October 1st 1916, Folder 53/File 8, RG 9 III D1 v4693, LAC.

<sup>198</sup> It was no accident that the divisional artillery of both the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Divisions were British formations for a year after the divisions arrived at the front.

<sup>199</sup> Batteries deployed in front of 4.5" pieces added a paradox to their emplacements to cut down casualties from prematures. James Edward Edmonds, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916*, vol. 1, History of the Great War, Based on Official Documents by Direction of the Historical Section of the Committee of Imperial Defence (London: Macmillan, 1932), 265; J.S. Stewart Interview, RG 41 v21, LAC; John Smith Stewart, *Memoirs of a Soldier* (Lethbridge, Alta: Robins Southern Printing), 124.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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that coincided in time and place.<sup>200</sup> At a Senior Officers' Conference in December 1916, the infantry complained of the lack of the personal touch between the infantry and artillery. The infantry was dissatisfied with the time needed to get heavy artillery support, the poor wire-cutting of the field artillery, and artillery inaccuracy.

The gunners responded to the infantry complaints by pointing out their difficulties. There were so few experienced officers available that they could not be spared from the guns. Therefore, new officers had to act as FOOs or LOs. Communications were slow and intermittent, so it was not surprising that the heavy artillery was unable to respond promptly. Burstall commented that the infantry often reported the barbed wire as cut, so the artillery was not at fault. The gunners also explained they were not given enough time to register their guns and that this affected accuracy.<sup>201</sup> As a result, the artillery was far less effective than at Courcellette.

## **Conclusion**

Turner's division performed admirably at Courcellette and won the most striking Canadian victory at the Somme. It also experienced the same frustrations that afflicted the other Canadian divisions at the Somme. Even Currie's vaunted 1<sup>st</sup> Division stumbled to the extent that Gough ordered a court of inquiry into the

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<sup>200</sup> A problem the British encountered on the Somme, as well. Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18*: 66-67.

<sup>201</sup> Reply to Corps Questionnaire - 3rd Division, November 1916, Folder 45/File 6, RG 9 III C1 v3843, LAC; Lessons from Somme Lahore Artillery, November 1916, Folder 20/File 5, RG 9 III C3 v4089, LAC; Senior Officer's Conference, 19 December 1916, Folder 1/File 10, RG 9 III C2 v4023, LAC.

#### **4 Won By My Infantry**

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division's failure at Regina Trench on 8 October.<sup>202</sup> Turner's own performance indicated he developed into a competent and effective divisional commander, and his reputation partially recovered. His further development as a combat commander ended in late November 1916, when the Canadian authorities selected him to address the administrative and training debacle in England. The factors contributing to this catastrophic situation and the oft-misunderstood process of Turner's selection are the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>202</sup> The unexpurgated version of the inquiry included a crossed out statement that one officer had to shoot several men who would not counterattack. Thanks to Aaron Miedema for identifying this version of the report. Unredacted Version, Finding of Court of Inquiry at Bouzincourt, Folder 17/File 4, RG 9 III C3 v4011, LAC.

# 5

## CHAOS IN ENGLAND: UNWISE MANAGEMENT

*For armies can signify but little abroad unless there be counsel and  
wise management at home.*

Cicero<sup>1</sup>

Before delineating the changes Turner implemented as GOC Canadian Forces in the British Isles, it is necessary to understand the chaotic state of the Canadian administration in England before Turner took over. Every facet of the Canadian military administration in England was flawed from the Quartermaster Department to the Chaplain Service to most importantly, the training of the combat arms and officers. This chapter analyses these flaws and their causes to explain the situation that faced Turner. The chapter then examines the organisation that replaced Hughes' chaos and Turner's selection to command it.

Military administration's purpose is to "provide the necessities that allow fighting soldiers to achieve full efficiency. There must be clear jurisdictions, open communications, and willing co-operation between soldiers of the bureaucracy and those of the line."<sup>2</sup> Hughes' regime represents the antithesis of this definition, as there were no clear lines of authority, limited communications, and a lack of co-operation between the authorities in Canada, England, and in the field. This

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<sup>1</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. Walter Miller, Loeb ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), B1 xxii 76.

<sup>2</sup> Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 258.

## 5 Unwise Management

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failure had drastic deleterious consequences, as it seriously compromised the ability of the Canadian Corps to sustain its combat edge, and cost Canada lives, treasure, and reputation.

In the next two chapters, the performance of the administration is assessed on two dimensions – effectiveness and efficiency.<sup>3</sup> Effectiveness describes the degree to which replacements met the requirements of the fighting forces in numbers and combat performance. An effective organisation produced sufficient numbers of disciplined replacements with high morale, who were able to efficaciously employ the tactics, weapons, and techniques required to carry out their mission. Efficiency refers to the extent to which resources of personnel, time, and money were utilised to produce trained replacements. An efficient organisation minimised the use of resources to achieve the required outcome.

### Structure

The structure of Canadian forces in England was a confusing mess of feuding officers, civilians, and ministerial representatives. At one point, there were six separate authorities in England that claimed they spoke for Canada. They included Perley the acting High Commissioner; Max Aitken, Hughes' 'personal representative;' Lord Brooke and later David Watson, the GOC Bramshott Canadian Training Division; J. C. MacDougall the original GOC Canadians in charge of the Shorncliffe Canadian Training Division; John Wallace Carson the

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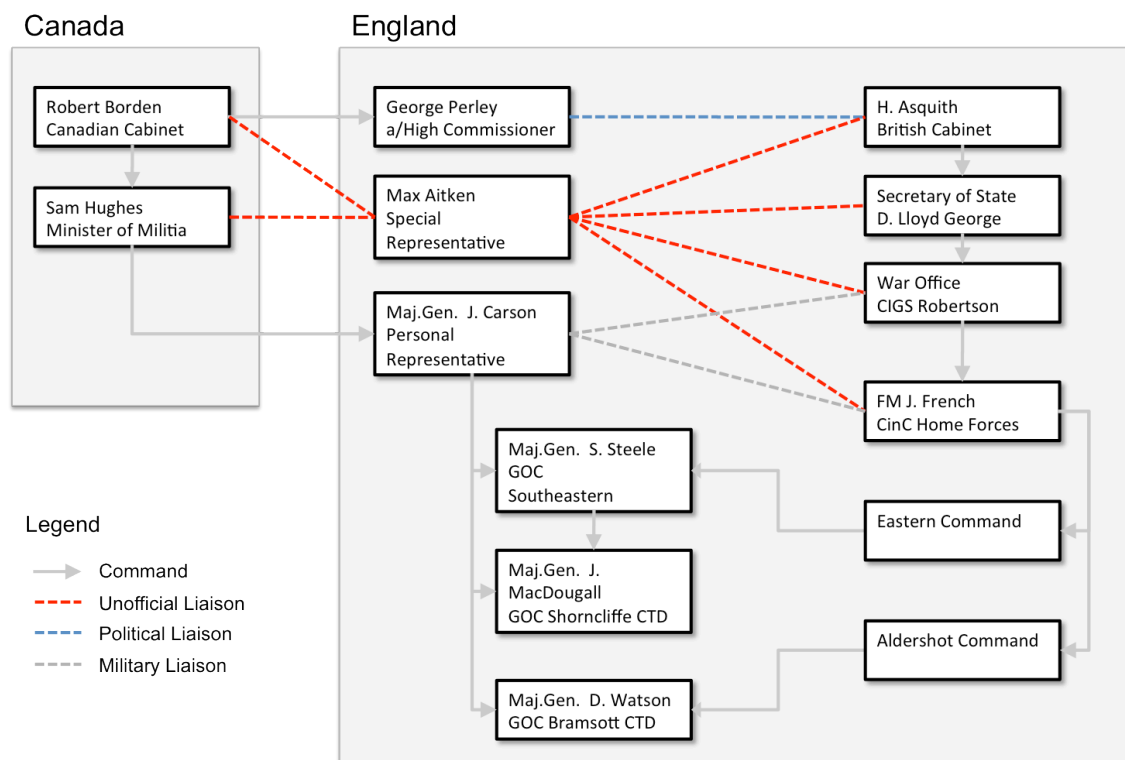
<sup>3</sup> Definitions of effectiveness and efficiency are the author's. For a different perspective, see Allan Reed Millett and Williamson Murray, *Military Effectiveness*, vol. 1, Merston Center Series on International Security and Foreign Policy (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 1-27.



## 5 Unwise Management

Minister's special representative; and Sam Steele, the GOC Southeastern Area and another GOC Canadians. This naturally confused the War Office, who at one point plaintively, asked who was in charge.<sup>4</sup> The answer was ultimately Sam Hughes was in charge.

**Figure 14 Canadian Forces in England 1916 Simplified Organisation Chart**



This confused structure developed rapidly once the 1<sup>st</sup> Division left for France in February 1915. As new units arrived, more training areas were added reporting to different British commands. By late 1916, the Canadian training system and organisation consisted of fifty-seven reserve battalions scattered across six major training centres, split into two Training Divisions at Shorncliffe and Bramshott, reporting separately to the British Aldershot and Eastern Commands.

<sup>4</sup> Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 267.

## 5 Unwise Management

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John Wallace Carson, a stout mining stock promoter, adroitly manoeuvred a poorly defined set of responsibilities into a position of being the de facto authority for the feuding Canadian Major-Generals in the training commands and the British. Carson impressed Borden in his initial foray as a special representative in 1914 and he extended his mandate to be the communications nexus between the British, the Canadian authorities in France and England, and Hughes. Carson was entirely dependent on Hughes' favour and so was certain to satisfy Hughes even when he disapproved of Hughes' demands.<sup>5</sup>

The front complained, the British complained, and even Borden complained about the disorganisation and misrule. Fundamentally, the problem was there was no single authority in charge of Canadian forces. From early on in the conflict, there was constant criticism of the administration in England. An example of the complaints sent to Borden from an officer in the 5<sup>th</sup> Brigade that "Canadian soldiering arrangements in England are in a deplorable state... that the senior officers ... are all working at cross purposes."<sup>6</sup>

The criticisms resolved to three core complaints about the effectiveness of the Canadian forces in England; their efficiency; and the always contentious and conspicuous issue of promotions.<sup>7</sup> Effectiveness regarded the poor quality and

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<sup>5</sup> Connaught, the Governor-General, characterised Carson as quite 'undependable' and Macphail thought one of Carson's business ventures a 'pure swindle.' Biography, J.W. Carson, RG 24 v6930, LAC; Connaught to Kitchener, 31 May 1915, WG/41, PRO 30/57/56, Kitchener Papers; TNA; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 32-33,71; Macphail Diary Entry, 9 February 1916, MG 30 D150 v4, Macphail Fonds; LAC. Carson told Brigadier-General Meighen "He was obliged to do things, by order of the Minster, of which he did not approve." Meighen to Duguid, 23 November 1936, HQ 683-1-30-5, RG 24 v1503, LAC.

<sup>6</sup> Borden to Perley, 17 March 1916, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, LAC.

<sup>7</sup> Sources Note. The evidence for this chapter comes from a variety of sources including reports written under the aegis of the administration that replaced Hughes' regime. These later reports

## 5 Unwise Management

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lack of replacements produced by the Canadian administration in England, while, efficiency referred to the excessive resources used to produce the deficient replacements. Promotions, appointments, commissions, decorations, and awards were always a topic close to the heart of officers and men and subject to the closest scrutiny.<sup>8</sup> Promotions generated ill will, complaint, and controversy, as it was apparent that factors, other than military competence, were decisive considerations for promotions.

### Effectiveness

The Canadian Corps's 24,000 casualties at the Somme threw an insupportable burden on the Canadian training establishment, and it collapsed. By mid-October, the demand for replacements was 18,000 men and with an estimated 7,000 more needed by the end of the month.<sup>9</sup> However, there were only 13,000 replacements available. Hughes refused to break up surplus battalions in England, cabling, "Stand firm. Let our divisions rest. We will get all six divisions in shape. Surely Byng cannot repeat June 3<sup>rd</sup> every month."<sup>10</sup> By 8 November, the corps was short of 296 officers, with only 65 replacements ready. The infantry needed 9,368 replacements, but only 2,923 were ready, leaving a

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were unlikely to minimise the extent of the problems but nor would they completely manufacture them. They provide useful details of the extent and nature of the issues. The majority of the sources used in the chapter come from the Hughes period and include criticisms from the Canadian Corps, from within the administration in England, from friends and associates of Hughes, and from Canada. They clearly indicate profound problems in the administration in England and are not later inventions.

<sup>8</sup> Promotions, appointments, commissions, decorations, and awards are hereafter referred to as promotions.

<sup>9</sup> Twenty-five thousand men were needed to replace losses in the corps and bring the replacement pool in France back to strength.

<sup>10</sup> Hughes was referring to the first day of the Battle of Mount Sorrel. Cable Hughes to Carson, 14 October 1916, 8-1-7b, 9/52, RG 9 III A1 v52, LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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shortfall of 6,445 men.<sup>11</sup>

Not only were there insufficient men, those few arriving were unprepared for battle. The training syllabus was only ten weeks, which was insufficient time to properly instruct the recruits.<sup>12</sup> Further, Hughes mandated training be conducted with the Ross Rifle. Currie complained that the failure of the 8 October attack was due to fighting with drafts untrained on the SMLE rifle and unfamiliar with the Mills grenade.<sup>13</sup> The staggering losses at the Somme also caused problems for the British and Australians. During the battle, men were reaching British units with only six weeks training making them a 'danger to themselves and others.'<sup>14</sup>

Three separate reports clearly identify myriad training inadequacies.<sup>15</sup> There was little or no coordination with Canada so much of the training in Canada was wasted. Training staff assessed battalions embodied in Canada for six to eighteen months arriving in England as having completed only the first three weeks of the training syllabus. The training in England was sub-standard and inefficient.

Alderson set an unfortunate precedent by agreeing to accept a portion of partially-

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<sup>11</sup> Maj. Macfarland A/DAG to Carson, 17 October 1916, 8-1-7b, 9/52, RG 9 III A1 v52, LAC; Outstanding Reinforcements, 8 November 1916, 8-1-7b, 9/52, RG 9 III A1 v52, LAC.

<sup>12</sup> Steele to Carson, 4 May 1916, 8-5-10d RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC; Visit to France of Dep. Min. ASMC, 3 November 1916, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

<sup>13</sup> Evidence of Court of Inquiry Held at Bouzincourt on 11 October 1916, MG 30 E100 v35, Currie Fonds; LAC; Response to Cdn Corps G.837, 12 October 1916, MG 30 E100 v35, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>14</sup> Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War*: 171, 253; Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918*: 381; Hodges, "The British Infantry and Atrocities on the Western Front, 1914-1918," 83.

<sup>15</sup> The three reports were an inspection of training facilities in England by Major-General Lessard in May 1916, a report of training deficiencies in the Shorncliffe base from June 1916, and a summary of conditions during the Hughes period written in February 1917. Lessard Report, May 1916, GAQ 10-39, RG 24 v1840, LAC; Notes on Canadian Training Division, Shorncliffe, 6 June 1916, 8-5-10e, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC; Summary of General Conditions Which Existed Prior to Assumption of Command by Major-General R.E.W. Turner, 23 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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trained replacements, and “since that time a very small percentage of fully-trained Drafts have been despatched overseas.”<sup>16</sup> One report includes this damning critique “The conception and tone of the Canadian Training Division is on a wrong basis from its foundation.”<sup>17</sup>

Another recurrent complaint was men were proceeding overseas without proper clothing and equipment. Part of the problem stemmed from men arriving in England and training in Canadian Oliver equipment, Canadian tunics and boots, and with the Ross Rifle. Before departing for France, they had to be re-equipped with Imperial pattern equipment, including the SMLE.<sup>18</sup> This added an additional complication to the rush to get replacements to France.<sup>19</sup>

The abysmal state of the training organisation did not escape the notice of the British War Office or Haig. Both tried to influence the Canadians to effect reforms. In June 1916, the CIGS requested Aitken to approach the Canadian Government with an offer to replace MacDougall with a British regular officer. If the Canadians did so, the War Office would abolish Alderson’s Inspector-General position, as an incentive, but nothing came of the request.<sup>20</sup> In July, Haig wrote King George V asking the King if he could say a word to help the situation, meaning pass on to the Canadian Government the concerns with the state of

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<sup>16</sup> Notes on Canadian Training Division, Shorncliffe, 6 June 1916, 8-5-10e, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

<sup>17</sup> Lessard Report, May 1916, GAQ 10-39, RG 24 v1840, LAC; Summary of General Conditions Which Existed Prior to Assumption of Command by Major-General R.E.W. Turner, 23 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>18</sup> Canadian tunics were too restrictive, Canadian boots dissolved in wet conditions, and the Oliver harness was uncomfortable and could carry less equipment and ammunition than the standard British web harness. See Report on Canadian Clothing, Equipment & Supplies for Canadian Overseas Forces, 20 February 1917, Q-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Appleton to OC 11 Cdn Training Reserve Brigade, 31 December 1915, E-60-1, RG 9 III B1 v418, LAC.

<sup>19</sup> H.N. Anley to Carson, 25 February 1916, RG 9 III B1 v622, LAC.

<sup>20</sup> Whigham to Aitken, 25 June 1916, A1765, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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training.<sup>21</sup> Again, nothing resulted from this intervention.

The quantity and quality of replacement officers was another problem.<sup>22</sup> In early 1916, Shorncliffe had only 7% of its officers immediately available for drafts and another 8% after completing courses.<sup>23</sup> The corps complained officers received from England did not have sufficient practical training to be effective. They lacked the 'habit of command,' did not understand their responsibilities, or the technical aspects of their role.<sup>24</sup> Steele issued an order that all officers were to know their men – it was extraordinary that officers were unaware of their basic responsibilities.<sup>25</sup> The situation was so dire that Byng established a corps Officer school because the officers coming from England were so incapable.<sup>26</sup>

The technical arms, so essential for combat success, including signals, engineers, artillery, and machine guns, were in especially poor condition. In August 1916, the commander of the 1<sup>st</sup> Division Signal Company commented "that after two years of war, the drafts we are receiving could not be worse than they are." A later report indicated that each base had its own syllabus based on an obsolete training manual.<sup>27</sup>

The engineering service was facing severe shortages of trained personnel, while demands escalated. Like the signal service, the engineering service had to

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<sup>21</sup> Williams, *Byng of Vimy, General and Governor General*: 130.

<sup>22</sup> Steele to MacDougall, 30 December 1915, RG 9 III B1 v622, LAC; Carson to MacDougall, 21 January 1916, 8-5-10c, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

<sup>23</sup> MacDougall to Carson, 21 January 1916, 8-1-87a, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC.

<sup>24</sup> Alderson to Carson, August 29 1916, 8-5-8H, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC; Summary of General Conditions Which Existed Prior to Assumption of Command by Major-General R.E.W. Turner, 23 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC; Canadian Military School, Undated, S-7-36 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3101, LAC.

<sup>25</sup> Steele to MacDougall, 4 Sept 1916, 8-5-10f, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

<sup>26</sup> Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 165.

<sup>27</sup> Canadian Signalling School, 1 December 1918, 113/5, RG 9 III D1 v4718, LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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depend on obtaining skilled tradesmen already trained for technical roles, as the training period would be too long. The corps complained they could only get reinforcements by transferring infantry to the engineers, which disrupted the infantry units and delayed engineer training. The Canadian Corps CRE, Brigadier-General Lindsay, complained in May 1916, that of the 700 sappers in training at the Canadian Engineer Training Depot (CETD) only 60 could be charitably classified as partially trained. Lindsay's conclusion was "there is something radically wrong with the organisation and administration, and there must an entire lack of co-ordination."<sup>28</sup> The War Office suggested many of the sappers "do not appear to have carried out any sapper training at all."<sup>29</sup>

The artillery underwent probably the most significant change of all the arms. Wartime experience drove the recognition that artillery had to focus on accurate indirect fire.<sup>30</sup> The artillery had to adopt the principles of scientific gunnery of the Royal Garrison Artillery, such as calculating adjustments for barometer, air temperature, wind, shell lots, gun calibration, charge propellant temperature, and muzzle velocity.<sup>31</sup> All of which placed a greater strain on the training organisation to produce more and better-trained gunners.

Unfortunately, it was apparent early on that the Reserve Artillery

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<sup>28</sup> Major Macfarlane to Sec. Dept. Militia and Defence, 24 June 1916, 8-5-8G, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC; Summary of General Conditions Which Existed Prior to Assumption of Command by Major-General R.E.W. Turner, 23 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC; Maunsell to a/CGS, 10 December 1916, M-29-33 v13, RG 9 III B1 v3092, LAC; Lindsay Report, 16 May 1916, 8-5-8E, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC; Steele to Carson, 17 July 1916, 8-5-10e, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

<sup>29</sup> 121/Overseas/2047. (S.D.3), DCIGS to Carson, 27 May 1916, Folder 11, 74/672 Box 3, DHH.

<sup>30</sup> Bailey, "British Artillery in the Great War," 26.

<sup>31</sup> "British Artillery Fire Control, World War 1 - 1914-18," [http://nigelef.tripod.com/fc\\_1914-18.htm](http://nigelef.tripod.com/fc_1914-18.htm).

## 5 Unwise Management

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establishment was unequal to the challenge. In December 1915, Currie complained the artillery training was “d-d rotten and the men responsible for the training of these men should be told so in no unmistakable terms.”<sup>32</sup> Steele in response had to emphasise to MacDougall to send only trained men, especially artillery, to France.<sup>33</sup> The harshest complaints came from Morrison, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division CRA. In December 1915, he reported to MacDougall about his inspection of the Canadian Reserve Brigade at Shorncliffe. He found it in poor condition and unable to supply the replacements needed for the 1916 campaign.<sup>34</sup>

The Machine Gun (MG) service in England was another branch that failed. The training of MG officers and men in England was the responsibility of the Canadian Machine Gun Depot. The depot originated as a Machine Gun battalion from Canada that had neither completed infantry training nor undertaken machine gun instruction. The depot’s organisation as a Reserve battalion was unsuitable for supplying the twelve brigade MG companies and other MG units in the corps. Infantry battalions supplied the depot with recruits, and as to be expected, the battalions foisted the unwilling and unfit on the depot. It often had difficulty rejecting even the obviously unsuited. Pressure for infantry replacements also resulted in authorities in England sending trained MG officers and men as infantry, thus wasting their MG training. Even recovered wounded machine gunners were not immune to this pernicious practice. In addition, the depot lacked the

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<sup>32</sup> Currie to Carson, December 1915, 8-7-1, RG 9 III A1 v52, LAC.

<sup>33</sup> Steele to MacDougall, 30 December 1915, RG 9 III B1 v622, LAC.

<sup>34</sup> Report to GOC Cdn. Training Division, Shorncliffe, 9 December 1915, MG 30 E81 v4, Morrison Fonds; LAC.



## 5 Unwise Management

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necessary training materials and the type of machine guns used at the front. The situation was so chaotic that in November 1916 the commander of the depot was unable to estimate how many trained men the depot could produce in the next months.<sup>35</sup> Byng was especially unhappy with the state of the brigade MG companies stating the "supply of personnel, condition of service and promotion is highly unsatisfactory and has resulted in extravagance, inefficiency and discontent."<sup>36</sup>

### Efficiency

The efficiency of the forces in England was abysmal. The treatment of casualties was so poorly organised that at one point 6,000 men were lost in the system. Contrary to good practice, recovered-wounded personnel were not returned to their units. A senior officer claimed the Canadians returned only 6% of their wounded to the front versus 60% for the British. There were also issues with authorities not repatriating permanently unfit men.<sup>37</sup>

The Medical Service had too few officers to inspect arriving and departing drafts, a lack of Medical Officers assigned to reserve battalions, poor training, and a lack of coordination of standards between authorities in England and France.

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<sup>35</sup> The Depot had only seventeen Vickers MG, the type used at the front and these had only arrived in November. "Report on Canadian Machine Gun Depot," 17 November 1916, 34/2, RG 9 III C1 v3937, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> C.S. Grafton, *The Canadian "Emma Gees": A History of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps* (Canadian Machine Gun Corps Association, 1938), 73; Summary of General Conditions Which Existed Prior to Assumption of Command by Major-General R.E.W. Turner, 23 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC; McDonald to Turner, 1 January 1917, RG 9 III B1 v3109, LAC.

<sup>37</sup> Canadian Casualty Assembly Centre, 20 April 1939, GAQ 11-11c, RG 24 v1844, LAC; Willson, *From Quebec to Piccadilly and Other Places: Some Anglo-Canadian Memories*: 206; Points Which Might Be Improved, Undated, (A Branch) Folder 103/File 6, RG 9 III C1 v3866, LAC; Perley to Borden, 27 November 1916, v7, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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The Service roiled with the controversy of the Bruce Report. Hughes appointed Colonel H.A. Bruce to investigate the Canadian Medical Service. Bruce, with no military experience but extensive surgical knowledge, made a one month whirlwind tour of the medical facilities and delivered a report in September 1916 recommending a number of significant changes. The Surgeon-General G.C. Jones disagreed with the recommended reorganisation and resigned. The fallout from Bruce's Report would bedevil Perley as Minister well into 1917.<sup>38</sup>

Hughes saddled the Chaplain Service with another of his poor administrative appointments. The Director, Colonel Richard Steacy, was characterised by Borden as a "self-centred, useless, inefficient creature, heedless of duty and bent solely on gaining higher rank and increased pay."<sup>39</sup> A report on the service described a litany of problems including no discipline for chaplains returned for misconduct, administrative irregularities, important letters unanswered, lack of supervision, no understanding of the needs of the service in France, Roman Catholic complaints ignored, and promotion 'left to caprice.'<sup>40</sup> The relations between the British and Canadian service deteriorated to the point

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<sup>38</sup> For a more favourable view of Bruce and the Bruce report see Wolfgang George Gomille, "The Bruce Report: An Unofficial History of the Canadian Medical Services Controversy During the Great War" (Masters, Queen's University, 1983). Bruce was essentially a civilian with no experience in military medical matters and his strident advocacy and underhanded tactics undermined the legitimacy of his findings. Once Bruce lost his political support, he was not sufficiently politically astute to work within the system, so repeatedly broke the bounds of what was regarded as appropriate. ASMC Minutes, 6 Oct 1916, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC; Reid to HQ CTD Shorncliffe, 6 June 1916, Series 7 7-6-16, RG 9 III A1 v25, LAC; Reid to Carson, 6 March 6 1916, Series 7 7-6-10, RG 9 III A1 v25, LAC; Report Canadian Army Medical Training School, 2 January 1917, R-160-2, RG 9 III B1 v806, LAC; Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 313.

<sup>39</sup> Borden, *Letters to Limbo*: 148.

<sup>40</sup> Confidential Report on Chaplain Service, 31 March 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC; Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains in the Great War*, vol. 16 (Montreal: McGill-Queen's Press, 1995), 50-58.

## 5 Unwise Management

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the British Deputy Chaplain-General refused to deal with Steacy.<sup>41</sup>

The situation in the Quartermaster's department was no better. The department unnecessarily used the highest medical category men in its Canadian Army Service Corps (CASC). Training units had their own ordnance supplies and transportation resulting in considerable duplication and waste. The Government paid for rented accommodations and hospital stores, even though the British were supposed to provide these gratis. There were 400 personnel working on repairing Ross Rifles at a cost of \$5 per rifle for a weapon not used at the front.<sup>42</sup>

Another complaint was that Canadian equipment was inadequate for active service and ended up condemned, sold at a loss, or cast off. These problems stemmed from Sam Hughes' desire to promote Canadian industry and his firm conviction of the superiority of Canadian material. Unfortunately, while Hughes' motives were well intended the results were not.<sup>43</sup>

### Promotions

An exceedingly sore point with the forces in France was the unshakeable belief that commissions, promotions, appointments, and awards were at the

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<sup>41</sup> "The Canadian Chaplain Service in the Field was constantly humiliated owing to the lack of even ordinary courtesy with the British Service, finally the Deputy Chaplain-General refused to have anything to do with the Canadian service except through the Assistant Director of Chaplain Services, Canadian Corps." Confidential Report on Chaplain Service, 31 March 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC; John Simms Principal Chaplain to Perley, 30 April 1917, File 10, MG 27 II D9 v118, Kemp Fonds; LAC. The British service had its own problems with the Chaplain Service, see Alison M. Brown, "Army Chaplains in the First World War" (PhD, University St. Andrews, 1996), 27.

<sup>42</sup> First Progress Report Quartermaster-General's Branch Overseas Military Forces of Canada, 20 February 1917, Q-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC; McRae QMG to Perley, 12 March 1917, 10-8-20, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 64.

<sup>43</sup> Hughes saddled Canadians with poorly made, poorly designed or poorly suited equipment with no spare parts. Report on Canadian Clothing, Equipment & Supplies for Canadian Overseas Forces, 20 February 1917, Q-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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mercy of political influence.<sup>44</sup> Perley shared this belief as well writing in March 1917 that “a great many of our troubles in the past have been caused by the feeling that promotion and leave could only be obtained through influence of some kind.”<sup>45</sup> As a result, there was the apprehension that the staff, sycophants, and the connected received rewards over more deserving recipients.<sup>46</sup> This belief is not surprising given the politicised nature of the pre-war Canadian Militia and the ample evidence of political influence affecting promotions.<sup>47</sup> What was especially frustrating to the officers at the front were examples of officers who Hughes recalled to Canada as junior Captains or Majors, returning to England as Majors and Lieutenant-Colonels having leapt over serving officers.<sup>48</sup>

The issue of promotions and awards was one that plagues all institutions and even if the system is objectively equitable, the perception will remain that it is unfair.<sup>49</sup> As Kang in his thesis on British officers phrased it “honours and awards were in fact a highly contentious issue during the Great War that provoked

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<sup>44</sup> For an example of the perennial Canadian complaint of regional inequality and influence see Steele to Carson, 28 August 1915, 8 8-5-10a, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC; Willson, *From Quebec to Piccadilly and Other Places: Some Anglo-Canadian Memories*: 202.

<sup>45</sup> Harrington Letter, 3 August 1918, 10-T-158, RG 9 III A1 v339, LAC.

<sup>46</sup> This was not a wholly Canadian problem see Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918*: 587.

<sup>47</sup> For an example of the problem over commissioning NCOs, see Odum to Carson, 29 March 1916, 8 8-1-70, RG 9 III A1 v31, LAC. For an example of political influence see Carson to Dodds, 24 August 1915, 8-5-8, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC. For a particularly egregious example of interference see Galbraith File, File 6-G-17, RG 9 III A1 v148, LAC. Hughes ordered Carson to commission a friend's son, who turned out to be incapable. His commanding officer in France characterised him as “... absolutely unsuitable and unfitted to be an Officer. He is not fit to be a Bombardier.”

<sup>48</sup> See Lieutenant-Colonel Rogers' complaint that two captains sent home because of inefficiency were promoted to Majors and made second in command of new battalions. Lt.-Col. C.H. Rogers to Carson, 16 March 1916, 8-1-71, RG 9 III A1 v31, LAC.

<sup>49</sup> For an account of the difficulties the British had see Chapter 15 of Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*: 474.

## 5 Unwise Management

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ceaseless suspicion and friction."<sup>50</sup>

Early in the war, Aitken arranged it so Hughes would be the sole arbiter of all promotions and honours not under Alderson's control.<sup>51</sup> This gave Hughes a powerful tool to control the forces in England, as he was the fountainhead for all advancement. As a result, Hughes was able to satisfy his friends, families, and colleagues. Hughes was especially diligent in advancing family members to positions above their probable merits.<sup>52</sup> This obvious bias alienated in the officers in France and helped exacerbate the estrangement between Hughes and the corps.<sup>53</sup>

Hughes, contrary to regulations, encouraged officers to contact him directly.<sup>54</sup> Hence, it became common practice to work outside the normal and expected communication channels to get advancement.<sup>55</sup> This extended to when Hughes visited England the various commanders were anxious to pay court to maintain favour.<sup>56</sup>

Another cause of endless squabbling was officer gradation, as the Canadian Militia List did not apply. This resulted in deeply anguished disputes about the

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<sup>50</sup> Kang, "The British Infantry Officer on the Western Front in the First World War: With Special Reference to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment," 353.

<sup>51</sup> Cable Aitken to Hughes, 20 September 1915, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

<sup>52</sup> Examples include Hughes' brother, W. St. P. Hughes, Carson to Aitken, 9 June 1916, 8-5-8F, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC. For a son-in-law, Lieutenant C.D.H. McAlpine, Adj-General Canadian Militia to Carson, 5 November 1915, 6-Mc-85, RG 9 III A1 v183, LAC. Examples for Garnet Hughes are legion, including Cable Aitken to Hughes, 28 September 1915, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

<sup>53</sup> Urquhart, *Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian*: 136.

<sup>54</sup> Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 155.; *The King's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia 1917*: Paragraph 424.

<sup>55</sup> Perley to Borden, 2 January 1917, RG 9 III A1 v73, LAC; DWB Spry to HQ CTD, 18 July 1916, 8-5-8G, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC.

<sup>56</sup> Steele to Carson 25 July 1916, 8-5-10e, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC; Steele to Carson, 21 July 1916, 8-5-10e, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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relative ranking of different officers. There was no single source that could definitively determine who had seniority, so the Minister had to settle these disputes.<sup>57</sup>

The promotion system failed. By late 1916, the authorities had not forwarded over 2,000 names from Shorncliffe to the War Office for promulgation.<sup>58</sup> In addition, the War Office could not follow the changes in Canadian policy. The War Office responding to a request that the Canadian Minister approve all Canadian promotions in France before gazetting responded it was following a 1915 Privy Council order.<sup>59</sup> In fact, this order was superseded, then further amended in 1916. This illustrates both the problem the War Office had in following Canadian rules but also that no one on the Canadian side caught the failure of the War Office to follow the agreed to procedure.<sup>60</sup>

The war placed unprecedented demands on the Canadian military, so it is not surprising there were failures in the initial stages of the war. These errors are understandable given the conflict's scope, scale, duration, and nature. After two years, however, the Canadian system in England was not improving and inexperience was no longer an excuse. The Canadian administration was not addressing the problems of inefficiency, ineffectiveness, and promotions. This was in stark contrast to the increasing professionalism and effectiveness of the Canadian forces in the field. If the field forces could demonstrate a steep 'learning

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<sup>57</sup> Perley to GG in Council, 3 January 1917, RG 9 III A1 v90, LAC.

<sup>58</sup> Report on the Work of Assistant Military Secretary's Branch since Organisation, 4 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>59</sup> Appointments, awards, and promotions were not official until published in the *London Gazette*.

<sup>60</sup> Gow to Secretary War Office, Min. 10-12-2, 13 March 1917, 10-8-7 v1, RG 9 III A1 v72, LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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curve,' so should have the Canadian administration in England.

The proximate causes of this chaos were five-fold: Hughes' need for control; Hughes' drive to create a six division army; mediocrities in command and on instruction staff; the Government's dependence on a volunteer recruiting system; and the limited communications between Canadian authorities in France, England, and Canada.

As other authors have commented, Hughes was pugnacious, partisan, grandiose, frenetic, and unfettered by self-doubt. Hughes was supremely confident in his judgement of people and situations.<sup>61</sup> This attitude contributed to Hughes' desire for personal control over 'his boys.' To achieve this end Hughes established a confused and overlapping set of authorities that reflected his desire to centralise all decision-making under his aegis.<sup>62</sup>

Hughes represented an older tradition of personal management of a government department.<sup>63</sup> Before the First World War, the Canadian Federal Government was small enough that it was possible for an engaged minister to be personally involved in all major and many minor decisions.<sup>64</sup> The ministries were as much an opportunity to reward the party faithful, as to run government operations.

Hughes' domination resulted in a tragic misalignment of priorities between

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<sup>61</sup> Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939*: 87; Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 39-62.

<sup>62</sup> Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939*: 111; Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 188; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 42.

<sup>63</sup> John English, *The Decline of Politics: The Conservatives and the Party System 1901-1920* (University of Toronto Press, 1977), 17-19.

<sup>64</sup> In 1915, major departments, such as Justice and Finance had less than 100 employees. Brown, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography*, 2: 6.

## 5 Unwise Management

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the dictates coming from Canada and the needs of the front. The authorities in England, when presented with a choice between satisfying Hughes or the front, chose expediency and satisfied Hughes, despite the resulting cost in blood and treasure. A particularly egregious example was Carson's response to a request in November 1916 to supply men with the personal equipment used in France "If the authorities in France choose to change that equipment once our men reach France, that is their own funeral and their own responsibility."<sup>65</sup>

Hughes was convinced that if the Australians could raise five divisions for service on the Western Front from a smaller population Canada should be able to raise as much as eight to ten divisions.<sup>66</sup> Hughes' drive to create a larger army and the dependence on a volunteer force had a deleterious effect on the efficiency and effectiveness of the training machine. The fundamental problem was the policy of raising new battalions rather than providing drafts for the front. Without a rational manpower policy or even an understanding of the available manpower resources, the Government relied on local worthies using their contacts and influence to raise battalions. The consequence was Canada formed 272 infantry or mounted rifle battalions, almost all of which were sent to England.<sup>67</sup> This resulted in an excess of units clogging the administration in England and diverting resources from the proper mission of training men. It created a serious political issue of excess senior officers and NCOs, as the Canadian Corps would not accept

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<sup>65</sup> Carson to CTD, Shorncliffe, 23 November 1916, E-4-2 v1A, RG 9 III B1 v694, LAC.

<sup>66</sup> Cable Hughes to Borden, 15 August 1916, 77912, MG26 H1 v146, Borden Fonds; LAC; ASMC Cable to Minister, 13 October 16, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC. In September 1916, Hughes was promising the British a 5th and 6th Divisions. See Robertson to Haig, 28 September 1916, 7/6/68, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.

<sup>67</sup> This total consisted of 257 numbered infantry battalions, 13 Canadian Mounted Rifle battalions that served as infantry, the RCR and the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI).



## 5 Unwise Management

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them as replacements at their rank. Consequently, there were 499 surplus senior officers and 6,000 NCOs in England.<sup>68</sup>

In a long tradition, units proceeding to the front left behind the halt, the lame, and the inefficient, as commanders and instructors. These tended to have limited knowledge of modern conditions and equally limited abilities to prepare men for battle. The absence of effective communications between England and France further exacerbated the problem of poor instruction, so recruits trained in outdated techniques. One remarkable example of how out of touch was the training staff was a Canadian staff officer's statement in the fall of 1916 that "the Lewis Machine Gun is apparently being used in the Canadian Corps"; this a year after its introduction at the front.<sup>69</sup>

The problem of mediocrities in England started at the top with weak commanders, such as Steele, MacDougall, and the first commander of Bramshott, Lord Brooke. Steele was old, tired, unfit, and prone to intrigue.<sup>70</sup> MacDougall was better suited for a staff position than commanding a training division, as he lacked the strength of character, health, backbone, or knowledge for such a responsible position. In addition, all PF officers knew they commanded on the sufferance of Hughes, who despised the PF.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Carson to Steele, 16 October 1916, 8 8-1-87c, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC; Cable White to Borden, 11 November 1916, 39205, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC; Surplus Officers as of 24 November 1916, O-35-33, RG 9 III B1 v2882, LAC; NCO Numbers in Training Units, Minutes ASMC, 16 October 1916, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

<sup>69</sup> Staff Captain CTD to DAG, 10 October 1916, RG 9 III B1 v2938, LAC.

<sup>70</sup> For the health of Steele and MacDougall see Macphail and Canada. Dept. of National Defence. Historical Section., *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-19. The Medical Services*: 46. For examples of Steele's predilection for intrigue see Steele to Perley, 18 November 1916, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 72.

<sup>71</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 42.

## 5 Unwise Management

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The training brigade commanders had little to no experience at the front and tended to be former battalion commanders who were skilled politicians. Alderson was concerned about officers, such as Lieutenant-Colonel C.A. Smart and Maynard Rogers, selected for training brigades.<sup>72</sup> Carson knew there were problems and admitted to Hughes he was not happy with the results from Shorncliffe and thought many of the brigade commanders incapable.<sup>73</sup>

Commanders, such as Steele and MacDougall, did not react well to the deluge of complaints from the front. They either denied there was a problem or they shifted the blame.<sup>74</sup> They seldom regarded any criticism as valid or at least deserving of investigation. This attitude was intensely frustrating and led to comments from senior officers like Currie "I almost feel as if it is no further use making complaints, because the position is almost hopeless."<sup>75</sup>

Units languished in Canada spending months in ineffective training before approaching a full complement. In many cases, to reach their full strength, units enlisted overage, underage, and unfit men who would be culled in England at great cost to the country.<sup>76</sup> In late 1916, medical inspections assessed an average 16% of all men arriving in England as unfit, with one unit with 45% of its men

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<sup>72</sup> Alderson to Carson, 4 December 1915, 8-5-10b, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

<sup>73</sup> Carson to Hughes, 25 January 1916, 8-5-10c, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC; Watson to Carson, 16 February 1916, 6-W-4, RG 9 III A1 v231, LAC.

<sup>74</sup> Some examples include Steele to Carson, 25 July 1916, 8-5-10e, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC; Carson to Steele, 17 July 1916, 8-5-10e, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC; MacDougall to Carson, 23 June 1916, 8-5-10e, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC; Carson to Currie, 14 December 1915, 8-5-10b, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

<sup>75</sup> Currie to Carson, 21 January 1916, 8-5-10c, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.

<sup>76</sup> Nic Clarke estimated the cost for a recruit was \$1,500 in First World War dollars for the first year and \$1,000 per year after that. Nicholas J. Clarke, "Unwanted Warriors the Rejected Volunteers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force" (PhD, University of Ottawa, 2009), 139.

## 5 Unwise Management

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medically unfit.<sup>77</sup>

A further issue was the General Staff, which in theory was responsible for training, was 'unduly subordinated' to the administrative side and in one officer's opinion practically subject to it.<sup>78</sup> The technical reserve units, such as artillery and engineers, were subject to the local commanders, who in many cases were wholly ignorant of and unsympathetic to their special requirements.

### Ministry of Overseas Military Forces of Canada Formed

Hughes was under pressure from Borden, colleagues, and his minions in England to reorganise the forces overseas.<sup>79</sup> For instance, Watson wrote to Carson suggesting "the whole slate must be cleaned from top to bottom. Things are radically wrong there General and you should insist, for the honour of Canada and the vital interests here at the front to have a drastic change effected."<sup>80</sup> In March 1916 in response, Hughes first set up an informal council with four members including Carson, Aitken, and Watson, the GOC 4<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>81</sup> The Council held only two meetings before Aitken undermined it, and Watson,

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<sup>77</sup> Inefficient and Medically Unfit Soldiers Arriving from Canada, 3 July 1916, I-24-1, RG 9 III B1 v447, LAC; Statement of Medical Fitness of Troops Who Arrive in England During October 1916, 10-12-15, RG 9 III A1 v90, LAC; Minutes ASMC, 27 October 1916, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

<sup>78</sup> Proposed Training Reorganisation, Col Reid to Carson 24 July 1916, 8-5-10f, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.; Summary of General Conditions Which Existed Prior to Assumption of Command by Major-General R.E.W. Turner, 23 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>79</sup> Proposed Training Reorganisation, Col Reid to Carson 24 July 1916, 8-5-10f, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC; Carson to Hughes, 15 December 1915, RG 9 III A1 v30, LAC; Gwatkin Notes, 11 March 1916, 31737-37138, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>80</sup> Watson to Carson, 16 February 1916, 6-W-4, RG 9 III A1 v231, LAC.

<sup>81</sup> Hughes to Aitken, 31 March 1916, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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realising the extent of the disorganisation, decided to focus on his division.<sup>82</sup> In the fall, Hughes formed an Acting Sub-Militia Overseas Council to act as an advisory body. However, its utility was constrained by the Minister having to approve all its decisions, its size (twelve members), and its staffing with Hughes' cronies.<sup>83</sup> Hughes in his grandiose style claimed that the British Adjutant-General wished they could model their system on Hughes' structure.<sup>84</sup> The Council did not accomplish much in its short existence before it was wound up in November.<sup>85</sup>

Borden had a terrible dilemma. It was obvious that there were serious problems with the overseas forces, and Hughes could not rectify them.<sup>86</sup> Hughes, however, had a powerful constituency in Canada believing his claims of his prowess and accomplishments.<sup>87</sup> In addition, Borden was non-confrontational and feared the damage the truculent Hughes could do if ousted. While Hughes was in England establishing his council, Perley was in Canada lobbying Borden for a civilian head of a smaller military council in England. From early in the war, Hughes and his regime concerned Perley. Already in May 1915, Perley was raising warnings that British did not know who was in charge. He had to deal with the consequences of Hughes' intemperate outbursts and Perley wanted to mitigate

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<sup>82</sup> At one point, the plan suggested Watson as GOC, Canadians with MacDougall sent to the Canadian Corps for instructional purposes for an "indefinite term." Minutes Informal Meeting of Four Members, 5 April 1916, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC; Brennan, "Major-General David Watson: A Critical Appraisal of Canadian Generalship in the Great War," 114; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 67.

<sup>83</sup> Included in the Council were Carson, Brooke, Meighen, and Hughes' son-in-law Byron Green as Secretary.

<sup>84</sup> Hughes to Borden, 8 September 1916, 35731-35732, MG 26 H1 v69, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>85</sup> Perley, the new minister, asked for the resignation of all its members on 16 November. ASMC Minutes, 16 November 1916, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

<sup>86</sup> Flavelle to Borden, 18 September 1916, File 6, Loc 2127, Box 2, Joseph W. Flavelle Fonds; QUA.; Ross Diary Entry, 25 November 1916, MG 30 E392 v1, Ross Fonds; LAC. See also, Brown, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography*, 2: 15.

<sup>87</sup> Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 187.

## 5 Unwise Management

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or avoid the damage by being more involved in military matters. Perley was convinced Hughes was a menace and was 'damaging Canada's reputation.'<sup>88</sup>

Perley was a survivor and was not one to bow to Hughes' bullying.<sup>89</sup>

Borden decided to establish a separate ministry for overseas forces. This approach would solve the problems of Hughes' control over the CEF while keeping Hughes in the Government. Recognising Borden's manoeuvre would effectively end his power Hughes reacted strongly. Hughes' health was suffering, and Morton suggests a serious car accident involving Hughes' family further unbalanced his already unsteady personality. Hughes' outrageous behaviour forced Borden to ask for his resignation. After much anguish, plotting, and pleas, Hughes finally resigned.<sup>90</sup> What is surprising is the limited reaction from Hughes. It suggests that there was an undocumented quid pro quo of ensuring Garnet Hughes would get a division. Certainly, there were instructions to Conservatives not to attack Hughes unless he attacked the government.<sup>91</sup>

In place of a single Department of Militia, Borden established two separate but equal ministries. Perley, who retained his position as acting High Commissioner, would head the new Ministry of Overseas Forces of Canada. Perley's appointment was well received – it was obvious a change was needed.<sup>92</sup> Perley was from a wealthy lumber family from Ottawa, who was first elected from

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<sup>88</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 66.

<sup>89</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 117.

<sup>90</sup> Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 302-306; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 84-90; Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 176-178.

<sup>91</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 92.

<sup>92</sup> Cable White to Borden, 11 November 1916, 39205, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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the Quebec riding of Arteneuil in 1904.<sup>93</sup> Perley was Borden's closest confidant while the Conservatives were in opposition and when elected, Borden tasked Perley with overhauling the government machinery.<sup>94</sup> Borden admired successful businessmen in an age where business attracted the best and brightest.<sup>95</sup> Borden sent Perley to England in 1914 to evaluate the situation of the Canadian High Commission in England.<sup>96</sup> Perley was an astute politician, an anglophile, a millionaire, and almost wholly ignorant of military matters.<sup>97</sup> Borden warned Perley indirectly about his perceived predilection for the British with "a cry may be raised on this side that Canadian rights will not be strongly asserted under your administration and that Canadian direction and control will not be properly maintained."<sup>98</sup>

Borden appointed A.E. Kemp Minister of Militia in place of Hughes. Kemp was born into humble circumstances in Quebec and had parlayed his acumen and hard work into a successful business career in Toronto. He first entered politics in 1900 and was serving as a Minister without Portfolio at the start of the war. He acted as Borden's trouble-shooter investigating operations of various departments and then serving as the first Chairman of the War Purchasing

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<sup>93</sup> Richard J. Walker, "The Political Management of Army Leadership: The Evolution of Canadian Civil-Military Relations 1898-1945" (PhD, The University of Western Ontario, 2003), 160.

<sup>94</sup> MacLaren, *Commissions High : Canada in London, 1870-1971*: 161.

<sup>95</sup> Perley was successful. Two of his properties became important landmarks in Ottawa. One property, Stornoway, is the residence of the Leader of the Official Opposition and the other was redeveloped as the Canadian Library and Archives building. Nancy Gelber, *Canada in London : An Unofficial Glimpse of Canada's Sixteen High Commissioners, 1880-1980* (London: Canada House, 1980), 28; English, *The Decline of Politics: The Conservatives and the Party System 1901-1920*: 51.

<sup>96</sup> The previous High Commissioner, Lord Strathcona, died in January 1914. MacLaren, *Commissions High : Canada in London, 1870-1971*: 162-164.

<sup>97</sup> Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 265.

<sup>98</sup> Borden to Perley, 6 November 1916, v7, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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Committee in 1915. Morton described Kemp as “bustling, aggressive, and sometimes pompous.”<sup>99</sup>

### ANZAC Comparison

The new structure was significantly at variance with the approach of New Zealand and Australia. They both appointed British officers as GOC of all of their overseas forces, and these officers retained this post even after receiving appointments to command other units.<sup>100</sup> This meant the GOC had responsibility for both the combat arms and administrative forces overseas. The advantages of this approach over the Canadian OMFC should have been better coordination with and support for the front. The same officer responsible for both functions should have mitigated the bickering between the front and rear services. In addition, a British GOC would minimise the intrusion of political influence.<sup>101</sup>

These advantages, however, were not always realised, and there were disadvantages. The GOC's focused on their combat command with the result that certainly the Australian GOC, Birdwood, spent little time on the forces in England.<sup>102</sup> There was still bickering and intriguing in the Australian case,

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<sup>99</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 148; Biography of Kemp, G.A.Q. 4-41, RG 24 v1816, LAC; Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916*: 150.

<sup>100</sup> Major-General Alexander Godley, who commanded the New Zealand Militia since 1910, was the GOC, New Zealand Expeditionary Force. Lieutenant-General W. Birdwood took over formally as GOC, Australian Imperial Force after the first commander Major-General W.T. Bridges was killed at Gallipoli. Godley received the XXIII Corps in 1917 and Birdwood the Fifth Army in 1918.

<sup>101</sup> Millar, "A Study in the Limitations of Command: General Sir William Birdwood and the A.I.F., 1914-1918," 128.

<sup>102</sup> Birdwood made only two visits to training depots in England in a year, so he essentially left matters to the commanders in England. Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion: Anglo-Australian Relations During World War I*: 141; Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 70.

## 5 Unwise Management

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especially when Major-General J.W. McCay, who was too politically dangerous to be returned to Australia, took over command of the depots in England.<sup>103</sup> Repeatedly, McCay lobbied to command all forces in England with a role similar to Turner's. At other times, he angled for command of the Australian Corps, Birdwood's position, or command of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, again.<sup>104</sup> Jeffrey Grey contrasts the Australian Imperial Force Headquarters (AIF) "whereas the Canadian and New Zealand administrations in London were to become large and effective with some initiative, the AIF Headquarters in London remained purely an administrative body, with all policy decisions referred to Melbourne."<sup>105</sup>

One advantage to the Canadian approach was the political heft of a cabinet minister residing in England. This may have been a factor in the lower capitation rates Canada paid for its forces versus the Australians.<sup>106</sup> This lack of political influence later caused the Australian Government to send a cabinet minister to England during demobilisation to assert Australian interests.<sup>107</sup>

A disadvantage of a British GOC was, in Birdwood's case, his reluctance to replace British staff officers with Australians. Birdwood, also, did not encourage the assignment of Australians as Staff Learners. This contrasts with the Canadian

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<sup>103</sup> McCay was heartily loathed by his officers and men and was blamed for the costly failure at Fromelles. McCay was a former Defence Minister and was responsible for bringing down two separate governments. For a full biography of this complex commander see Wray, *Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life*.

<sup>104</sup> *ibid.*, 214.

<sup>105</sup> Grey, *A Military History of Australia*: 111; Frederick William Perry, "Manpower and Organisational Problems in the Expansion of the British and Other Commonwealth Armies During the Two World Wars" (PhD, University of London, 1982), 289.

<sup>106</sup> The Dominions agreed to pay the British for all supplies, food, and ordnance supplied at the front and to simplify the accounting a per capita rate was charged for each soldier at the front. Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 94; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 117.

<sup>107</sup> Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 281.



## 5 Unwise Management

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policy of developing Canadians to replace British staff officers for all but the most senior positions.<sup>108</sup>

One of the drawbacks of the two ministries was Perley was unable to defend his ministry in the House, leaving that responsibility to Kemp. As Morton suggests, Perley could be above politics leaving Kemp with the dirty work.<sup>109</sup> Perley was of the cabinet but not really in the cabinet, given his remote location in England.<sup>110</sup>

From the available records, there is no indication that Borden ever considered an overall GOC of overseas forces. Hughes would not have tolerated a GOC limiting his power and the GOC would undoubtedly have been a British officer, which would have been anathema to Hughes and the Canadian cabinet.<sup>111</sup> When established, Borden's purpose for the OMFC was to retain Hughes while stripping him of his power over the CEF.

### Turner is Selected

Perley, assisted by William White, the Finance Minister in England on

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<sup>108</sup> Grey, *The Australian Army: 57*; Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion: Anglo-Australian Relations During World War I*: 113.

<sup>109</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 112-113.

<sup>110</sup> In the Second World War, the Canadians adopted a different approach with a headquarters responsible for routine matters and command of the static training and administration units in England. This headquarters was subordinate to the Senior Combatant Officer, Canadian Army Overseas. There was a conscious effort to avoid what Crerar, the Chief of the General Staff, considered the ills of the system in the First World War and while the new system had advantages, there were still tensions between the front and base. It is also questionable if it was that more efficient than the organisation in the First World War, as the Canadian HQ in London at the end of the First World War consisted of 760 personnel versus the 2,073 at the Second World War. C. P. Stacey, *Six Years of War*, Official History of the Canadian Army in the Second World War (Ottawa,: E. Cloutier, Queen's printer, 1955), 215; Canada. Ministry Overseas Military Forces of Canada., *Report of the Ministry, Overseas Military Forces of Canada, 1918* (London: Printed by authority of the Ministry, Overseas Military Forces of Canada, 1919), 55.

<sup>111</sup> In late 1916, when Borden was determining the organisation, no Canadian officer, including Currie, had the experience, credibility, or success to be selected GOC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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business, had the daunting task of determining the structure of his new ministry. Initially, all the parties worked on the assumption that Perley's new Ministry would mimic the organisation in Canada with an Overseas Militia Council. Borden offered to send the Chief of General Staff, Major-General Willoughby Gwatkin, and Eugene Fiset, the Deputy Minister of Militia, to help staff the Council. Borden made the Gwatkin offer in part, because Gwatkin was planning to resign due to conflict with Hughes.<sup>112</sup> Perley was fully aware of the inadequacies of the existing senior commanders in England and knew he needed a stronger team. He realised he needed a respected leader with front experience and the confidence of the corps.<sup>113</sup> Parachuting in Gwatkin, an Englishman, would be a serious misstep, undermine Perley's credibility with the corps, and would open Perley to further accusations of subordinating Canadian interests to British ones.<sup>114</sup>

Perley astutely met with Byng and his senior commanders down to brigade level to get their advice on the organisation and staff. Perley received universal advice that rather than a Council there should be a front-experienced officer as GOC. He should be assisted by an Adjutant-General, Quartermaster General, and Director of Training, with a Deputy Minister under Perley for civil affairs. They could act as an informal council if the right men were selected.<sup>115</sup>

Perley now had his organisation, but he needed the front-experienced GOC.

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<sup>112</sup> Cable Borden to Perley, 8 November 1916, v7, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC; Acting Sub-Militia Council E.P. 3.7.39, RG 24 v6930, LAC.

<sup>113</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 96.

<sup>114</sup> Perley to Borden, 27 November 1916, v7, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>115</sup> Cable Perley to Borden. Undated, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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This officer needed to have the confidence of the corps but also have the breadth of experience and expertise to deal with the multitude of issues in England that involved military and civil matters. Perley had effectively two choices, Currie or Turner. Of the other two divisional commanders, Lipsett of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division was British and thus was disqualified, and Watson was too junior and had already passed on the opportunity to be GOC in England. Perley interviewed both Currie and Turner without revealing his purpose and sought Byng's advice. Byng recommended Currie without any qualifications and offered to release him to England.<sup>116</sup> Perley cabled Borden that "Currie is generally preferred by officers at the front," but his Liberal affiliations may cause objections, however, Currie claimed he no longer took a political interest. Perley described Turner as "much beloved by everyone but perhaps not quite so firm or forceful as others."<sup>117</sup> Both White and Perley thought "Currie most capable for position but Turner would probably be more popular with our following."<sup>118</sup>

As a result, Perley first offered the position to Currie, which Currie rejected. Currie smouldered with resentment over the treatment of the corps by the politicians and he was convinced that the offer was a manoeuvre to displace him. Currie demanded that he would only accept the position if it were free of political interference. This was not an unreasonable demand given the previous history of overt intrusion. Perley, however, was probably offended by the inference that he was no different from Hughes. Currie believed that Perley was cool to him

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<sup>116</sup> GHP Memorandum, File 3, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

<sup>117</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 22 November 1916, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>118</sup> *ibid.*

## 5 Unwise Management

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afterwards because of this. Currie also wanted to remain at the front, as that was where the opportunities and honour lay.<sup>119</sup>

Perley then offered the position to Turner on 24 November 1916. Turner at first resisted – recognising, as did Currie, the supremacy of the active front. He did not want to leave his division. Perley however positioned it as Turner's duty and presented an excerpt of a cable from Borden that read whomever Perley selected "will regard it as his duty in the public interest and for the national welfare to undertake the ever more important duty which you propose to entrust to him."<sup>120</sup>

Perley had requested Borden send the telegram as a further inducement to convince Turner. Additional pressure from Byng and Turner's innate sense of responsibility led him formally to accept the offer on 30 November. He did so with the proviso that his seniority be respected and that he be considered for Corps command if the opportunity arose.<sup>121</sup> Perley's original note was accompanied by an unsigned and undated note asking Turner to cross over quickly and that the "post will not foreclude him from again getting to the fighting line at some future time after he has got everything in shape here and when the suitable opportunity arises."<sup>122</sup>

One aspect of this decision process that some historians have

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<sup>119</sup> Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939*: 130; Urquhart, *Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian*: 116, 140; Currie to Mother, 24 January 1917, File 34, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

<sup>120</sup> Cable Perley to Borden. Undated, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>121</sup> Turner to Perley, 30 November 1916, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>122</sup> The note is undoubtedly from Perley. Perley to Turner, 24 November 1916, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

## 5 Unwise Management

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misrepresented is the notion that Byng was eager to sack Turner.<sup>123</sup> Given the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division's considerable success at Courcelette it is difficult to understand why Byng would want to unstick Turner, and there is no evidence existing to support this claim. Clearly, Byng regarded Currie as more capable than Turner but it does not follow that he wanted to remove Turner. If Byng wanted to replace Turner, why did he not recommend Turner initially? It is more plausible that Byng wanted the desperate situation in England to be resolved and if Currie would not do it then Turner would have to.

Turner was reluctant to take the position but writing Garnet Hughes, he put an interesting spin on his situation that "When the two ministers were here no intimation was given that I was likely to be selected, and I honestly say the prospect did not appeal to me. I know there will be a bag of trouble, and that is a feature which rather pleases me."<sup>124</sup>

Turner was on his way to England with the unwieldy title of General Officer Commanding Canadian Forces in the British Isles.<sup>125</sup> As one battalion history put it "It may be assumed that, though duty permitted him no alternative, he surrendered command of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Division with regret; it is certain that the units of the division regretted his departure profoundly."<sup>126</sup> A contemporary

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<sup>123</sup> For example "Byng, delighted to be rid of an inadequate commander..." Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*: 86; Greenhous, *Canada and the Battle of Vimy Ridge, 9-12 April 1917*: 54.

<sup>124</sup> Turner to Hughes, 26 November 1916, File 5, MG 27 II D23 v14, Hughes Fonds; LAC.

<sup>125</sup> Turner's wife and two daughters were staying in London, so Turner's letters to his wife cease, with his transfer to England. The remaining entries of his 'diary' are sparse references to inspections he made in 1918. Turner's son, Harold, attended school in Canada at Bishop's College in Sherbrooke, Quebec. Turner was later granted an honorary Doctor of Laws from Bishops.

<sup>126</sup> Fetherstonhaugh, *The 24th Battalion, C.E.F., Victoria Rifles of Canada, 1914-1919*: 109.

## 5 Unwise Management

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perspective from a staff officer D. E. Macintyre believed Turner “certainly is the right man in the right place. Unfortunately it is a great loss for us, everyone was his friend out here. He is not only a capable soldier but an absolutely honest and fearless man and should go far.”<sup>127</sup> How far Turner went and what he accomplished is the subject of the next chapter.

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<sup>127</sup> Macintyre Diary Entry, 26 November 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC.

# 6

## **‘A WISE CHOICE:’ TRANSFORMATION**

*General Turner is a great strength and was a wise choice.*

Sir George Perley, Minister of OMFC<sup>1</sup>

Turner and his staff were under severe time constraints to build up a supply of effectively trained replacements before the start of the 1917 spring offensive.<sup>2</sup> It was, therefore, apparent to Turner that virtually every aspect of the Canadian training and administration organisation needed rapid reform, revision, replacement, rearrangement, or renewal. Turner implemented wide sweeping reforms that increased the effectiveness and improved the efficiency of the organisation and refashioned the promotion system. What is remarkable is how swiftly Turner and his staff implemented these changes, with most in place within four months of Turner’s selection.

This chapter describes this remarkable transformation over the first seven months of Turner’s command, during which Byng commanded the Canadian Corps. The chapter also reviews the extent to which this metamorphosis was successful and the factors that explain the success.

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<sup>1</sup> Perley to Borden, 27 January 1917, 13656, MG 26 H1 v33, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>2</sup> Throughout the chapter and the rest of the thesis, it is difficult at this remote remove to distinguish the responsibility between Turner and his staff. Staffs, in this period, were considered an extension of the commander and were to remain in the background. As a result, in most instances it a reference to Turner should be assumed to encompass his staff, as well.

**Figure 15** Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Turner, GOC Canadian Forces in the British Isles



General Turner Photograph, Office, Canadian War Records, 19940003-682, CWM.

After a short leave and meetings with Perley, Turner's first actions were to deal with the old guard by relieving the acting Chief of Staff, Adjutant-General,



## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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and Quartermaster-General.<sup>3</sup> Turner thanked them for their services and suggested a position commensurate with their qualifications would be found; none, however, was identified and all returned to Canada.<sup>4</sup> Initially, Perley considered keeping MacDougall as the Adjutant-General and finding a place for Carson, but Turner rejected this plan, as he did not want to be encumbered with those responsible for the chaos.<sup>5</sup> MacDougall's appointment was by Order in Council, so Perley assumed it was necessary to recall MacDougall to Canada for Turner to replace him.<sup>6</sup> Canadian authorities recalled MacDougall, where he resumed revising the King's Regulations and Orders – a task more in keeping with his capabilities.<sup>7</sup>

The two most influential officers, Steele and Carson, were also relieved of their duties. On Perley's appointment, Steele promptly sent Perley recommendations that he become the Inspector-General or even the GOC.<sup>8</sup> Perley did not however see any role for Steele, and Steele lost his Canadian command but retained the British Southeastern District.<sup>9</sup> Carson was relieved 7 December, and while Perley considered him briefly as chairman of a

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<sup>3</sup> Turner essentially sent the same letter to the acting Chief of the General Staff Brigadier-General R.G.E. Leckie, the Adjutant-General, Colonel F.A. Reid, and the Quartermaster-General Colonel W.J. Neill.

<sup>4</sup> Turner to Leckie, 4 December 1916, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC. Leckie briefly commanded the forming 5<sup>th</sup> Division before being superseded by Garnet Hughes in February 1917.

<sup>5</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 22 November 1916, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>6</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 28 November 1916, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>7</sup> *ibid*; Biography of J.C. MacDougall During War, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815 LAC.

<sup>8</sup> Steele's Recommendations for Organisation of OMFC, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC; Steele to Perley, 18 November 1916, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC.

<sup>9</sup> Steele remained in command until 1918. Cable Perley to Borden, Undated, v7, File 3, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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Demobilisation Committee, Carson returned to Canada in June 1917.<sup>10</sup>

Turner's next challenge was staff selection. Contrary to what some historians have claimed, Turner was responsible for choosing his senior staff officers, which Perley approved.<sup>11</sup> Turner had three critical positions to fill, which corresponded to the British staff model. In the British system, there were three supposedly co-equal staff branches – the General Staff, Adjutant-General, and Quartermaster-General. In reality, the General Staff managed coordination of staff duties, so it was more equal than were the others. The primary duties of the General Staff in the OMFC were training and counter-intelligence.<sup>12</sup> The Adjutant-General branch was responsible for personnel matters, discipline, draft finding, Medical, and Chaplain Services. The Quartermaster-General was accountable for supplies, transportation, and accommodations.<sup>13</sup>

Turner had a predilection for selecting officers he knew, and this applied to two of this three key staff officer appointments.<sup>14</sup> For the critical role of GSO 1, he selected Major H. F. McDonald, a burly Militia officer aged thirty-two, who had served with Turner as the Orderly Officer in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade and later served in Garnet Hughes' 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade as a Brigade-Major. McDonald was wounded at the

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<sup>10</sup> J.W. Carson Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 1534 - 50, LAC; Cable Perley to Borden, 4 December 1916, 45435, MG 26 H v88, LAC. Carson hung around long enough to either start or be the subject of a rumour that he would fill in as the Deputy Minister, Carson to Be Appointed Deputy Minister, Ross Diary Entry 16 January 1917, MG 30 E392 v1, Ross Fonds; LAC.

<sup>11</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 5 December 1916, 45449, MG 26 H v88, LAC; Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory: The Canadian Corps in World War I*: 142; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 99.

<sup>12</sup> On active service, the General Staff responsibilities also included operations and intelligence.

<sup>13</sup> Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*: 17; Canada. Ministry Overseas Military Forces of Canada., *Report of the Ministry, Overseas Military Forces of Canada, 1918*: 9-97.

<sup>14</sup> He also brought over his CRE Colonel H.T. Hughes, the Deputy Director of Medical services for the Corps, Surgeon General G. Foster, and his DA&QMG, as the Director Ordnance Services.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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Somme and lost his left arm.<sup>15</sup> No longer fit for active service but with extensive front-line experience, McDonald was an excellent choice for the training role. Byng thought him a good selection agreeing, "Nothing could be better from my point of view."<sup>16</sup>

For his Adjutant-General, Turner selected another familiar face, his chief administrative officer from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, Colonel P.E. Thacker. Thacker was a forty-one year old PF officer and RMC graduate. He had attended Camberley Staff College, and so was one of the few formally trained staff officers in the Canadian military. In 1912, he was seconded to the Central Section of the Imperial General Staff in London, where he was serving at the start of the war. This strongly suggests that he was highly regarded by British and Canadian authorities. Serving in London was an invaluable introduction to many of the British officers he would deal with later. Thacker joined the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division as its chief administrative officer when the division arrived in England.<sup>17</sup>

Finding an effective Quartermaster-General with the appropriate experience in both the military and civilian spheres was a greater challenge. Initially, Turner asked to retain A.D. McRae, the forty-three year old Deputy Minister of Hughes' Sub-Militia Council, as a temporary Quartermaster-General until he could find a suitable officer. Perley planned to use McRae as his Deputy Minister. Turner,

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<sup>15</sup> 2nd Canadian Division, RO 1313, 21 October 1915, RG 9 III B3 v3789, LAC; 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 19 June 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC; McDonald, Harold French Service Record, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 6726 - 40, LAC.

<sup>16</sup> Byng to Turner, 17 December 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.6, 19710147-007, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>17</sup> Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914)*; P.E. Thacker Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9580 - 41, LAC; Biography P.E. Thacker, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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however, requested McRae be made the permanent Quartermaster-General as he could not find a replacement "with a wide experience of business affairs as well as a knowledge of Military matters."<sup>18</sup>

McRae was an interesting choice. First, he was the only senior officer retained from Hughes' Sub-Militia Council. He had no pre-war military experience but was able to leverage his considerable business acumen and success to bring dramatic improvements to the quartermaster service in England.<sup>19</sup> Finally, Turner selected him over the objections of influential Western politicians, who were still angry about McRae's reformation of the remount service in the West in 1915.<sup>20</sup> This is an example of both Perley and Turner refusing to allow the political interference that characterised Hughes' regime.

With McRae's loss, Perley had to find a Deputy Minister. After discussing the matter with Borden, Perley selected Walter Gow, a railroad lawyer from the prestigious Toronto law firm of Blake and Cassels. Gow had up to that point an undistinguished military career, so it was probably not a difficult decision to return to a civilian role.<sup>21</sup> Gow worked effectively with Turner and Perley but relations with Turner broke down later in 1918 and will be discussed in Chapter

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<sup>18</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 16 December 1916, 45462, MG 26 H v88, LAC; Turner to Perley, 27 January 1917, MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>19</sup> McRae was a wealthy and very successful developer from Vancouver. For a laudatory biography, see Betty O'Keefe, Macdonald, Ian, *Merchant Prince: The Story of Alexander Duncan McRae*, 1st ed. (Surrey, B.C.: Heritage House, 2001).

<sup>20</sup> Cable Borden to Perley, 8 November 1916, v7, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC; O'Keefe, *Merchant Prince: The Story of Alexander Duncan McRae*: 88; Steele to Shaungnessy, 19 November 1916, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC.

<sup>21</sup> His Brigade Commander recommended that he not retain his position as a Brigade-Major in a Training Brigade in England. Confidential Report on W Gow, 27 December 1916, R-161-2, RG 9 III B1 v806, LAC.

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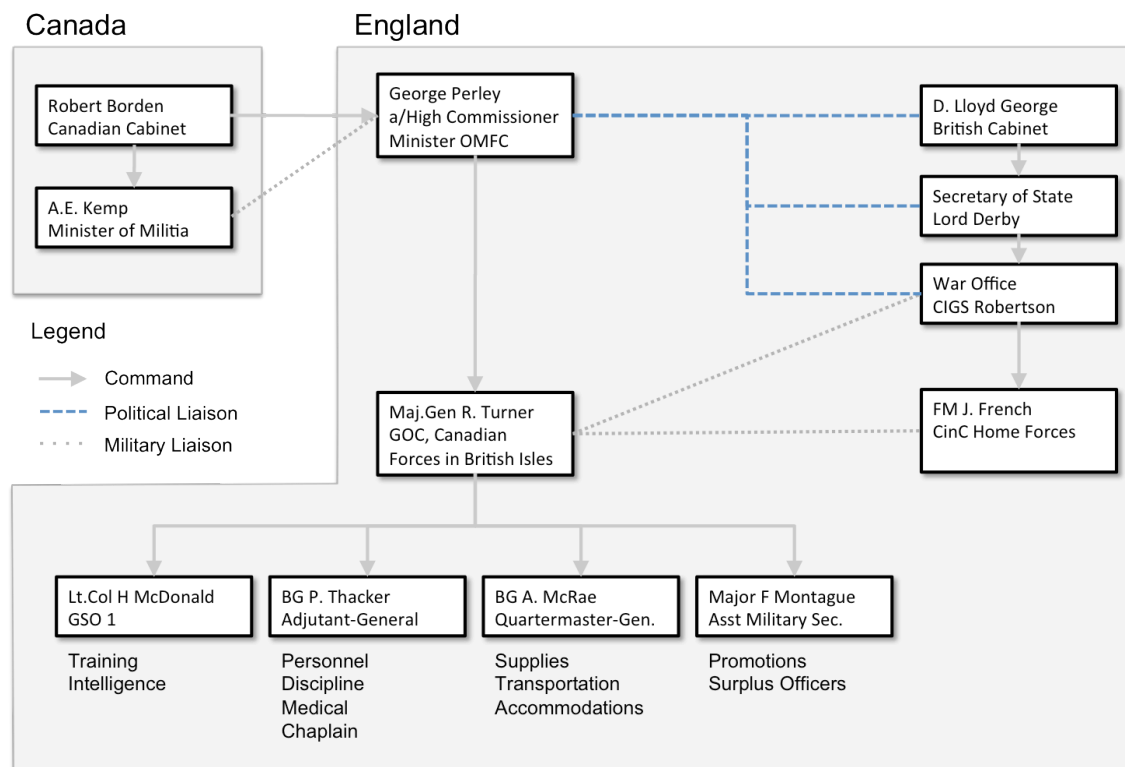
Turner's policy of choosing familiar officers carried a risk of selecting them more for their compatibility than their capability. An example of this was his selection and retention of Garnet Hughes as his Brigade-Major. Generally, Turner's choices, however, did work out. Garnet Hughes defended Turner's selections to his father characterising them as "Thacker is not quite up to his job but they might have done a great deal worse. There is a first class man in McDonald who used to be my Brigade-Major and who is now chief of the general staff. ... McRae is the best possible."<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 16 January 1917, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC; Cable Borden to Perley, 20 January 1917, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 99.

<sup>23</sup> Garnet Hughes to Sam Hughes, 25 March 1917, File 4, MG 27 II D23 v14, Hughes Fonds; LAC.

**Figure 16 Canadian Forces in England 1917 Simplified Organisation Chart**



Underlying all the problems with replacements was the inherent inefficiency of the training system because the manpower supply and replacement demands were decoupled from each other and were unpredictable. Monthly replacement demands could fluctuate by a factor of four between the months of holding the line to a peak resulting from a major offensive. For example, the OMFC despatched 3,241 replacements in January 1917 and 13,710 in May.<sup>24</sup> Manpower supply also varied, although steadily declining in 1917, because of recruiting issues. Further complicating matters was the threat of U-Boats that forced Canadian authorities to rush drafts to England in March and April before the long

<sup>24</sup> Reinforcements Despatched January 1917, File 19, MG 30 E46 v3, Turner Fonds; LAC; Reinforcements Despatched May 1917, File 23, MG 30 E46 v3, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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daylight hours of May, June and July.<sup>25</sup>

This variability meant the new system had to be flexible to handle a large influx of men from Canada or rush recruits through a compressed training schedule. For instance, in the aftermath of Vimy, the General Staff condensed the newly introduced fourteen-week training course to nine weeks.<sup>26</sup> In addition, the training state of units arriving from Canada ranged from having completed only one to five weeks of the syllabus despite being embodied in some cases for over a year.<sup>27</sup>

The recruiting system in Canada collapsed with the average number of new recruits arriving in England dropping dramatically over the course of 1917 from 15,197 in April to the low point of 261 in July 1917.<sup>28</sup> Thus, the system had to deal with this fundamental problem outside of Turner's control. The chart below graphically illustrates the catastrophic imbalance between replacements received versus despatched and this understates the problem, as it does not account for losses in England owing to illness, accidents, debility, and transfers.

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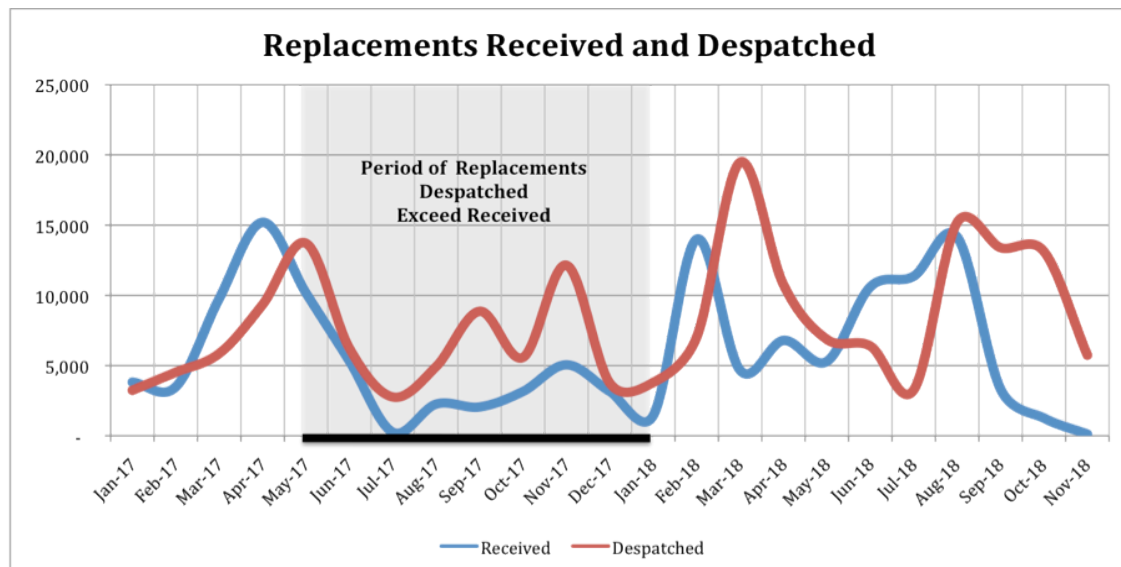
<sup>25</sup> Cable Perley to Kemp, 3 March 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

<sup>26</sup> Memo to GOC, Lt.Col. McDonald, 19 June 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC; Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of June 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>27</sup> State of Training in Canada of Battalions Arriving in England in April/May 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>28</sup> Report to Kemp, 18 May 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

**Figure 17 Replacements Received and Despatched<sup>29</sup>**



A further complication was the increasing demands for Rail and Forestry Troops. 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.<sup>30</sup> Further, hard experience showed the Rail troops needed to be a high medical category given the heavy work of building and maintaining light rail lines.<sup>31</sup> A final short-term distortion to the manpower supply was a bizarre error made by Kemp's staff in mistakenly decoding a cable requesting 500 artillery replacements as 5,000, resulting in Canada sending excess artillery personnel.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>29</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> Some rail troops worked close to the front building and maintaining light rail links and were subject to heavy German artillery interdiction fire. Rail and Forestry Reinforcements Needed, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

<sup>31</sup> Report Captain Ker, Senior Medical Officer, CRT, 1 December 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.

<sup>32</sup> This resulted in gunners arriving from Canada transferring to the infantry to the deep frustration of those involved. Artillery Transfers, 10-8-21 pt1, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC.



### Effectiveness

Turner and his staff's first step to improve training effectiveness was publishing a daily set of Routine Orders commencing 5 December 1916. Previously, there was no central repository or authority for routine or standard orders and the British equivalent Army Council Instructions applied automatically, regardless of their applicability. As of 16 January, the Headquarters, OMFC determined which British instructions applied.<sup>33</sup>

McDonald strongly recommended that the General Staff take over full responsibility for training from the British to centralise control. That same day, the War Office announced that Canadians control training.<sup>34</sup> Turner's staff also streamlined staff work by getting British approval to communicate directly with the Adjutant-General Department of the Canadian Section at GHQ.<sup>35</sup>

Turner wanted also to reform the way Canada supplied replacements. He wanted depots in Canada to provide drafts to affiliated training units in England. Using drafts meant no longer having to wait for battalions to recruit to full strength before sending them to England. It would also eliminate the many problems of having to break up units when they arrived with the attendant evils of unhappy men, surplus senior officers, and the 'residue of the regimental organisation.' Perley agreed and lobbied Kemp to change the policy.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> RO 244, 16 January 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.

<sup>34</sup> Memo McDonald to Turner, 21 December 1916, RG 9 III B1 v3098, LAC; Order War Office 121/Overseas.3157 (S.D. 2), 21 December 1916, RG 9 III B1 v3098, LAC.

<sup>35</sup> Previously, all personnel matters such as leave and furlough had first to pass through the War Office and GHQ with the attendant delays. War Office A Matters. 121/Overseas/3289 (D.R.2), 7 February 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2738, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> Memo Turner to Perley, 16 December 1916, RG 9 III A1 v90, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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Perley and Kemp decided that existing infantry battalions in Canada with over 700 men would ship to England as a unit, with the understanding it would disband on arrival.<sup>37</sup> All officers above the rank of Lieutenant would return to Canada if they could not find a position or were unwilling to revert to Lieutenant. Canada would send any battalions under 700 men as drafts. Kemp anticipated sending men in batches of 250 for a particular battalion in England.<sup>38</sup> Kemp, because of the compromise, avoided facing the consequence of the Government having authorised too many battalions. Instead, Perley, Turner, and the OMFC had to face the obloquy of breaking up battalions.<sup>39</sup> The authorisation of additional battalions continued to June 1917.<sup>40</sup>

On 28 December, Headquarters announced a new training organisation to improve draft finding and to better maintain the territorial affiliation of units.<sup>41</sup> Turner's staff reduced the existing fifty-seven Training Battalions to twenty-six Reserve Battalions and the twelve Training Brigades to six. Each reserve battalion reinforced one or two battalions at the front.<sup>42</sup> Previously reserve battalions would supply men to as many as eleven line battalions.<sup>43</sup>

In May, frustrated by the poor results of training in Canada, McDonald recommended instruction in Canada be limited to just inculcating essential discipline before despatching drafts. This memo became the basis of a letter from

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<sup>37</sup> An understanding that was not always communicated or was not comprehended.

<sup>38</sup> A/AG Cdn Militia to HQ, CEF, 19 January 1917, 10-12-11, RG 9 III A1 v90, LAC.

<sup>39</sup> For a particularly vitriolic view of the break up, see Leslie M Frost, *Fighting Men* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1967), 90.

<sup>40</sup> Notes and Comments on Article by Major Pope, DHS 10-75, RG 24 v1762, LAC.

<sup>41</sup> RO 95, 28 December 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.

<sup>42</sup> For instance, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Reserve Battalion (Western Ontario) absorbed the 36<sup>th</sup>, 133<sup>rd</sup>, half of the 162<sup>nd</sup> and 180<sup>th</sup> battalions and reinforced the 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Battalions in the field.

<sup>43</sup> Reinforcement by Arm, DHH, Folder 48, File 3, 74/672 Box 33, DHH.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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Perley to Kemp who agreed that this would be policy from June 1917.<sup>44</sup>

The next crucial step was to convert the infantry to a full territorial regimental system to 'simplify the system of records and facilitating dealing with casualties.'<sup>45</sup> Battalions from the same province or area formed regiments, consisting of a Regimental Depot for handling convalescents and new recruits, one or more battalions in the field, and one or more reserve battalions. This organisation would help ensure wounded men would return, if not to their battalion, at least to a battalion from their province, and aid in administering recruits and returning wounded.<sup>46</sup>

Another important step was the adoption of the War Office's fourteen-week training syllabus modified by the General Staff to suit Canadian needs. One difference was 50% of all Canadian troops were to receive Lewis Gun training, unlike the British who did this instruction in France.<sup>47</sup> The General Staff issued the syllabus as a training pamphlet in January 1917, with a revision issued 1 October. Turner instructed reserve units to focus on the training of men for the front, which did not appear to be always a priority under Carson. As an example, the General Staff ordered training commands to assign no fatigues to instructors or trainees, unlike previously where much training time was taken up in these duties. The

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<sup>44</sup> Memorandum on Training Reinforcements in Canada and England 23 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>45</sup> For instance, the Alberta Regiment consisted of the 21st Reserve Battalion feeding the 31st, 50th Battalions and the 9th Reserve Battalion tied to the 10th, 49th, and 202nd Battalions. The 202nd Battalion was briefly part of the 5th Division before being broken up. RO 95, 28 December 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.

<sup>46</sup> Thacker to the Secretary Militia Council, 5 March 1917, D-85-33, RG 9 III B1 v2754, LAC; Proposed System for Dealing with Casualties of the Canadian Forces, Undated, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>47</sup> BGGs, GHQ Home Forces to HQ Canadians, 12 February 1917, T-12-36 v1, RG 9 III B1 v3108, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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syllabus placed considerable attention on physical and bayonet training as a way of fostering fighting spirit. Paul Hodges, a modern critic of the bayonet, considers the bayonet a 'fetish.' Not all historians agree, however, as a recent thesis and Paddy Griffith argue the bayonet was useful and so the training not wasted.<sup>48</sup>

Over half of the time was spent on physical training, fieldwork, marching, and drill, which was a reaction to Byng's preference for men with fundamental military discipline rather than a smattering of higher level instruction. Turner, as a result of Byng's demands, wanted attention paid to neatness and smartness in drill, saluting, personal appearance, and care of arms. It was also a recognition that the lethality of modern weapons increased the need for attention on drill as the cornerstone for discipline. It was a conceit of the British and Canadian senior commanders that drill was essential to develop discipline and discipline was foundational for success in the conditions on the Western Front – a belief that had some merit. The British view of Canadian recruits reinforced the apparent need for additional drill, as the British Inspector of Infantry believed "The Canadian learns bayonet fighting, bombing and wiring quicker than the average Englishman, but he is slower at picking up subjects which necessitate exactness, snap and discipline."<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Hodges, "The British Infantry and Atrocities on the Western Front, 1914-1918," 87; Aaron Taylor Miedema, "Bayonets and Blobsticks: The Canadian Experience of Close Combat 1915-1918" (Masters, Royal Military College of Canada, 2010); Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18*: 67-72.

<sup>49</sup> Circular McDonald to HQ, 8 January 1917, RG 9 III B1 v3098, LAC; Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of July 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC; David Englander, "Discipline and Morale in the British Army, 1917-1918," in John Horne (ed.), *State, Society, and Mobilization in Europe During the First World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 125-126; Inspection Report of Canadian Training Division Bramshott, 11 December 1916, I-8-36 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3083, LAC.

**Figure 18 Training Syllabus<sup>50</sup>**

Tasks	Hours	Percentage
PT, Field Work, and Marching	171	33%
Bayonet	54	10%
Musketry	153	29%
Inspection/Lecture	51	10%
Anti-Gas	12	2%
Bombing	12	2%
Night Work	15	3%
Entrenching	15	3%
Drill	111	21%
Rifle Bomb/Lewis Gun	24	5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>526</b>	<b>100%</b>

Not only was the nature of the instruction changed but also so were the instructors and their training. Turner made it a priority to replace fully fit instructors, with lower category combat veterans. This replacement had the double benefit of releasing NCOs to the front and bringing in instructors with front-line experience. However, not all the NCOs were interested in leaving the comfort of England for the hardships of the front. In May, Turner demanded the area commanders be more aggressive in replacing Category 'A' instructors.<sup>51</sup>

Further, Turner wanted all officers in training positions, and especially company commanders in reserve units, to be overseas veterans. Ideally, they should be officers fit only for home service, and, if not, the area commanders had to get permission to retain them.<sup>52</sup> By October 1917, Turner had tightened the requirements so that all the Permanent Cadre of the training units were to be

<sup>50</sup> Training in Canadian Reserve Battalions, Revised Edition, 1 October 1917, T-25-36 v1, RG 9 III B1 v3111, LAC.

<sup>51</sup> McDonald to Landry, 26 May 1917, T-4-36 v4, RG 9 III B1 v3106, LAC.

<sup>52</sup> Circular Thacker to Training Units, 19 April 1917, 0-75-33 v1, RG 9 III B1 v2885, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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overseas veterans and any that were not were to be replaced immediately.<sup>53</sup>

Turner's demand for combat veterans had three benefits. First, it helped ensure the training was practical and in line with the front's needs. Secondly, combat veterans would have more impact on trainees. Finally, it helped defuse the constant complaints that Argyll House (the short-hand term used to describe Headquarters, OMFC) and the training command had too many non-veteran officers hiding from the front.<sup>54</sup>

One of the innovative steps taken was the General Staff's establishment of a Trench Warfare School to help improve the quality and consistency of training. The School trained instructors in entrenching, bombing, rifle-bombing, anti-gas, and Stokes mortars, and qualified 509 Officers and 3508 Other Ranks as instructors.<sup>55</sup> Canadian authorities also took advantage of the courses offered by the British, such that the number of Canadian personnel at British courses almost doubled from December 1916 to February 1917.<sup>56</sup> Men now trained using the weapons and equipment they would use at the front, unlike under Carson. This had the obvious advantage of making the training more realistic and useful. It also eliminated the trouble caused by having to re-equip men being drafted.<sup>57</sup> All recruits were required to pass standard War Office tests and have their

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<sup>53</sup> Pope, 22 October 1917, 0-75-33 v1, RG 9 III B1 v2885, LAC.

<sup>54</sup> It was located at the upscale address of 245 Regent Street in London. Report Adjutant-General Branch, 27 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v3, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>55</sup> RO 1335, 3 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC; Summary on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of November 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>56</sup> Courses of Instruction February 1917, R-2-36 Vol 2, RG 9 III B1 v3098, LAC.

<sup>57</sup> RO 243, 15 January 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC; RO 370, 1 February 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.

qualifications recorded in their pay books when sent to the front.<sup>58</sup> This allowed the General Staff to trace any deficiencies and this resulted in improved commitment to results from training officers.<sup>59</sup>

### Comparisons with Other Dominions

The New Zealand military had probably the most efficient and effective drafting and training system of all the Dominions. New Zealand benefited from a compulsory military training program, so was able to provide a predictable supply of replacements. Regional units in New Zealand drafted and trained men that reinforced an affiliated unit at the front.<sup>60</sup> In addition, New Zealand understood its manpower resources, so did not over-expand its forces, as much as did Canada and Australia.<sup>61</sup> The Australians relied more on British instructors and courses for much of their training.<sup>62</sup>

Ironically, while Canada was adopting a regimental system for its forces, the British moved to a more centralised system to make the most efficient use of available personnel. The severe losses at the Somme meant the authorities

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<sup>58</sup> The men were tested on musketry, bombs, bayonet fighting, anti gas, rapid wiring, Lewis Gun, and drill.

<sup>59</sup> Tests G.S. Canadians 10 August 1917, T-8-14, MG 30 E75 v3, Urquhart Fonds; LAC; Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of August 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>60</sup> Perry, "Manpower and Organisational Problems in the Expansion of the British and Other Commonwealth Armies During the Two World Wars," 333; Pugsley and Barber, *Kiwis in Conflict: 200 Years of New Zealanders at War*: 127; Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War*: 51-51.

<sup>61</sup> Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War*: 64.

<sup>62</sup> Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 139.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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despatched drafts to where needed, regardless of regimental distinctions.<sup>63</sup>

The Germans relied on more training near the front with eight weeks at a depot in Germany and four more weeks of intense training at the front manned by combat veterans.<sup>64</sup> At least one British division commander believed the German training to be 'harder and sterner' than British training.<sup>65</sup>

Addressing the numerous problems with the technical arms was another high priority for Turner. The first step was to have these Depots report directly to the General Staff rather than through the local training command.<sup>66</sup> The Artillery Depot was reorganised with a new commander responsible for all the branches of the artillery. At the same time, the artillery service had to deal with a major reorganisation at the front. Haig wanted a more flexible field artillery structure with more army-level Field Artillery Brigades. To create these additional units, the War Office reduced divisional artillery to two Field Artillery Brigades and increased batteries to six guns. In the process, three Canadian Army Field Artillery Brigades were formed. It meant a considerable shuffling of Canadian artillery units in France and England, with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division's artillery supplying gun sections to increase battery size.<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*: 153; "The Training Reserve," [http://www.1914-1918.net/training\\_reserve.htm](http://www.1914-1918.net/training_reserve.htm).

<sup>64</sup> Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 162.

<sup>65</sup> Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945*: 121.

<sup>66</sup> RO 162, 5 January 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.

<sup>67</sup> The 4th Division artillery was still training in England at this point. Marble, "The Infantry Cannot Do with a Gun Less: The Place of the Artillery in the BEF, 1914-1918," 145; Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of May 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC; War Office to Administrative HQ, CEF, 18 December 1916, O-31-33, RG 9 III B1 v2881, LAC; Administrative HQ, CEF to War Office, 3 January 1917, O-31-33, RG 9 III B1 v2881, LAC.



## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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The General Staff established a new Signal School for training signallers in the infantry, cavalry, and artillery, while the Engineers continued to be responsible for training signallers for brigade, division, and corps units. Signalling was in a transition period as new communications technologies, such as Buzzer sets, Fullerphones, and wireless were increasingly used and, confusingly, responsibility was split between the Signalling Service and the Engineers. Signal training quality and quantity, especially for the divisional and corps units, was a source of considerable dissatisfaction throughout the war.<sup>68</sup> The lack of civilian-trained recruits for the most advanced technical positions and equipment shortages handicapped training. Some positions, such as wireless operator, required months of training and practice. As early as May, the commander of the CETD was pointing out that the Depot, in the first quarter of 1917, had supplied 2,004 replacements but had only received 997 men from Canada and 620 of these arrived at the end of April.<sup>69</sup>

The Machine Gun service was in particular need of immediate reform. Typical of Turner, the solution was to follow the British lead and establish a separate Machine Gun Corps (MGC). The British had formed their MGC in October 1915 to more effectively train, administer, and draft these critical personnel.<sup>70</sup> Byng, in February 1917, responded to Turner's initial

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<sup>68</sup> Currie to HQ OMFC, 1 May 1918, R-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Currie to Cdn Representative, 10 December 1917, MG 30 E133 v1, McNaughton Fonds; LAC; Canada. Canadian Army. Royal Canadian Corps of Signals., *History of the Royal Canadian Corps of Signals, 1903-1961*: 6.

<sup>69</sup> Canadian Signalling School, 1 December 1918, 113/5, RG 9 III D1 v4718, LAC; Bogart to Secretary HQ OMFC, 11 May 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.

<sup>70</sup> Timothy Travers, "The Offensive and the Problem of Innovation in British Military Thought 1870-1915," *Journal of Contemporary History* 13(1978): 545.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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recommendations for a MGC with a detailed proposal from Lieutenant-Colonel Raymond Brutinel, the Canadian Corps Machine Gun Officer. To further assist, Byng also sent over an experienced Machine Gun officer, Major Balfour. Byng expected Balfour to replace the existing commander of the Machine Gun Depot, whom Byng thought an egregious failure. When this did not transpire, Byng complained to Turner. Turner responded immediately, by writing on Byng's letter, "Major Balfour is to take command of MG Corps permanently!"<sup>71</sup> The Canadian MGC (CMGC) came into effect in April with the transfer of all officers and men in Machine Gun units to the CMGC.<sup>72</sup>

From early in the war, the Canadian Corps wanted only subalterns from Canada and England.<sup>73</sup> The corps adopted this position in part to prevent Hughes saddling the corps with excessive numbers of unqualified but politically connected senior officers. Turner was demanding subalterns be commissioned from the ranks in December 1915.<sup>74</sup> Once in command in England, Turner was able to institute this policy over the objections of the authorities in Canada, who had to deal with hundreds of now surplus junior officers in Canada. Turner did bend to allow a small number of officers conducting drafts to England to be considered for retention. Other than this exception, only RMC graduates and

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<sup>71</sup> Byng to Turner, 27 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>72</sup> Grafton, *The Canadian "Emma Gees": A History of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps*: 73; RO 558 Organisation - Cdn MGC, 20 February 1917, P-81-33, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC; Sims to Montague, 25 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC; Byng to Turner, 18 January 1917, 99/10, RG 9 III C1 v3864, LAC.

<sup>73</sup> Carson to Hughes, 13 January 1916, 8-1-87a, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC.

<sup>74</sup> Turner to Carson, 7 December 1915, 8-1-87, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC.

technical officers, such as doctors, were to come from Canada.<sup>75</sup>

The British and Dominions moved to a policy of relying on commissioning NCOs and men to supply subalterns. The British increasingly adopted this approach after exhausting the traditional supply of junior officers from Public Schools and Universities, so that roughly 80% of officer commissions in 1917-1918 were from the ranks.<sup>76</sup> However, British policy was typically to have the newly commissioned officer assigned to a different formation, whereas Canadian officers returned to their original unit.<sup>77</sup> The result was British commanders were known on occasion to recommend NCOs to dispense with them.<sup>78</sup> Canadian commanders were more likely to recommend a superior candidate knowing they would return, than would a British commander.<sup>79</sup>

New Zealand adopted a different approach where roughly half of the commissions were from the ranks and half from New Zealand. The New Zealand divisional commander was concerned about depleting the supply of future Company and Regimental Sergeant-Majors. The view being they were of far

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<sup>75</sup> Memo Touching the Supply of Officers to the C.E.F. On Service in the United Kingdom 12 February 1917, RG 24 v2543 LAC; Decision of the Militia Council 28 February 1917, H.Q. C. 1591, RG 24 v2543 LAC; Cable Turner to Gwatkin, 5 March 1917, RG 24 v2543 LAC; Militia Council Decision 16 March 1917, H.Q. C.2043, RG 24 v2543 LAC.

<sup>76</sup> Cable Perley to Kemp, 3 February 1917, H.Q. C-2043, RG 24 v2543 LAC; Kang, "The British Infantry Officer on the Western Front in the First World War: With Special Reference to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment," 110.

<sup>77</sup> The Australians followed a similar policy until reversed in January 1917. Gary Sheffield, "Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army, Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army, 1902-22" (PhD, King's College, 1994), 216; Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 158.

<sup>78</sup> W. N. Nicholson, *Behind the Lines: An Account of Administrative Staffwork in the British Army 1914-18* (Stevenage: Strong Oak Press with T. Donovan Publishing, 1939; repr., 1990), 233.

<sup>79</sup> Commanders would complain vociferously if their cadets did not return. For example, see the complaints from the 46th Battalion not getting its cadets back. Exchange 46 Bn. Officers, 13 March 1918, R-113-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v2940, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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greater value than a mere subaltern.<sup>80</sup> The Germans rarely commissioned from the ranks preferring to maintain the social exclusivity of the officer class.<sup>81</sup> The Germans also did not have the same needs for junior officers as they relied far more on their NCOs for command. British and Canadian battalions had on average three times the number of officers as did a German battalion.<sup>82</sup>

The previous officer training courses were harshly criticised by the Canadian Corps. In one of his best selections, Turner appointed Lieutenant-Colonel A. C. Critchley to command the school, based on Byng's recommendation. Critchley raised the quality of instruction, improved the syllabus, and made the program far more practical and pragmatic – recognising the purpose of the school was just to develop effective platoon commanders. The school was a model and was so successful that the Royal Air Force (RAF) recruited Critchley to command their cadet program.<sup>83</sup>

Turner was a nationalist and wanted to ensure a steady supply of Canadian staff officers to replace British officers.<sup>84</sup> Turner believed only the most senior staff positions of BGGs and GSO 1 in the corps required British officers.<sup>85</sup> Acting on this belief, Turner almost immediately instituted a program of Staff Learners in

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<sup>80</sup> Pugsley, *The Anzac Experience: New Zealand, Australia and Empire in the First World War*: 154.

<sup>81</sup> Alexander Watson, "Junior Officership in the German Army During the Great War, 1914-1918," *War in History* 14, no. 4 (2007): 436.

<sup>82</sup> Martin Samuels, *Command or Control?: Command, Training, and Tactics in the British and German Armies, 1888-1918* (London: Frank Cass, 1995), 226; Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and British Armies, 1914-1918*: 131. For instance, before the Somme, Canadian infantry battalions received an extra fourteen officers in expectation of heavy losses. Carson to Steele, June 30 1916, 8-1-87, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC.

<sup>83</sup> Circular McDonald Undated, S-7-36 v1, RG 9 III B1 v3101, LAC; A. C. Critchley, *Critch, the Memoirs of Brigadier-General A. C. Critchley* (London: Hutchinson, 1961), 72-75.

<sup>84</sup> The most senior British officer in the OMFC was Lieutenant-Colonel Prismall in charge of musketry and a holdover from Carson's time.

<sup>85</sup> Turner to Perley, 27 January 1917, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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England to develop the supply of Canadian staff officers.<sup>86</sup> Staff Learners were officers who would understudy existing staff to learn their duties. They might also attend a course to learn the rudiments of staff work. The British and Dominion forces faced severe shortages of staff given the army's rapid expansion. Traditional staff training courses took too long to develop the numbers required, so Staff Learners were a way of accelerating staff development, albeit not as well trained or rounded as the pre-war ones. Turner also worked with the Canadian Corps and Haig to assign more Canadian Staff Learners in France.<sup>87</sup> The agreement was to assign Canadians as Staff Learners to British units to expand their experiences. Haig preferred that the Canadians not replace their British staff but rather have Canadian staff assigned to British units.<sup>88</sup> Both Turner and Currie agreed, however, that they wanted Canadian staff officers in the corps. Birdwood, the Australian GOC, was not as active in promoting Australian officers and had to be forced by the Australian Government, so that it was not until 1917 that the Australians began replacing British staff in large numbers.<sup>89</sup>

### Efficiency

Under Turner, the Adjutant-General and Quartermaster-General were responsible for the improved efficiencies in the OMFC. The primary focus of the Adjutant-General department was to find drafts for the front by ferreting out

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<sup>86</sup> Circular, Director Personnel Services, 21-2-34, 13 December 1916, O-29-33 vI, RG 9 III B1 v2881, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> Turner to Sims, 25 February 1917, A-8-24 v1, RG 9 III B1 v2105, LAC; Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939*: 129.

<sup>88</sup> Haig to War Office O.B./742, 17 June 1917, 10-8-18, RG 9 III A1 v73, LAC.

<sup>89</sup> Grey, *The Australian Army*: 57.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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surpluses in the employment of officers and men. One of the most important steps was to assess the fitness for duty of the men in England using the War Office categorisation system. Category 'A' men were fit for general service, Category 'B' for duty abroad but not general service, Category 'C' for service in England, Category 'D' were temporarily unfit but were likely to become fit in six months, and Category 'E' not likely to be fit in six months. Each category divided into sub-categories, so 'Ai' meant fully fit and trained for active service, while 'Aii' meant fit but not fully trained. It took considerable time to educate the medical boards making the assessments to be consistent in their findings.<sup>90</sup> Unlike in the Second World War, the categorisation system did not make any allowance for the mental or psychological capabilities of the soldier.<sup>91</sup> It was enough to be able to march, shoot, salute, and wear a gas mask.

Once the assessment was complete, the Adjutant-General department could determine who was available for the front and who would return to Canada. The intent was to replace Category 'A' men wherever possible with Category 'B' or 'C' men, so the Category 'A' would be available for the front. The results of the combing out process were impressive. In February 1917, there were 6,379 'A' category men on duties other than training and by July, this dropped to 3,550. This included Service and Ordnance Corps men who were not part of the original total. In their place, the authorities substituted lower category men. In three

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<sup>90</sup> Major Cassels to Deputy Minister, OMFC, 16 July 1917, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>91</sup> In the Second World War personnel selection went beyond the physical capabilities of the soldier but also encompassed experience, psychological make up, and intelligence. Jeremy A. Crang, "The British Army as a Social Institution 1939-1945," in Hew Strachan (ed.), *The British Army, Manpower, and Society into the Twenty-First Century* (London: Frank Cass, 2000), 18-19.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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months, 2,709 men were raised from a lower category to Category 'A' making them available for the front. The number of men in the Command Depot for convalescent wounded dropped from 10,000 in January 1917 to 5,600 men in June 1917.<sup>92</sup>

Another aspect of the categorisation was identifying men to return to Canada. All 'Ciii' men who were not likely to be reclassified to a higher category in six months were to be discharged in Canada, as it was not economical to keep them. This was another slow process. In May, Turner expressed dissatisfaction with the number of men unsuitable for military employment remaining in the areas. He wanted all 'Ciii' men discharged and wanted each area commander to make it a priority to return them. The Adjutant-General Branch made some progress as it returned 5,000 men from 1 December 1916 to 20 February 1917.<sup>93</sup>

The administrative treatment of the wounded was reformed. The previous system lost men or allowed them to languish in depots. The new system relied on the new regimental system so when wounded arrived in England they were assigned to a regimental depot for tracking. Once discharged from the Convalescent Hospital, the Medical Board assessed the men and assigned to one of four alternatives depending on their category.<sup>94</sup>

An additional step was the official disbanding of ninety-six battalions over

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<sup>92</sup> Major Cassels to Deputy Minister, OMFC, 16 July 1917, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>93</sup> To Area Commanders, 15 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v12, Turner Fonds; LAC; Report Adjutant-General Branch, 27 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v3, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>94</sup> The four possibilities were assignment to a reserve battalion to prepare to return to the front; to a Command Depot for 'hardening'; a Garrison Duty battalion if Category 'B' or 'C'; or discharge if Category 'E.' Proposed System for Dealing with Casualties of the Canadian Forces, 3 February 1917, O-52-4, RG 9 III B1 v2112, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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the course of the year.<sup>95</sup> Each disbanded battalion represented tens, and in some cases, hundreds of hours of effort in auditing regimental books and disposing of regimental funds, equipment, and surplus officers.

A constantly recurring complaint about Argyll House was the excess personnel on staff. Turner was always quick to respond to this complaint by providing statistics showing reductions. The table below demonstrates a considerable decline in staffing levels. One of the ways to achieve these reductions was to reduce the number of headquarters, such as closing MacDougall's headquarters at Brighton, which released the equivalent of a divisional staff.<sup>96</sup> As there were fewer units to control, these headquarters became superfluous.

**Figure 19 Reduction in Staff December 1916 to September 1917<sup>97</sup>**

Staff Size	Officers	Other Ranks	Total
1 December 1916	134	566	700
1 August 1917	139	486	625
15 September 1917	109	436	545

The Chaplain Service desperately needed reformation but had to wait until the most critical issues were resolved. Based on Turner's strong recommendation, Perley replaced Steacey, the Director of the Chaplain Service, with John Almond, the Assistant Director in France. Almond transferred experienced chaplains from the front to England, replaced ineffective chaplains, sent surplus ones home, and placated aggrieved denominations – especially the Roman Catholics. The British

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<sup>95</sup> RO 1603, 4 June 1917; RO 2174, 4 August 1917; RO 2750, 27 October 1917; RO 2848, 9 November 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.

<sup>96</sup> Report Adjutant-General Branch, 27 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v3, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>97</sup> Turner to Perley, 21 September 1917, 10-8-43, RG 9 III A1 v77, LAC.



## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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service noticed the difference, and John Simms, the British Principal Chaplain, commented, "the outlook is much brighter."<sup>98</sup>

The Quartermaster-General department also underwent significant changes. With Turner's active support, McRae started implementing much needed reforms that he had advocated for months. The objective of these changes was to free up men for the front and to reduce costs, and McRae was successful. Overall, McRae reduced the branch personnel by 15%, replaced Category 'A' men, so that by April 1917, 85% of the CASC personnel were Category 'C' men, and through centralising transport released 500 Category 'A' men for the front.<sup>99</sup>

McRae's approach for cost savings was four fold. First, the branch found all instances where Canada was paying for services that the British were to supply at no cost. This was not a case of the British reneging on promises, but one of the Canadian authorities not following up. The British had offered to provide accommodations for all offices and billets for officers at no charge. Under the old regime, however, Canada paid for rented office space and hundreds of officers billeted at Canada's expense. By August, McRae had sent one bill to the War Office for £98,000 for billeting with more to come. The British agreed to supply hospital stores and McRae found further savings of £90,000 per year. McRae also negotiated a share of the profits from Imperial Canteens for Soldier Relief Funds. This would later grow into an amount worth millions of dollars and play a key

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<sup>98</sup> Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land: Canadian Chaplains in the Great War*, 16: 61-63; Cable Perley to Borden, 12 February 1917, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC; John Simms Principal Chaplain to Perley, 30 April 1917, File 10, MG 27 II D9 v118, Kemp Fonds; LAC; RO 822, 15 March 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.

<sup>99</sup> First Progress Report Quartermaster-General's Branch Overseas Military Forces of Canada, 20 February 1917, Q-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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role in encouraging the feuding post-war veterans' organisations to merge.<sup>100</sup>

McRae also persuaded the British to grant an exception for custom duties for a saving of another \$466,000 a year.<sup>101</sup>

The second initiative was to centralise purchasing, rations, stores, and transport. Under Carson, each unit had its own transport, stores, and made its own ration purchases. While appropriate for active service units, this approach was grossly inefficient for static units. McRae established a central purchasing organisation but could not even estimate the savings because of the wretched state of prior documentation. Food provision changed to a centralised system. This move saved a further \$2,000,000 a year, delivered better meals, once cooks received training, and reduced food waste, which was crucial given food shortages and complaints from British inspectors. To address criticisms about meal quality, the Quartermaster-General branch established a School of Cookery.<sup>102</sup> Turner also got involved by attending a meeting of commanders from Bramshott and Shorncliffe to make it clear that the new system was there to stay.<sup>103</sup> This is an example of Turner's support for his immediate staff.

McRae centralised quartermaster and ordnance stores to reduce the excess supplies at the unit level. In reaction to a complaint from Borden about excessive red tape, McRae responded that there were not enough controls on items, such as

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<sup>100</sup> See Chapter 8 for more details and Desmond Morton and Glenn T Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987), 179.

<sup>101</sup> Memorandum of the Quartermaster General's Branch at the Request of the Minister, 22 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>102</sup> Canada. Ministry Overseas Military Forces of Canada., *Report of the Ministry, Overseas Military Forces of Canada, 1918*: 74.

<sup>103</sup> QMG Branch Progress Report September 1917, MG 30 E46 v5, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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quartermaster stores, and as a result, there were serious discrepancies. McRae had a board working for four months to adjust the quartermaster stores in 300 units.<sup>104</sup>

McRae also imposed better controls that resulted in further savings.

Purchases in France had to have the corps commander's approval with a resulting drop in purchases by 90%. Under Carson, no one was responsible for monitoring damages done to barracks, with the result the British wanted to charge 6 shillings per month per soldier as damages and no one on the Canadian side had any documentation to dispute this claim. McRae made units responsible and the problem diminished.<sup>105</sup>

Cost cutting was the fourth key initiative. McRae slashed the use of stationery, typewriters, closed the Ross Rifle facility to save \$250,000 per year, and reduced the number of motor vehicles. McRae was also able to dispose of \$7.5 million of surplus, obsolete, redundant, or inadequate goods, such as Canadian greatcoats, 'Savage' Lewis Guns, and Ross Rifles at no cost to the Government.<sup>106</sup>

Despite these changes, Kemp in Canada was displeased with the pace of dealing with surplus equipment. In response to this complaint, McRae patiently explained:

Appreciating that it is quite impossible for the Hon. The Minister to have a true appreciation of the result of two years of bad administration and the problems

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<sup>104</sup> McRae QMG to Perley, 12 March 1917, 10-8-20, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC.

<sup>105</sup> Memorandum of the Quartermaster General's Branch at the Request of the Minister, 22 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>106</sup> The Savage Arms Company manufactured Lewis Guns in the US under a Canadian contract, but these guns were not parts-compatible with British versions, so were relegated to training units. Ibid.

it has left for us to clear up, the desired results cannot be obtained without much patience.<sup>107</sup>

### Promotions

The next challenge was to establish a credible promotion and gradation system. In January 1917, Borden informed Perley that "Irrespective of rank promotions of officers serving in France are made by you" after Perley had proposed that he consult with Borden on all brigade and divisional command decisions.<sup>108</sup> There was, however, no effective mechanism for monitoring and managing officer promotions, which was essential to mitigate the perceptions of favouritism. To address this deficiency, Turner established an Assistant Military Secretary (AMS) Branch in March 1917, similar in function to the British Military Secretary.<sup>109</sup> To head this extremely sensitive position, Turner selected another familiar officer, Captain F.F. Montague, his former ADC from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. While holding a relatively junior rank, the AMS was a critical position for changing the perception that political influence dominated promotions.<sup>110</sup> One of the toxic aspects of the Hughes regime was the bitter suspicion that officer promotions were as much a matter of politics as capability.

A case in the Canadian Railway Troops (CRT) illustrates the deleterious

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<sup>107</sup> McRae QMG to Perley, 12 March 1917, 10-8-20, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC.

<sup>108</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 28 December 1916, 31655, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC; Cable Borden to Perley, 12 January 1917, 31656, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>109</sup> Holmes, *Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918*: 192; Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*: 17.

<sup>110</sup> In the British Army, the Military Secretary was usually a Lieutenant-General and outranked the Quartermaster-General, who was a Major-General. There was no equivalent of the AMS in the Canadian Militia. *The King's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia 1917*; F.F. Montague Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 6297 - 5, LAC; RO 306, 25 January 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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effects of a flawed promotion process. The commander of the CRT in France was a full Colonel with a Lieutenant-Colonel as a Deputy and one Lieutenant-Colonel assigned to each army. One of these army level officers, Lieutenant-Colonel Ramsay, was an excellent officer but a difficult personality. Ramsay received a promotion to full Colonel, in part because of his previous command of the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps, but was then unwilling to take direction from the Deputy. In addition, Ramsay's peers, on learning of his promotion, wanted to be elevated as well. This is an example that a promotion could have implications beyond a specific officer and cause dissension.<sup>111</sup>

The AMS was responsible for dealing with surplus officers; honours and awards; appointments, promotions, resignations, and reversions; commissioning; gradation lists; and promulgation of changes in the *London Gazette*. Part of the role of the AMS was to track officers, enforce policies, and ensure promotions were merited before submitting them to Turner and Perley for approval.<sup>112</sup>

Promotions in the corps were a sore point with Currie and were a source of considerable conflict. Eventually the policy evolved that Currie, as Canadian Corps commander, approved all promotions for officers and other ranks in the corps.<sup>113</sup>

To resolve disputes over seniority amongst officers of the same rank, Turner tasked Montague with creating a gradation list. Unlike the Australian Army that

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<sup>111</sup> Sims to Turner, 31 July 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>112</sup> Turner tracked all officers through a ledger system managed by a soldier from the 21st Battalion. See, Interview A.R. Cousins, 21st Battalion RG 41 v10, LAC.

<sup>113</sup> Report on the Work of Assistant Military Secretary's Branch since Organisation, 4 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC; Memorandum from AMS to Director of Personal Services, 17 August 1917, P-118-33, RG 9 III B1 v2913, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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had created a list at the AIF's inception, the CEF operated without one.<sup>114</sup> The challenge was how to determine seniority. Turner persuaded Perley it should be the date officers sailed for England.<sup>115</sup> The AMS worked on this basis and developed the list, but Byng objected strenuously to the sailing date, arguing it would mean officers in England, in some cases, would have seniority over ones at the front. Turner responded there was but a single CEF. Turner also contended that the corps commander was poorly positioned to make decisions for the units outside of the corps. In this case, Turner won out, and the sailing date was the basis.<sup>116</sup>

Even more contentious was the problem of surplus officers. The breakup of battalions was a painful event for the men and junior officers, much like a 'death in the family,' but it was far worse for the senior officers.<sup>117</sup> The Canadian Corps would only accept officers above Lieutenant with overseas experience. As a result, the senior officers had a stark choice of reverting to Lieutenant with the resulting loss of prestige and pay, scramble for a position in England, while staff positions were disappearing, or return to Canada with the resulting ignominy. Understandably, after the money, energy, and prestige expended in raising units, these officers were outraged at their treatment, especially given they were for the

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<sup>114</sup> Grey, *The Australian Army*: 40; Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 27.

<sup>115</sup> Perley to GG in Council, 3 January 1917, RG 9 III A1 v90, LAC.

<sup>116</sup> Byng to Military Secretary, GHQ, 3 May 1917, P-24-24, RG 9 III B1 v2128, LAC; Memorandum on the Procedure to Be Adopted in Connection with Promotion and Appointments in the Canadian Forces in France, P-24-24, RG 9 III B1 v2128, LAC.

<sup>117</sup> Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War*: 77.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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most part Conservative party stalwarts.<sup>118</sup>

The problem of surplus officers emerged early in the Hughes regime with Carson raising it as an issue to Hughes in March 1915.<sup>119</sup> All through 1915 and 1916, Carson made ineffectual efforts to address the problem, including sending senior officers as replacements for subalterns. Haig complained to the War Office that a request for six subalterns for the 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion was filled with two Lieutenants, two Captains and a Lieutenant-Colonel who was senior to the battalion's commanding officer.<sup>120</sup>

Perley was aware of the problems and the political consequences. He instructed that every surplus officer be told individually that their service was appreciated, and their return was not due to inefficiency on their part, but was on the 'grounds of military expediency and economy.'<sup>121</sup>

Turner's initial approach was to assess all surplus officers and arrange a two-week instructional tour in France, so they could return to Canada having served at the front.<sup>122</sup> Byng appreciating the pressure on Turner allowed these instructional tours even though they were disruptive. The War Office stopped the tours in March but allowed one more in June.<sup>123</sup>

The next plan was to allow select officers to serve as supernumeraries with units in the field, with the opportunity to be taken on strength if the unit

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<sup>118</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*. 256; Perley to Borden, 2 April 1917, 39248-39251, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>119</sup> Carson to Hughes, 26 March 1915, 8-1-87, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC.

<sup>120</sup> Haig to Secretary War Office, 17 May 1916, RG 9 III B1 v2883, LAC.

<sup>121</sup> Thacker A.G. 8-1-38, 6 January 1917, M-29-36 v3, RG 9 III B1 v3091, LAC.

<sup>122</sup> Telegram DAG 553, 9 December 1916, RG 9 III B1 v2882, LAC; Memorandum Regarding Disposal of Supernumerary Officers, 22 December 1916, RG 9 III B1 v2882, LAC.

<sup>123</sup> Deputy Director Staff Duties to HQ OMFC, 27 March 1917, T-68-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3000, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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commander agreed. This program lasted until after the 1917 election.<sup>124</sup> One other approach was to supply officers for Line of Communications duties in France, such as Town Majors. Initially the British accepted 150 officers, and in April 1918, 162 were serving in these roles.<sup>125</sup>

Eventually, the problem became too large to manage with tours or other subterfuges, and Turner adopted a more hard-nosed approach of giving surplus officers the stark choice of reverting to Lieutenant to serve at the front or return to Canada.<sup>126</sup> Through these means by July 1917, the OMFC despatched 196 officers to Canada, including 3 Generals, 1 Colonel, 48 Lieutenant-Colonels, and 107 Majors. By the end of the year, the OMFC returned 665 surplus officers.<sup>127</sup> Some officers were willing to drop in rank to get to the front. In April, one Lieutenant-Colonel, who reverted to Major, and four Majors and twenty-five Captains who reverted to Lieutenant, were sent to the front.<sup>128</sup> Despite these results, there were still 416 surplus officers as late as November 1917.<sup>129</sup>

Presenting surplus officers with the choice of reversion or return required tact and diplomacy, which at times was missing. Turner had to chastise one area

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<sup>124</sup> Pope for AG to Secretary, War Office, 5 December 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2883, LAC.

<sup>125</sup> Memorandum, Director of Operations, 25 May 1917, Folder 79, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC; Summary of Officers on Loan to Imperial Forces, 17 May 1918, O-259-33, RG 9 III B1 v2903, LAC.

<sup>126</sup> RO 1535, 26 May 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC; Note Turner to A.M.S., 26 June 1917, O-54-33, RG 9 III B1 v2883, LAC.

<sup>127</sup> Return of Officers Returned to Canada Surplus to Requirements in England, 12 July 1917, O-54-33, RG 9 III B1 v2883, LAC; Return Showing Number of Surplus Officers Returned to Canada for Disposal by the Adjutant-General Ottawa from Jan 1 to Dec 31st, O-76-33, RG 9 III B1 v2885, LAC.

<sup>128</sup> Memorandum for the Information of the GOC, 1 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>129</sup> A.G. 8-1-128 Thacker to Turner Revised, 21 November 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2887, LAC.



## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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commander for the poor treatment of officers from broken up battalions.<sup>130</sup>

Thacker wrote another commander that senior officers were to be asked to sign reversion letters by that commander or his senior staff and not a mere Lieutenant.<sup>131</sup>

Later in 1918, Turner personally interviewed most of the returning officers once and all Lieutenant-Colonels at least three times to try to limit the damage they would do back in Canada. At the peak of sending the aggrieved back, Turner, as a further step to mollify them, had Montague interview every surplus officer when they received their embarkation orders, and pass on to Turner those cases Montague thought worthy of a further interview. Montague had to see up to forty officers a day plus all of his usual duties. Naturally, when the majority of these officers did not get a chance to see Turner they would turn their ire on Montague. Kemp received numerous complaints about Montague's brusque treatment.<sup>132</sup> Turner attempted to defend Montague explaining the process and that two of the cases Kemp highlighted were for an officer dismissed for inefficiency and another too old and not qualified for his rank of Major but not willing to revert. Turner's view was "Major Montague has served under my Command for a period of thirty months, ... I have the greatest confidence in this

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<sup>130</sup> Turner to Matthews, 4 April 1917, MG 30 E60 v2, Matthews Fonds; LAC.

<sup>131</sup> The officers of one battalion, including the Lieutenant-Colonel, were outraged that a Lieutenant presented them with the choice. Thacker to OC Cdn Troops Shorncliffe, 30 April 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2882, LAC.

<sup>132</sup> Kemp to Turner, 31 January 1918, H-6, MG 27 II D9 v144, Kemp Fonds; LAC. One other data point was Sutherland Brown wrote a confidential letter complaining about the attitude of Montague and that he was insufficiently respectful of the front line officers and was too narrow and pettifogging. Sutherland Brown to Unknown (Currie?), 1 April 1918, M-15-3, RG 9 III B1 v965, LAC.

Officer.”<sup>133</sup> In the end, however, it appears Turner had to sacrifice Montague to assuage the anger. Montague was seconded to the War Office on 1 April 1918 to work with the Ministry of Information under Aitken.<sup>134</sup>

### Political Interference

To demonstrate the new regime's commitment to eliminating political influence, Turner's headquarters issued two Routine Orders in December 1916 strictly prohibiting irregular communications about appointments and promotions. Turner's headquarters repeated the prohibitions again in January of 1917 and 1918. Perley wrote Borden in January, "A very large part of the letters and cables which come to the Overseas Department are from soldiers or their friends with requests of a personal nature."<sup>135</sup> The habits of the Canadian Militia of political interference were hard to break.

An example of Perley's commitment to trying to drive out both the reality and appearance of political influence was his reaction to the discovery that Sam Steele had tried sending a cable to Canada to lobby for a division for his protégé Brigadier-General Ketchen. Perley wrote Borden,

As you know, we are trying to manage the Overseas Department as a military organization, and to make all appointments and promotions entirely on the grounds of efficiency, It would not only be unwise but absolutely inexcusable to have political pressure used in regard to the appointment of a Divisional Commander.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> Turner to Kemp, 4 February 1918, H-6, MG 27 II D9 v144, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>134</sup> F.F. Montague Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 6297 - 5, LAC.

<sup>135</sup> Perley to Borden, 2 January 1917, RG 9 III A1 v73, LAC.

<sup>136</sup> The censor intercepted Steele's cable to the powerful Robert Rogers. Perley to Borden, 28 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

To reinforce the message, Turner made an example of an officer who violated these policies. Lieutenant-Colonel Preston of the 39<sup>th</sup> Battalion lost his position with the reorganisation of training units. Preston reacted by sending cables to two Members of Parliament, who in turn strongly endorsed Preston and requested he be found a position. Turner responded by hustling Preston back to Canada with a recommendation that the authorities there discipline him.<sup>137</sup>

An early test of the political independence of the OMFC was the selection of Turner's replacement as commander of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division. Byng recommended the GOCRA, Major-General Henry Burstall, a PF officer, take command. Borden was unhappy with the selection and wanted Garnet Hughes appointed to placate Sam Hughes. Perley, impressed with Byng, acceded to Byng's recommendation and Burstall was selected.<sup>138</sup>

A further issue was the status of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, which was fraught with political implications. In September, Sam Hughes promised Robertson, the CIGS, two more divisions and the British were eager to get these units to the front.<sup>139</sup> Haig asked Robertson in January when he could expect the 5<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>140</sup> Both Perley and Kemp had serious doubts about the feasibility of maintaining a fifth division in action. Perley met Robertson in November to provide the evidence

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<sup>137</sup> AG to HQ Cdn Troops Shorncliffe, A.G. 2.P.211, 27 January 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>138</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 2 December 1916, 31645, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC; Cable Borden to Perley, 6 December 1916, 31646, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC; Cable Perley to Borden, 20 December 1916, 31649, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC; Cable Borden to Perley, 22 December 1916, 31652, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 100.

<sup>139</sup> Robertson to Haig, 28 September 1916, 7/6/68, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.

<sup>140</sup> Haig to CIGS, 24 January 1917, WO 158/22, TNA.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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that Canada could only keep four divisions at the front and Robertson grudgingly agreed.<sup>141</sup>

Given Perley and Kemp's qualms regarding the 5<sup>th</sup> Division, why was it still raised?<sup>142</sup> A clue may be who received the divisional command – Garnet Hughes. Borden was most anxious about who was to get the division, cabling Perley "Please consult me before final decision. This very important."<sup>143</sup> Typically, Borden only intervened in politically sensitive matters. Borden had earlier explicitly granted Perley complete authority over promotions, so this suggests a strong political implication. On learning of Hughes' appointment, Borden responded that he 'quite approved.' Hughes, furthermore, was junior to the incumbent divisional commander, Brigadier-General R.G.E. Leckie.<sup>144</sup> To appease Leckie, Perley had to apply considerable pressure on Kemp to get Leckie a command of a district in Canada and a promotion to Major-General.<sup>145</sup> All of this indicates the Government procured Sam Hughes' relative silence by giving his son the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. According to Lieutenant-Colonel Manley Sims, the Canadian Representative at GHQ, Garnet Hughes accepted the position knowing that the authorities did not intend to send the division to France. Sims who made the offer claimed Hughes was not in good health and Turner should recall him as soon as possible, which Turner promptly did.<sup>146</sup>

The British were relentless in their demands for the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. Turner and

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<sup>141</sup> Perley to Borden, 10 November 1916, 39104, MG26 H1 v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>142</sup> *ibid*; Perley to Borden, 20 December 1916, 39110, MG26 H1 v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>143</sup> Cable Borden to Perley, 26 January 1917, V8, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>144</sup> Leckie was the former acting Chief of the General Staff of Hughes' Acting Sub-Militia Council.

<sup>145</sup> Perley to Turner, 25 April 1917, 10-L-10, RG 9 III A1 v293, LAC.

<sup>146</sup> Sims to Turner, 3 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC; Notes to Garnet Burke Hughes, Tuesday, File 5, MG 27 II D23 v14, Hughes Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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Perley met with the Secretary of State for War, the CIGS, and Deputy CIGS to demonstrate yet again there were insufficient resources to maintain another division.<sup>147</sup> The War Office sent three requests alone in February for the 5<sup>th</sup> Division.<sup>148</sup> Robertson raised the topic again at the Imperial War Cabinet in March, but Borden evaded the issue.<sup>149</sup>

In May, Robertson cabled the Governor-General of Canada "It is very important that this Division should eventually be sent to France."<sup>150</sup> Gow, Perley's Deputy Minister, finally ended the British pleas by making it clear that "it is estimated that we shall be able to keep our four Divisions in the Field reinforced until about the end of the year, but in order to do this we shall have to use the 5<sup>th</sup> Division for the purpose."<sup>151</sup> The 5<sup>th</sup> Division remained in England for the remainder of 1917 and became a subject of further controversy in early 1918.

## Assessment

Were the changes effective? Most of the data in this chapter are derived from internal OMFC documents.<sup>152</sup> These reports, as any in a bureaucracy, will tend to trumpet successes and ignore, minimise, or explain away failures. Therefore, to evaluate the effectiveness of the reforms, it is necessary to look at three separate metrics: objective results described in the reports; contemporary

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<sup>147</sup> Perley to Kemp, 17 January 1917, 39119-39120, MG26 H1 v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>148</sup> Perley to Secretary, War Office, 2 March 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

<sup>149</sup> J. L. Granatstein, *Broken Promises: The History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1985), 30.

<sup>150</sup> Cable Robertson to Governor General, 25 May 1917, 39133, MG26 H1 v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>151</sup> Gow to MG Callwell W.O., 30 May 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

<sup>152</sup> Starting in April 1917 each branch including the General Staff, Adjutant-General, AMS, and Quartermaster-General produced detailed monthly or quarterly reports.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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statements by officers in the Canadian Corps, Byng, Perley, and the British; and the opinions of historians.

By these measures, the answer is Turner's reforms were broadly effective. The OMFC was a far more efficient organisation than its predecessor. Under Turner's leadership, it used far fewer personnel, Category 'A' men, resources, and cost less than before. The considerable costs savings found by McRae, the combing out process of replacing Category 'A' men, and the reduction in staffs are all evidence of this greater efficiency. The best illustration of the increased efficiency is the OMFC sending to France 70% more men than it received from Canada in 1917.<sup>153</sup>

One measure of the increased effectiveness of Turner's regime was the significant improvement in musketry tests. Every soldier had to complete standard War Office musketry tests before going to the front. Over the course of the first eight months of Turner's command the percentage of 3<sup>rd</sup> Class shots, the worst rating, dropped significantly in almost every training area, while the number of Marksman, the highest rating, more than doubled from 2.8% to 6.8% of men. For example, at Bramshott the percentage of 3<sup>rd</sup> Class shots fell from 26% to 2% by August.<sup>154</sup>

The contemporary records show a favourable view of the changes. The Deputy-Minister paid a visit to the corps in June and found,

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<sup>153</sup> In 1917, the OMFC received 67,467 men from Canada but despatched 114,222 to France. The extra men were returned wounded and men combed out of units in England. Memorandum to GOC, 7 January 1918, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC.

<sup>154</sup> Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of June 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC; Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of August 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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Speaking generally I found a very much better feeling existing on all hands as to the relations between London and the front than existed when I was in France last year. Every where the statement was "Things are so much better than they were. The drafts which come over from England are much better trained and the relations between the field and the forces in England seem to be much closer and better in every way." That is I think a fair epitome of the many statements made to me on the subject.<sup>155</sup>

Officers at the front also thought there was an improvement. Brigadier-General W. Griesbach commenting, after inspecting the training facilities in England "I was ...impressed with the system of training that prevails and with the willingness of these officers to maintain touch with the Battalions at the front and in all respects to render the greatest possible service to the front line people."<sup>156</sup> The 25<sup>th</sup> Battalion' commander wrote to McDonald to express his appreciation for the quality of recruits the battalion received.<sup>157</sup> A First Army request for the state of replacements received in October and November 1917, the height of the Canadian attacks at Passchendaele, elicited a broadly favourable response from all the divisions, with the 4<sup>th</sup> Division commenting the replacements 'showed a marked improvement in training.'<sup>158</sup>

Even Currie was willing to pass on plaudits about the improvement in the Machine Gun Depot. Brutinel claimed the success of the machine guns at Passchendaele was "rendered possible chiefly by the very high standard of training attained in the Canadian Machine Gun Depot in England, and the

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<sup>155</sup> Gow to Perley, 29 June 1917, 10-8-7 v1, RG 9 III A1 v72, LAC.

<sup>156</sup> Griesbach to 1st Canadian Division, 2 October 1917, T-4-37 v7, RG 9 III B1 v3107, LAC.

<sup>157</sup> McDonald to Lt.Col. Bauld, 15 May 1917, M-29-33 v11, RG 9 III B1 v3092, LAC.

<sup>158</sup> State of Training Oct/Nov 1917, G.177/2-10, 8 December 1917, Folder 103/File 10, RG 9 III C1 v3866, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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discipline, and Esprit de Corps with which the fresh drafts are imbued."<sup>159</sup>

Byng's recommendation that Turner receive the Légion d'honneur illustrates Byng's attitude to Turner.<sup>160</sup> A second indication of Turner's contribution was his appointment as a Knight Companion to the Order of St Michael and St. George on 4 June 1917.<sup>161</sup> With this appointment, he became Sir Richard Turner.

Perley was appreciative of Turner's efforts from the beginning writing positively of the changes to Borden in January and April 1917.<sup>162</sup> Perley upon relinquishing the Ministry wrote Turner "I cannot express to you strongly enough my earnest appreciation of the active and sustained assistance which you and your whole staff have given me in every way."<sup>163</sup>

The British thought the reforms were a success. The Commander in Chief of Home Forces, Field Marshal Sir John French noted the improvements and wrote Perley that "General Turner may look with satisfaction on the results achieved generally."<sup>164</sup> McDonald claimed when visiting France a consensus of both British and Canadian officers at the base depots agreed that on average Canadian infantry were better trained than were the British with the exception of drill.<sup>165</sup> Inspectors of Infantry for different commands also commented on improvements in training

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<sup>159</sup> Currie to Turner, 10 November 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC; Grafton, *The Canadian "Emma Gees": A History of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps*: 99.

<sup>160</sup> Byng to Turner, 17 December 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.6, 19710147-007, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>161</sup> Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC.

<sup>162</sup> Perley to Borden, 27 January 1917, 13656, MG 26 H1 v33, Borden Fonds; LAC; Perley to Borden, 30 April 1917, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>163</sup> Perley to Borden, 27 January 1917, 13656, MG 26 H1 v33, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>164</sup> French to Perley, 28 August 1917, 10-8-18, RG 9 III A1 v73, LAC.

<sup>165</sup> McDonald to Morrison, 26 July 1917, T-8-36 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3108, LAC.



results.<sup>166</sup>

Historians almost universally acknowledge that the new regime accomplished much in the reformation of the administration and training.<sup>167</sup> Even historians normally hostile to Turner, such as Daniel Dancocks, wrote that "He did a good job. It took several months to sort out the mess, but there would be no further complaints about the standard of training of the replacement troops reaching the Canadian Corps."<sup>168</sup> The British Official History attributed the success of the Canadian Corps in the Arras campaign to,

the high standard of the Canadian infantry reinforcements. ... The Canadian drafts had not only as a rule undergone more training but were also rather older men and often of better physique. Thus, a Canadian division appeared to deteriorate very little after taking part in several engagements at short intervals of time."<sup>169</sup>

Where historians differ is the degree to which Perley is primarily responsible for the improvement. Most historians will grant Turner was a 'first class staff officer,' but noted historians like Hyatt, Currie's biographer, consider Perley the 'architect of the new system.'<sup>170</sup> This chapter has demonstrated that while Perley was a key figure, Turner and his staff were the real architects of the system and were responsible for most of the changes.

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<sup>166</sup> Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of June 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>167</sup> Some historians who agree that Turner was successful include S. F Wise, *Canadian Airmen and the First World War*, vol. v. 1 (University of Toronto Press in co-operation with the Dept. of National Defence and the Canadian Govt. Pub. Centre, Supply and Services Canada, 1980), 580; Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory: The Canadian Corps in World War I*: 171; Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918*: 260.

<sup>168</sup> Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography*: 81.

<sup>169</sup> Cyril Benthall, *Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1917* (London: Macmillan, 1940), 451.

<sup>170</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 62; Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory: The Canadian Corps in World War I*: 142; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 100-102; Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939*: 127-129.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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Not all of Turner's initiatives, however, were successful. The anti-gas, signal, engineer, and artillery branches continued to experience problems. These problems were due to a set of factors only partially under Turner's control. For example, shortages of equipment and a supply of civilian-trained men limited signals' training. Neither Turner nor his staff had any experience in the technical branches, and their relative ignorance showed as they replaced their initial choices for command of the various depots. Turner relied on the corps to send the right man to command the depots. In the case of the artillery, the first officer sent by the corps failed, and a second had to be sent.<sup>171</sup>

One area that Turner's organisation never properly addressed was anti-gas training. The technology and tactics of gas warfare evolved rapidly at the front, and the OMFC was never able to catch up. The authorities were still sending men to France in July 1917 without training them in a gas chamber. There was no proper exchange of information with the front, so the training was inadequate, outmoded, and the instructors in England were unimpressive. As Tim Cook phrased it "The problem remained unsolved, and soldiers were required to learn much of their gas training in France for the rest of the war."<sup>172</sup>

Currie complained about the high percentage of men received after Vimy classified as partially trained. In May, Byng wrote a mild letter to 'My dear Turner' asking that the 5<sup>th</sup> Division be used for replacements if there was a shortage of

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<sup>171</sup> McDonald to Morrison, 26 July 1917, T-8-36 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3108, LAC.

<sup>172</sup> Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999), 115-117.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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trained men.<sup>173</sup> Part of the problem was a matter of terminology, in that the replacements had not completed the full fourteen-week syllabus but had finished a compressed program to meet the needs of the corps. For example, the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion reported receiving a draft rated as untrained. The draft came from a reserve battalion that provided pioneer replacements and as it was over-strength, the men were despatched to the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion having completed their nine weeks of infantry training but not pioneer training and so were classified as untrained.<sup>174</sup> Later in the war, McDonald asked the Adjutant-General department not to classify men who had passed through a compressed training cycle as partially trained to reduce these complaints.<sup>175</sup>

In periods of intense fighting or in expectation of high losses, Turner would compress the training syllabus to as little as nine weeks to maintain the strength of the corps. The vagaries of manpower supply from Canada handicapped what Turner could provide. Both Byng and Currie were informed of this decision to condense training, but Currie typically still demanded fully trained men regardless of the resources available to Turner.<sup>176</sup>

Another partial failure was the regimental organisation. There was an imbalance in battalions from regions based on population and available replacements. British Columbia had four more battalions, Quebec two more, and Ontario ten fewer than their populations warranted. The Quebec situation was

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<sup>173</sup> Byng to Turner, 6 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>174</sup> The larger question was whether nine weeks was sufficient time to train an infantryman. Memo to GOC, Lt.Col. McDonald, 19 June 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>175</sup> AG to Training Areas, 30 March 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.

<sup>176</sup> Currie 30 April 1917, (A Branch) Folder 103/File 13, RG 9 III C1 v3866, LAC.

especially dire, as a significant portion of the population were French-speaking who volunteered in limited numbers.<sup>177</sup> This meant the battalions from British Columbia and Quebec lacked replacements, so required men from other provinces to maintain strength.<sup>178</sup> In March, Turner reported that the seven British Columbia battalions had requested 1,406 replacements but he was only able to supply 81 men. There were a further 1,038 in training, but this was before the losses of Vimy, so it is clear there was a looming replacement problem.<sup>179</sup> Turner, working closely with Byng, replaced two Montreal battalions with one each from Ontario and Nova Scotia.<sup>180</sup> They also decided to disband two pioneer battalions from British Columbia rather than infantry units. Byng was disappointed to have to break up battalions but understood the necessity and was pragmatic about it.<sup>181</sup> The breaking up of these combat formations just before Vimy was disruptive and caused multiple protests from the unit and divisional commanders, including two who travelled to London to complain to Turner.<sup>182</sup>

### The replacement situation for British Columbia and Quebec after Vimy

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<sup>177</sup> A early 1917 War Office report indicated 1.4% of French Canadian men, 6.7% of men of 'foreign extraction,' and 37.5% of men of British extraction in Canada had volunteered. Brock Millman, *Pessimism and British War Policy, 1916-1918* (London: F. Cass, 2001), 90; Proposal on Reorganizing Battalion Affiliation Undated, Unsigned, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

<sup>178</sup> Turner claimed that from June 1916, the other provinces had to supply 4,900 men to the Quebec battalions. Turner to Watson, 22 March 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC; Turner to Perley, 26 February 1917, 39239-39244, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>179</sup> Turner to Perley, 10 March 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>180</sup> The two Montreal battalions were the 60th and 73rd, and they were replaced by the 116th, an Ontario battalion, and the 85th a Nova Scotia battalion. Perley to Turner 26 December 1916, 39226, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC; Turner to Perley, 28 December 1916, 39228-39229, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC; Turner to Perley, 26 February 1917, 39239-39244, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>181</sup> Byng to Perley, 18 December 1916, 39214, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>182</sup> Interestingly, Turner did not blame the officers for their actions but the authorities who allowed too many units from BC and Quebec to be sent to the front. Turner to Byng, 19 April 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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continued to deteriorate. Turner had to warn Sims that in discussing the replacement supply problems with the Canadian Corps that it was not "an opportune time to question the soundness of the territorial basis."<sup>183</sup> To solve the ongoing crisis, Turner recommended to Perley in July 1917 to disband two more British Columbia battalions. Currie, however, resisted the notion of breaking up two more combat-experienced units. Turner then suggested reinforcing the two battalions from Ontario regiments, with the result they would gradually convert into Ontario units. This was more acceptable to Currie and that while it would cause much hand wringing; it was a far better policy than disbanding units. It became the policy, thereafter, as multiple battalions needed to change.<sup>184</sup>

Another problem with the affiliation of battalions in the field with a single reserve battalion was real or perceived unfairness of the distribution of personnel. Twice the 38<sup>th</sup> Battalion, with the support of the brigade, divisional, and corps commanders, claimed that the 7<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion which supplied the 38<sup>th</sup> and the PPCLI was sending its best quality men to the PPCLI, because the 7<sup>th</sup> Reserve was dominated by PPCLI officers. The 7<sup>th</sup> Reserve Battalion denied any favouritism and explained the greater number of PPCLI officers as a function of the PPCLI being at the front longer than the 38<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>185</sup> However, the fact that the 38<sup>th</sup> complained twice with endorsements from the chain of command suggests there was something to their concerns.

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<sup>183</sup> Turner to Sims, 27 June 1917, File 7, MG 30 E133 v1, McNaughton Fonds; LAC.

<sup>184</sup> Turner to Perley, 19 July 1917, File 7, MG 30 E133 v1, McNaughton Fonds; LAC; Currie to Sims, 29 July 1917, File 7, MG 30 E133 v1, McNaughton Fonds; LAC.

<sup>185</sup> MacBrien to 4th Division, G.15/275, 17 August 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC; Edwards to 12 Canadian Infantry Battalion, G.C. 12-A-5, 17 February 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2941, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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Not only Canada had to face the difficult situation of having to disband units because of replacement shortages. The British had to shift to three battalions per brigade, which meant roughly one quarter of the infantry battalions at the front, had to be disbanded in early 1918.<sup>186</sup> The Australians, in May 1918, had to start disbanding battalions because of a lack of replacements. By September, Monash reluctantly broke up seven battalions. Six of these refused to disband and the situation was not resolved when the Australians left the line.<sup>187</sup>

### Reasons for Success

The reasons for Turner's success fall into three broad categories of situational factors; support from superiors, peers, and subordinates; and personal factors. Turner had powerful situational advantages that contributed significantly to the success, including the benefit of ample political will behind the transformation. Perley and Borden were aware there were problems, although Perley admitted, "If I had known how difficult the situation is here I doubt if I should have complied with your request."<sup>188</sup> Both knew the system needed to be rectified and so were committed to reform.

Turner had the further advantage of not being beholden to the previous regime, so there was no need to retain or defend the existing organisation, policies, procedures, or personnel. Turner in essence had an unfettered mandate to make reforms. There was a broad recognition in not only France but in Canada

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<sup>186</sup> Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*: 275.

<sup>187</sup> Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 125.

<sup>188</sup> Perley to Borden, 27 November 1916, v7, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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and England that matters were not as they should be, so there was little need to justify the need for changes. Turner and most of his staff also had the advantage of unassailable experience. This meant they knew what was needed but also had the credibility to institute changes based on this experience.

Finally, Turner and his staff had the advantage of adapting proven British policies, organisations, and structures to Canadian circumstances. These changes were not in themselves revolutionary departures from British Army practices. Turner was at heart conservative and systematic, so utilising the British model was an obvious step. Given the time constraints and the absolute necessity of working within the strictures of the British system, there was no opportunity or the need for radical steps.

The second set of advantages was the support Turner received from Perley, Byng, and Turner's subordinates. George Perley had very little knowledge of military matters, and he was fully cognisant of this, so he was reliant on Turner and his staff. As a result, Turner had a free rein as long as he delivered results. Perley was an ideal superior in giving Turner the latitude to make the necessary changes but willing to supply the necessary political muscle when dealing with British or Canadian authorities.<sup>189</sup> Perley's involvement undoubtedly facilitated rapid decisions, such as receiving training control from the British.

Turner was always careful not to transgress on Perley's prerogatives and to never overstep boundaries. He kept Perley informed and requested Perley's approval before taking action. Turner and his staff were wholly responsible for

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<sup>189</sup> Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War*: 93.

analysing, planning, proposing and executing the changes. Perley provided the political support in dealing with Borden, the Cabinet, the Ministry of Militia in Canada, and the British, and ensuring Turner had the resources to carry out his reforms. Perley was also an arbitrator and mediator between Currie and Turner. Turner and Perley worked well together, and their only major disagreement was over a separate Canadian Air Service, to be discussed later.

Turner also had a good relationship with Byng. Byng was determined to improve the training system in England and recognised that supporting Turner was the best method to achieve this goal; as a result, Byng was accommodating. An example of this attitude was Byng's pragmatic reaction to the news that two battalions would disband before Vimy.<sup>190</sup> Byng was willing and even eager to send first class officers like Major Balfour and Lieutenant-Colonel Critchley to command Depots and Schools in England. Byng could be frank when displeased, but there was mutual respect and they had a good working relationship.<sup>191</sup> The fact Turner was a former subordinate and was outranked by Byng ensured there was a clear demarcation of command and no tussling for control.<sup>192</sup> Additionally, Byng's considerable experience in both command and administrative functions and in cutting the political strings from Canada gave him an appreciation of the challenges facing Turner and how he could assist.

Turner and his staff regularly visited the corps, and there was generally an open and frank line of communications. Having recent front experience also

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<sup>190</sup> Byng to Perley, 18 December 1916, 39214, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>191</sup> Byng to Turner, 6 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>192</sup> Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939*: 132.



## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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meant they had a common and shared experience with the staff and commanders of the corps. The exchange of officers and the visits helped ensure training was up to date. Guy Turner (no relation), a Chief Instructor at the CETD, when asked if the training was excellent, remarked in a post-war interview,

Yes, I can assure you it was because we were kept in close touch with what was going on. I know that during the time I was the chief instructor in field works at the engineer training centre I made two or three trips back to France to get first-hand information.<sup>193</sup>

While Turner endeavoured to provide the Canadian Corps with what it needed, he was not a mere 'cypher.'<sup>194</sup> Turner had to walk a fine line of ensuring he met the corps' requirements without sacrificing long-term efficiency or effectiveness. Turner was more than willing to stand up for what he regarded as the correct policy, as example his defence of the gradation basis. He also was determined that England not become a dumping ground for failures from the corps.<sup>195</sup> He had his staff closely monitor the corps, as illustrated by the query about the excess strength of two battalions.<sup>196</sup>

Another overlooked factor in Turner's success was Sims' role as a go-between the Canadian Corps and Argyll House. Sims, an ex-British Army Major and a business associate of one of Hughes' representatives, replaced Aitken as the

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<sup>193</sup> Interview with General Guy R. Turner, RG 41 v21, LAC.

<sup>194</sup> Stephen John Harris, "From Subordinate to Ally," *Revue Internationale D' Historie Militaire* 51(1982): 122.

<sup>195</sup> Lt.Col Harvie to Odum, 27 August 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>196</sup> Two battalions reported strengths of 1,360 and 1,405 well in excess of their establishment. The explanation was the two battalions had absorbed men from the disbanded 60th Battalion. To Major Hamilton, AAG Cdn Section, 3rd Echelon GHQ, 31 May 1917, R-97-33 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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Canadian Representative at GHQ in early 1917.<sup>197</sup> One of Sims' roles was to act as the intermediary between the corps and Argyll House and, according to Perley, Sims was liked by Byng, other commanders, and the authorities at GHQ.<sup>198</sup> There are numerous letters from Sims to Turner, staff, and corps providing insight into the views of the other side to help explain their position. For example, Sims in February 1917 warned Turner about the ill will felt by the corps to the commander of the Machine Gun Depot.<sup>199</sup> Sims provided a useful back channel to help vent and explain matters that could not go through official lines of communication.

Other than the possible exception of Montague, all of Turner's key staff officer selections were successful. McDonald, Thacker, and McRae turned in superlative performances and were critical to the success of the OMFC. Turner well appreciated their contribution and recommended Thacker to be the Adjutant-General in Canada.<sup>200</sup> Turner wrote of McDonald in a confidential report that a long list of achievements "bear evidence of his ability in organisation and amicable relations between ourselves and the Imperial Authorities at present are largely due to his tactful connections with them."<sup>201</sup>

Finally, there were Turner's own characteristics. He worked hard in making the changes including holding meetings on New Year's Day 1917.<sup>202</sup> Another hallmark was professionalism; one of the critical differences between the old

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<sup>197</sup> Sims was a business associate of J.J. Carrick from Port Arthur, Ontario. Douglas Hogarth, who later replaced McRae as Quartermaster-General, was also a Carrick associate.

<sup>198</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 8 December 1916, 31647-31648, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>199</sup> Sims to Montague, 25 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>200</sup> Postscript, 18 October 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

<sup>201</sup> Turner to Mewburn, 23 December 1918, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>202</sup> Ross Diary Entry, 1 January 1917, MG 30 E392 v1, Ross Fonds; LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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regime and Turner's was the focus on follow through and proper procedures. For instance, under Carson every unit interpreted how to fill out returns in its own idiosyncratic fashion with the result that returns were incomplete and inaccurate. It was, therefore, impossible to gain an accurate notion of strengths and available drafts.<sup>203</sup> Turner did not tolerate this. In addition, Turner was constantly striving for increased efficiency, such as requesting Thacker to report on the number of orders issued, their frequency, and whether all were necessary.<sup>204</sup>

There was a palpable difference in the paper work generated under Carson versus Turner. Far more entertaining and useful to the historian, Carson's correspondence is chatty, informative, and revelatory. It exposes the dirty deeds, the hypocrisy, the frantic manoeuvring for position and power, the almost abject obeisance to Sam Hughes, and drive for authority.<sup>205</sup> Turner's correspondence is far more bureaucratic, structured, professional, bloodless, and effective.

Turner instilled a willingness in his staff to accept criticism, unlike under Carson. The typical reaction to a complaint was to ask for details, investigate them, and if justified, make changes. For instance, in response to a biting critique from the British Inspector of Infantry, Turner instructed McDonald to thank the Inspector for bringing these deficiencies to light. There was a short explanation of what went wrong and was being done to address the problems. It closed with a

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<sup>203</sup> Report Adjutant-General Branch, 27 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v3, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>204</sup> Montague AMS to AG, 26 July 1917, M-29-33 v11, RG 9 III B1 v3092, LAC.

<sup>205</sup> For example of obeisance "Why do you not, when the session is over, have our two divisions in the field as an Army Corps and with your good self in command." Carson to Hughes, 1 April 1915, 8-5-8, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC. An example of manoeuvring to get rid of an officer is Carson's attempt to dispose of the Paymaster W.R. Ward. Ward is called back temporarily to Canada for a month, and Carson writes Hughes a confidential and private letter "to keep him in Canada and not return him to England, why the matter, from every standpoint, will be quite agreeable to me." Carson to Hughes, 4 December 1915, 6-W-56, RG 9 III A1 v232, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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request to call on the Inspector to discuss these issues.<sup>206</sup> The Commander-in-Chief of Home Forces commented that he was pleased Canadian officers now accepted critiques from Inspectors and acted upon them.<sup>207</sup>

A more detailed example of the response to criticism was McDonald's reaction to complaints about artillery drafts. McDonald asserted the only significant complaint coming from France during a one-week visit was the state of artillery replacements. When asked about this, the commander of the Artillery Depot claimed the drafts did not come from his establishment, but McDonald investigated further and found the replacements were his responsibility. He was promptly removed.<sup>208</sup>

Turner delegated much responsibility to his subordinates, which worked well with strong officers. Turner's approach was a modern method of appointing the right people for each position and enabling them to do their job. In this case, Turner's business experience probably helped influence his management style. From the evidence, Turner set policies and then allowed the responsible officer to implement them, but closely monitored their execution. His pencilled comments can be found on a wide range of documents probing, requesting further information, and making decisions.<sup>209</sup> He closely monitored the regular reports from his staff. An example was his questioning of a Quartermaster-General report

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<sup>206</sup> McDonald to Howard, 5 July 1917, T-4-36 v6, RG 9 III B1 v3106, LAC.

<sup>207</sup> French to Perley, 28 August 1917, 10-8-18, RG 9 III A1 v73, LAC.

<sup>208</sup> McDonald to Morrison, 26 July 1917, T-8-36 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3108, LAC.

<sup>209</sup> Turner asks why a hospital has not been inspected since August, Turner to Surgeon General Foster, 9 November 1917, File 15-1-3, v1, RG 9 III B2 v3495, LAC. Turner queries about the treatment of French Canadians, Thacker to Turner, 8 August 1918, R-113-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v2940, LAC. Turner queries about cost control, Hogarth to Turner, 13 December 1917, MG 30 E46 v5, Turner Fonds; LAC. Turner asks about the proposed establishment for a unit of 21 men, Turner to AG, 23 October 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2790, LAC.

## 6 'A Wise Choice'

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that, after further investigation and discussions with the War Office, revealed that the Canadians were being double billed for freight costs for rations.<sup>210</sup>

He would solicit the opinion of his staff officers before making a decision. For instance, Thacker recommended that reserve unit commanders have the discretion to select officer reinforcements. Turner redirected the memo to McDonald for his remarks. McDonald agreed and Turner approved the policy.<sup>211</sup>

To an outside observer, this approach can be easily mistaken for a relegation or abandonment of responsibility. There were complaints later in 1918 that Turner's staff dominated him; however, the complainants were not particularly unbiased or trustworthy.<sup>212</sup> Those closer to Turner, such as Kemp and Currie, never made this complaint, so on balance this criticism can be discounted.

A final factor was Turner had a solid reputation for treating officers fairly. An example was Major Bill Hewgill who wrote Turner "understands conditions and as he is in supreme command of the Canadian Forces I know I shall have fair treatment."<sup>213</sup> Turner's regard even extended to the newly married; asking that the Canadian Corps allow a newly married officer an extension for his marriage leave, writing in the margin of a note "Have a Heart."<sup>214</sup> This attitude was sure to foster good will.

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<sup>210</sup> Hogarth to Turner, 13 December 1917, MG 30 E46 v5, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>211</sup> Memo Thacker to Turner, 3 November 1917, R-113-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v2940, LAC.

<sup>212</sup> Aggrieved surplus officers returned to Canada and J.G. Rattray, a former 1st Division battalion commander made these allegations. Currie had arranged a training position for Rattray in 1916 when he started breaking down as a battalion commander. Rattray subsequently wrote repeatedly to Currie passing on gossip and asking to return to the front. A.T. Hunter to Kemp? 6 November 1917, H-6, MG 27 II D9 v144, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Currie to Carson 8 July 1916, 6-R-122, RG 9 III A1 v207, LAC; Rattray to Currie, 24 April 1918, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>213</sup> Hewgill Diary Entry, 15 January, MG 30 E16 v1, Hewgill Fonds; LAC.

<sup>214</sup> McDonald to Sims, 15 January 1917, E-4-24, RG 9 III B1 v2112, LAC.

## **6 'A Wise Choice'**

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Turner and his staff accomplished a major transformation of the Canadian administration and training organisation in England. As a result, the Canadian Corps was able to sustain its combat effectiveness from the storming of Vimy Ridge through the remaining actions of the Arras Offensive. Owing to the superlative performance of the Canadian Corps, Byng was promoted to command of the Third Army. With Byng's promotion, the nature of Turner's command changed, and this is the topic of the next chapter.

# 7

## FIGHTING THE AUTHORITIES: THE TURNER-CURRIE RELATIONSHIP

*General Currie must not try to convince himself that there is anyone here after him with a view of destroying the good reputation which he has built up for himself in military matters.<sup>1</sup>*

Kemp to Borden, 5 March 1919

On 9 June 1917, Currie replaced his red brassard with a new red, white, and red one indicating he was now the commander of the Canadian Corps. Currie's selection meant a dramatic change for Turner and his command, as Currie brought a fundamentally different and more adversarial attitude to the relationship of the corps to Argyll House. Currie famously responded when asked if he had problems with the British answered "My fight was not with regular officers at all. It was with Canadian authorities in London."<sup>2</sup> This chapter explores the sometimes contentious relationship between Currie and Turner through the prism of their correspondence. Unlike previous studies, this work examines their interactions using evidence from both sides to determine the nature and extent of the 'fight.' The chapter extends from the selection of Currie in June 1917 to the final clashes in the post-armistice period and is focused on the Turner-Currie dynamic.

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<sup>1</sup> Kemp to Borden, 5 March 1919, 55844-55845, MG 26 H v102, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>2</sup> A. M. J. Hyatt, "Sir Arthur Currie and Politicians: A Case of Study of Civil-Military Relations in the First World War," in Richard Preston and Peter Dennis (eds.), *Swords and Covenants* (Croom and Helm, 1976), 148.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Lieutenant-General Sir Arthur William Currie was born in 1875 and grew up in rural Ontario. Currie at age 18 moved across the continent to Vancouver Island to make his fortune. He was a successful teacher, insurance salesman, and real estate broker. Whether because of over-involvement in his militia career or just poor judgement, Currie was on the verge of bankruptcy at the start of the war as result of the local real-estate market collapsing in 1912/1913, a matter that will be discussed later.<sup>3</sup>

Currie's pre-war military career was an unbroken success. He first enlisted in the 5<sup>th</sup> Regiment, an artillery unit based in Victoria, in 1897 and commanded it from 1909 to 1913, when he retired. He was an effective commander and his unit won numerous awards.<sup>4</sup> Senior officers of the newly raised 50<sup>th</sup> Regiment, including the junior Major Garnet Hughes, persuaded the then retired Currie to accept command of the 50<sup>th</sup> when its first commander resigned at the end of 1913. Currie's pre-war service record was outstanding, but he gained no administrative experience outside of his regiment and he had had no active service. Unlike many other senior officers, such as Turner, A.H. Macdonell, and J.H. Elmsley, Currie did not serve in the Boer War.<sup>5</sup>

Physically, Currie was tall and portly, and lacked a strong presence.<sup>6</sup> Shy

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<sup>3</sup> See Urquhart, *Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian*: 18; Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 5-7; Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 193-194.

<sup>4</sup> Urquhart, *Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian*: 24.

<sup>5</sup> When the Boer War first broke out Currie had wanted to enlist but stomach problems in late 1899 and early 1900 prevented him joining. It is unclear why he did not join one of the later contingents. Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography*: 14. Both Macdonell and Elmsley would rise to the rank of Brigadier-General in the First World War, with Macdonell commanding a brigade in Turner's 2<sup>nd</sup> Division.

<sup>6</sup> Currie stands out in any group photo in late 1918 for his height, heavy-set figure, and his lack of facial hair. For instance, in a photo with Prince Arthur of Connaught (the Governor-



## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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and somewhat awkward outside of small groups or his inner circle, with a cold and aloof demeanour, Currie never connected with the rank and file as corps commander.<sup>7</sup> In part, this was because Currie was a strict disciplinarian, especially in matters of dress and appearance. He was maladroit when he interacted with his men.<sup>8</sup> Currie lacked the man-management skills needed to inspire Canadian soldiers.<sup>9</sup> It was, however, quite difficult for a corps commander on the Western Front to make a positive impression given the scale of the formation and the nature of the war.

Despite these limitations, Currie was one of the finest corps commanders on the Western Front and probably the best field commander Canada has produced. Beneath his bulk was an incisive mind, careful, deliberate, and perhaps not particularly imaginative but decisive. His considerable strengths aligned well with the circumstances of the Western Front. Currie believed in thorough pre-battle preparation and ample firepower to reduce losses.<sup>10</sup> One of his principal strengths was his great willingness to learn and master his trade.

Currie had an inestimable advantage in possessing Haig's confidence, who overlooked Currie's lack of 'soldierly deportment' because of Currie's ability to instil discipline and his continued success.<sup>11</sup> An important factor in the victories of

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General's son) Currie is one of only eight out of 32 officers in the picture without a moustache. S. J. (Samuel John) Duncan-Clark, b. 1875, Plewman W. R. (William Rothwell) 1880-, and Wallace W. Stewart (William Stewart) 1884-1970, *Pictorial History of the Great War* (The John A. Hertel Co, c1919), 322.

<sup>7</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 97.

<sup>8</sup> Isabella Diane Losinger, "Officer-Man Relations in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919" (Masters, Carleton University, 1990), 18.

<sup>9</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 240.

<sup>10</sup> Burstall Comments, 7j, MG 4027 Acc. No 391 Ref 1-2, Urquhart Fonds; McGill.

<sup>11</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 22-23.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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the Canadian Corps was Currie's willingness to confront his superiors over poor plans, and demand additional guns, shells, and time if he thought it necessary. Examples abound of Currie's taxing nature that would have resulted in his dismissal were he a British corps commander. Two examples from the Passchendaele offensive illustrate this point. First, Haig had to persuade Currie of the necessity of the Canadian commitment to the offensive. Second, Haig agreed to Currie's demand that the corps serve under Plumer rather than the hated Gough.<sup>12</sup>

The Canadian Corps staff officers were initially concerned when Currie was appointed. As Lieutenant-Colonel A. McNaughton, the Canadian Corps Counter-Battery Staff Officer at the time put it "We as staff officers, didn't have too high an opinion of General Currie at that time. As a divisional commander he was a very difficult person to deal with. He was very determined that he was going to get the best – for his particular division."<sup>13</sup> He soon won over the corps staff, as he was willing to listen and learn from his staff and subordinates.<sup>14</sup> Currie could be a vexing subordinate and challenging peer but was an excellent superior to his immediate subordinates.

Garnet Hughes wrote to Currie on 11 May that there were reports circulating in England that Byng was being promoted.<sup>15</sup> Currie, also, met with a British ADC or liaison officer, who discussed the views of the commander of the

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<sup>12</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 206-207.

<sup>13</sup> John Alexander Swettenham, *McNaughton Volume 1 1887-1939* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968), 94.

<sup>14</sup> Horn and Harris, *Warrior Chiefs*, 50-51.

<sup>15</sup> Garnet Hughes to Currie, 11 May 1917, File 9, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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First Army and Haig on Turner and the corps, suggesting manoeuvres by GHQ were already taking place to ensure Currie's promotion.<sup>16</sup>

Haig was unhappy with the performance of the Third Army in the Arras offensive and he relieved its commander, General Sir Edmund Allenby. Ironically, Allenby went on to greater success in Palestine.<sup>17</sup> In his place, Haig appointed Byng. Next was who was to replace Byng. Byng lobbied Haig that it was time for a Canadian to command the corps and that Currie was ready.<sup>18</sup> Haig was surprised and worried about the complications of political influence. He, however, respected Currie.<sup>19</sup> Haig was convinced and to forestall any potential interference he quickly appointed Currie to command the corps, again without permission. Later, to mollify the Canadians, the British apologised that Currie's appointment announcement inadvertently omitted the term 'temporary.'<sup>20</sup>

It is apparent that Currie was well aware that there would be resistance to his elevation.<sup>21</sup> Urquhart, Currie's first biographer, made the case that a cabal led by Aitken applied considerable pressure to appoint Turner instead.<sup>22</sup> This lobbying was without Turner's support or encouragement.<sup>23</sup> Turner, because of his seniority and Perley's pledge could have caused the Government considerable

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<sup>16</sup> The identity of the officer is difficult to determine but from internal evidence, the officer was probably from either the First Army or GHQ. Currie Diary Entry, 3 May 1917, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>17</sup> Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army*. 221.

<sup>18</sup> Urquhart, *Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian*: 160-162.

<sup>19</sup> *ibid.*, 157; Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 191.

<sup>20</sup> Perley to Lord Derby, 15 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

<sup>21</sup> Currie had had previous run-ins with Aitken. See Cook, "Documenting War and Forging Reputations: Sir Max Aitken and the Canadian War Records Office in the First World War."

<sup>22</sup> Urquhart, *Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian*: 160.

<sup>23</sup> Gow, the Deputy Minister of the OMFC later had a fierce battle with Turner that resulted in Gow's resignation, so it is especially telling that he denied Turner participated in the plot. Gow to Urquhart, 15 October 1934, File 13, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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embarrassment by demanding the earlier promise be fulfilled. Turner's stance, however, was that he would not lobby for the position but expected the Government to honour its commitments. Turner's refusal was a combination of his honourable and dutiful nature and probable realisation that Haig would not accept him as the corps commander.

Perley reported to Borden that Turner was anxious for command as "he is by temperament a fighting soldier, but he will acquiesce cheerfully in our decision." Perley also wanted to retain Turner as 'his work invaluable here' and while Turner was senior, Currie was more acceptable to the British.<sup>24</sup> Perley then met with Haig who made it clear that the only Canadian he would appoint was Currie. Currie's combat record was stronger than Turner's, and Turner had been out of the line for six months and so was out of touch. Perley agreed to Currie's appointment but asked that as a sop to Turner that both Currie and Turner be promoted to Lieutenant-General, so that Turner would retain his seniority.<sup>25</sup>

Perley then met with both Turner and Currie on 15 June to determine the channels of communication and boundaries of responsibility.<sup>26</sup> Perley reported that there was a 'pleasant understanding' with Currie and Turner, but the reality was there would be considerable conflict between the two before a *modus vivendi* was achieved.<sup>27</sup> According to the standard narrative, the underlying cause of the resulting conflict was Perley's granting of additional powers to Turner that

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<sup>24</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 9 June 1917, v9 File 1, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>25</sup> Perley to Lord Derby, 15 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

<sup>26</sup> GHP Memorandum, File 3, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

<sup>27</sup> Perley to Borden, 15 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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encroached on Currie's authority within the corps.<sup>28</sup> This belief stems from a Perley memorandum that delineated the relationship of the various Canadian formations and headquarters with each other and the British. Perley specified Turner was the Minister's 'Chief Military Advisor,' and all policy and administrative matters were to continue to pass through him for his recommendations. Perley concluded with "It follows from the above that the appointment of GOC Canadian Forces in the British Isles is the senior military appointment in the OMFC."<sup>29</sup> There is, however, nothing in the memorandum that indicated Turner gained any additional powers over the corps in comparison to the situation under Byng.

Two issues arose in the aftermath of Currie's selection that affected the Turner-Currie relationship. The first involved who would replace Currie in the 1<sup>st</sup> Division. Borden was most concerned to ensure Garnet Hughes received the command.<sup>30</sup> Again, the matter of what to do with Hughes loomed large. Sims met Currie on 10 June and Currie claimed had tried to negotiate with him regarding the position. Currie rejected any interference, and this may be the genesis of Currie's dislike of Sims, which will be discussed further in Chapter 8.<sup>31</sup> While Currie did not rule out giving Hughes a division, he thought the PF officer

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<sup>28</sup> "His solution was to give Currie the corps, while placating Turner with a promotion and increased power, at the expense of the Corps Commander, in France." Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 152; Biography of Currie, John Alexander Swettenham, MG 31 E42 v5, Swettenham Fonds; LAC, 97.; Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939*: 131.

<sup>29</sup> Memorandum, 14 June 1917, T-7, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>30</sup> Cable Borden to Perley 13 June 1917, v9 File 1, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>31</sup> Currie Diary Entry, 10 June 1917, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Brigadier-General A.C. Macdonell a better choice.<sup>32</sup> It was unlikely, though, Currie had any intention of giving Hughes a division, as demonstrated later in 1918 when Currie refused Hughes again. Currie claimed he had to resist tremendous pressure from the politicians to select Hughes. Hyatt and Morton both suggest Currie probably exaggerated the pressure placed on him.<sup>33</sup>

Currie later had a heated three-hour meeting with Hughes who pleaded for the division but Currie adamantly refused. According to Currie, Hughes stormed out vowing vengeance.<sup>34</sup> He believed Garnet was now an implacable enemy and that Garnet and his father were sure to undermine and attempt to replace him. However, Currie continued to correspond with Garnet and meet with him in England when on leave, which tends to belie Currie's claim.<sup>35</sup> As Turner was closely associated with Garnet, it was an easy leap to assume that Turner was also an inveterate enemy, especially as Currie had thwarted Turner's ambition to command the corps.

The second issue was a terrible secret that had loomed over Currie – he was a thief. He had embezzled \$10,000 from the 50<sup>th</sup>'s regimental funds to stave off bankruptcy.<sup>36</sup> Throughout the war, Currie the strict disciplinarian had lived with the fear that his peculation would be uncovered and if found, the best he could hope for was cashiering. Surprisingly, Sam Hughes knew of this serious breach of ethics but never revealed it despite his conflicts with Currie. In 1915, Hughes sent

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<sup>32</sup> Perley to Borden, 15 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

<sup>33</sup> Hyatt argues Currie had a guilty conscience about his treatment of his former friend Garnet. Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 71-73; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 121-122.

<sup>34</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 121.

<sup>35</sup> Currie Diary Entries, 13 September; 26 December 1917, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>36</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 9-13.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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his aide Harold Daly to assure Currie that his financial situation was under control.<sup>37</sup>

Shortly after Currie's appointment to corps command, Perley through the Militia Council learned of Currie's theft. Initially, Perley proposed he and Kemp pay off the debt but two of Currie's subordinates, David Watson, and Victor Odlum, GOC 11<sup>th</sup> Brigade, settled it.<sup>38</sup>

Saving Currie's career from his financial turpitude was correct given Currie's success in commanding the Canadian Corps. However, it does place Currie in an unfavourable light given his lack of effort to repay the debt before its discovery. This was at a time when the authorities regularly cashiered junior officers for passing bad cheques of £20.<sup>39</sup> Secondly, it was a poor decision to allow two of Currie's subordinates to repay the debt, as at a minimum it raised the issue of a potential conflict of interest.<sup>40</sup> Finally, it conditioned the Currie and Turner relationship. There is no evidence that Turner knew of the problem, but Currie had to suspect that Turner was aware and, so Currie would be concerned that Turner could use the information against him.

Currie as corps commander was in an anomalous position as he owed duty to two different masters and had to negotiate the nebulous boundaries between responsibilities owed to the British chain of command and the Canadian

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<sup>37</sup> This was around the time of Festubert. Harold Daly Comments, MG 4027 Acc. No 391 Ref 1-2, Urquhart Fonds; McGill.

<sup>38</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 9-13.

<sup>39</sup> Notices of officers being cashiered were a regular feature of the Routine Orders published by Turner's Headquarters. Lieutenant-Colonel Jolly of the 212th Battalion was cashiered for issuing a fraudulent cheque for \$800. Thacker to Deputy Minister, 20 August 1917, 10-J-52, RG 9 III A1 v291, LAC.

<sup>40</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 194.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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authorities. Operations were wholly under British control but administrative matters, such as promotions and appointments, involved both British and Canadian control. The boundary evolved over the course of the war, as the Canadians wrested greater control from the British. The Canadian Corps had a similar organisation to a British corps, other than having its divisions effectively permanently attached.<sup>41</sup> It was fully integrated into the BEF's command, discipline, and logistics infrastructure. However, in matters of promotion, commissioning, and appointments it also reported to Canadian authorities. In a British corps, the commander did not have control over appointments to the senior command, administrative, and staff positions.<sup>42</sup> The commander of the Canadian Corps had not only combat responsibilities, but was also the head of a national contingent, which carried political implications. A British corps commander on the Western Front was far enough down the chain of command that his role was entirely military.

The formation of the OMFC and Perley's memorandum regularised responsibilities between the forces in the field and the command structure in England. Currie, however, was vigilant in defending what he regarded as his prerogatives. Many historians view the Turner-Currie relationship through the lens of Currie's voluminous correspondence and diary. As a result, an image surfaces in some accounts of a jealous and refractory Turner interfering in Currie's

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<sup>41</sup> It was not until early in 1918 that the organisation of Canadian Divisions differed significantly from British Divisions.

<sup>42</sup> In the British service, the corps commander had little control over staff appointments other than Staff Captains, Brigade-Majors, and GSO 3. GHQ appointed higher staff positions and the branch or administrative corps the administrative roles. Memorandum on the Procedure to Be Adopted in Connection with Promotion and Appointments in the Canadian Forces in France, P-24-24, RG 9 III B1 v2128, LAC.



## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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responsibilities. However, a careful review of the documentation reveals an asymmetric dynamic: Currie was at war with the administration, but Turner and Perley were not fighting Currie.

Two issues, initially, roiled the Turner-Currie relationship. First was the issue of artillery officer promotion. Currie wrote to Turner on 29 July to complain that the gazetting of officer promotions in the artillery was in chaos with some promotions not gazetted for over a year. Currie then made an impassioned plea to promote officers who fought with their batteries at the Somme and Vimy, and died without receiving their due promotions. He closed with “This you know is not right, and the matter should receive prompt attention.”<sup>43</sup> Turner swiftly replied agreeing and he followed up to report there were no outstanding promotions at the War Office or at GHQ.<sup>44</sup> Turner did Sims no favour by stating “The delay therefore must be at Corps Headquarters and Colonel Sims tells me he has pointed this out to you.”<sup>45</sup> Turner then sent his AMS Major Montague to help the corps to accelerate the promotions transit through the War Office machinery. Montague reported, “General Currie advised us that he had been under a misapprehension at the time he wrote the letter of July 29<sup>th</sup>.”<sup>46</sup> Currie had neglected to ask Brigadier-General G.J. Farmar, his chief administrative officer, before writing in high dudgeon to Turner. According to Farmar, the artillery officers had received acting promotions which did not require gazetting, and so they had received their due pay and allowances. There is no record of Currie

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<sup>43</sup> Currie to Turner, 29 July 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.

<sup>44</sup> Turner to Currie, 2 August 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.

<sup>45</sup> Turner to Currie, 9 August 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.

<sup>46</sup> Montague to Turner, 16 August 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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apologising to Turner after his faux pas. This would be a pattern of Currie automatically assuming problems or obstacles were Turner's fault.

In August, Currie wrote a strident letter complaining about Turner's interference in the appointments in the corps. The specific case was the appointment of the Canadian Corps Ordnance and Veterinary Officers without first getting Currie's approval. Currie argued Turner should have asked him for recommendations or better yet that Currie make the recommendation, as "This puts me in a false position and I maintain is most unfair. If I am to command this Corps, surely it is for me to say who should be recommended to fill the appointments." He then drew a comparison with Sam Hughes' approach to promotion that was sure to rankle Perley and Turner.<sup>47</sup>

Turner's stance was that the British Army support organisations, such as the Army Veterinary Corps, made all administrative appointments without reference to the corps commander, so it was within his prerogative to appoint the two officers. Turner's view was all combat promotion and appointment recommendations emanated from Currie, but that administrative ones were in the purview of the services involved.<sup>48</sup> Turner, Currie, and Sims worked out a compromise that Turner would unofficially consult Currie to solicit his views before deciding on appointments. This was not a case of Turner interfering but one of Currie overstepping his bounds and Turner subsequently retreating from

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<sup>47</sup> Currie described it as similar to Hughes' approach of slapping someone on the back and promoting them. Currie to Perley, 4 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>48</sup> Memorandum, 3 September 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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standard British policy.<sup>49</sup> Turner in most cases backed down and granted Currie what he demanded.

Another example of this process of negotiating the boundaries was the corps demand starting with Byng that Lieutenant-Colonel Raymond Brutinel be promoted to a full Colonel, with the pay and allowances of a GSO 1, and to be responsible for the CMGC. Turner rejected the promotion but did allow Brutinel to receive the pay and allowances of a GSO 1.<sup>50</sup> The argument was that while the Machine Gun Officer had a powerful influence on the Machine Gun Depot he did not command it, so was not truly the head of the CMGC.<sup>51</sup> Currie had to acquiesce.

### Turner and the Abortive Birth of a Canadian Air Force<sup>52</sup>

One of the paradoxes of Canadian participation in the First World War was why there was no separate Canadian air service at the front.<sup>53</sup> Canada asserted the right for Canadians to serve in distinct Canadian units from the war's beginning. The British accepted this claim of sovereignty well before Canadians had demonstrated any martial prowess. The British authorities furthermore indicated a

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<sup>49</sup> Even Haig had limitations to his ability to appoint staff. For instance, the War Office deemed Haig's first choice for position of Chief of General Staff as too junior and posted Major-General L. Kiggell instead. Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army*. 139.

<sup>50</sup> A GSO 1 was typically a Lieutenant-Colonel but received higher pay and allowance than a line Lieutenant-Colonel.

<sup>51</sup> Turner Handwritten Comments on Cdn Corps A-29-1-6, 1 June 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.

<sup>52</sup> For more details, see 'Missed Opportunity: Currie, Turner, and the Abortive Birth of the Canadian Airforce in the Great War' to be published in the *Royal Canadian Air Force Journal* in the summer 2012.

<sup>53</sup> Two squadrons were authorised and were in the process of forming and training at the armistice.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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willingness to accept separate Canadian squadrons.<sup>54</sup> In late 1915, the Army Council suggested the Dominions raise complete squadrons; an offer the Australians accepted.<sup>55</sup> The War Office welcomed Hughes' offer of squadrons in September 1916 and as late as March 1917 was trying to arrange a meeting with Perley to discuss the proposal – a proposal unknown to Turner, Thacker, and Perley.<sup>56</sup> Canada made a major contribution to the British air effort with 20,000 men trained or roughly one quarter of the total British pilot strength. The nature of the contribution was also notable, as four of the top ten British air aces were Canadian.<sup>57</sup> Finally, there was Australia's success in raising and maintaining four squadrons at the front by late 1917 despite Canada sending twenty times the number of pilots to the front in comparison to Australia.<sup>58</sup>

Turner had a full appreciation of airpower from his experiences at Second Ypres, St. Eloi, and the Somme. As a result, Turner was a strong proponent of a separate air service for Canada. As early as January 1917, Turner was advocating a separate service.<sup>59</sup> Turner launched a campaign to convince the Government to establish a Canadian flying service by writing a strong letter to Perley on 13 July.

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<sup>54</sup> Wise, *Canadian Airmen and the First World War*, v. 1: 49, 74.

<sup>55</sup> F. M. Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps in the Western and Eastern Theatres of War, 1914-1918*, The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918, V. 8. (Sydney, Australia: Angus & Robertson, 1923), 31.

<sup>56</sup> Cubitt to Sam Hughes, 8 September 1916, 10-9-27 v1, RG 9 III A1 v80, LAC; Fellows to OMFC, 6 March 1917; Thacker to Turner, 7 March 1917; Perley to Air Board, 8 March 1917, 10-9-27 v1, RG 9 III A1 v80, LAC.

<sup>57</sup> These aces were William Bishop with 72 victories, Raymond Collishaw 60, Donald MacLaren 54 and William Barker 50.

<sup>58</sup> Australia's contribution consisted of the 410 pilots of the Australian Flying Corps, approximately 200 more transferred to the Royal Flying Corps under special provisions and an unknown but relatively small number of directly recruited Australians. Australia had a policy of prohibiting Other Ranks from transferring to the British military. Michael Molkentin, *Fire in the Sky* (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2010), 179; Cutlack, *The Australian Flying Corps in the Western and Eastern Theatres of War, 1914-1918*: 421.

<sup>59</sup> Wise, *Canadian Airmen and the First World War*, v. 1: 587.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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He followed up with a second letter on 22 September stating it was 'humiliating' that Canada had no air service when it was contributing so many men to the British service.<sup>60</sup> The second letter was probably the most pointed letter Turner sent to Perley.

Turner recommended Canada form squadrons 'as rapidly as conditions allow' with the objective of establishing a Royal Flying Corps Brigade.<sup>61</sup> Turner believed that this formation would cover all the branches of the air service. The British would supply the equipment and Canada the flying and ground personnel. His rationale was a Canadian airforce would provide better service, increase Canadian recognition, enable the Government to fulfil its responsibilities to its citizens in the British flying services, and afford valuable experience. The majority of Canadians entered the flying service via direct recruitment or transfer where they were lost to Canadian authorities.<sup>62</sup> The OMFC could only track officers seconded to the flying services.<sup>63</sup> The rationale is a clear demonstration of Turner's nationalist orientation and his political sensitivity.

Perley's response was to argue to Borden that he sympathised with the feeling for a Canadian air service, but there were practical arguments against it. His most telling point arose from discussions with Commander Redford Mulock,

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<sup>60</sup> Turner to Perley, 22 September 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>61</sup> A Brigade was normally attached to an Army included observation and scout squadrons, a balloon park, and an aircraft park.

<sup>62</sup> Robert M. Morley, "Earning Their Wings: British Pilot Training, 1912-1918" (Masters, University of Saskatchewan, 2006), 88. For an in-depth discussion of the Royal Flying Corps in Canada see C. W. Hunt, *Dancing in the Sky: The Royal Flying Corps in Canada* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2009).

<sup>63</sup> Canadian Authorities incorrectly believed Canadians made up as much as 35% of the flying officers in the British air service. Perley to Borden, 10 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC. Turner to Perley, 13 July 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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the senior Canadian pilot. The issue was how to ensure a separate Canadian service would get a fair proportion of modern aircraft. Technology advances quickly rendered aircraft obsolescent and flying these aircraft was akin to a death sentence, as witnessed by the terrible losses of the Royal Flying Corps in April 1917.<sup>64</sup> Perley's concern was any real or perceived inequitable aircraft distribution would rebound on the Government. There are, however, no reports to suggest the Australian Flying Corps had any difficulty in this respect. At its heart, Perley's argument was the political risks of a separate service far outweighed any potential benefits.<sup>65</sup>

All of these points had some validity but other than the issue of modern equipment, all applied equally to forming separate Canadian ground units. Hughes, however, brushed these objections aside and aggressively asserted Canada's sovereignty to the benefit of Canada and the overall war effort.

In the midst of the Passchendaele offensive, Currie wrote to Turner about his desire for a Canadian squadron to support the Canadian Corps. He revealed he did not know Turner's stance on a separate airforce.<sup>66</sup> Currie's comment demonstrates a critical error made by Turner in not enrolling Currie and the senior Canadian pilots in lobbying Perley. It highlights the costs of the estrangement between Currie and Turner. A strong position from Currie and the senior Canadian pilots orchestrated by Turner may have been sufficient to change

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<sup>64</sup> John Howard Morrow, *The Great War in the Air : Military Aviation from 1909 to 1921*, Smithsonian History of Aviation History (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 234; Peter Hart, *Bloody April : Slaughter in the Skies over Arras, 1917* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2005).

<sup>65</sup> Perley to Borden, 10 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>66</sup> Currie to Turner, 3 November 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Perley's mind.

With Kemp replacing Perley in January 1918, Turner reopened the file by sending a series of letters in January, February, and April reiterating the case for a separate service and adding Currie agreed with him.<sup>67</sup> Billy Bishop VC, Canada's most famous pilot, supplied additional ammunition claiming all Canadian officers in the RAF, formed from the Royal Flying Corps and Royal Naval Air Service in April 1918, wanted their own service.<sup>68</sup> Turner was quick to pass on Bishop's views to Kemp.

The formation of the RAF gave Turner another opportunity to push for a separate airforce. Turner wrote a further pointed letter to Kemp at the end of April strongly recommending that Canada secure representation on the Air Board commensurate with Canada's contribution, and begin the formation of a Canadian Air Force. Turner's strongest point was Canadians were not proportionally represented at the higher ranks.<sup>69</sup> Turner had considerable grounds for his complaints. Figures gathered on seconded officers by the OMFC showed Canadians made up 9.5% of the pilots but only 2 to 3% of the Flight Commanders and above.<sup>70</sup>

Turner's dogged persistence with support from Currie and leading Canadian pilots, increased public scrutiny, and a less anglophile Minister convinced the Government to change its policy by mid-1918. The result was much less than

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<sup>67</sup> Turner to Kemp, 19 January 1918, 10-9-27 v1, RG 9 III A1 v80, LAC.

<sup>68</sup> Bishop to Morrison, 10 April 1918, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>69</sup> Turner to Kemp, 30 April 1918, C-18, MG 27 II D9 v132, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>70</sup> Particulars of Canadians Seconded to Royal Flying Corps, 5 April 1918, 10-9-27 v1, RG 9 III A1 v80, LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Turner wanted – just two squadrons.<sup>71</sup> Despite the promising start, neither squadron reached the front before the armistice.<sup>72</sup>

Throughout the war, Canadian authorities struggled to supply sufficient numbers of competent NCOs and junior officers to maintain the combat effectiveness of the Canadian Corps. Yet, Canada allowed approximately 20,000 men who were or could have been NCOs and junior officers in the CEF to serve in the British flying services, with limited direct benefit to Canada. Given the extent and nature of Canada's contribution to the air war, why was there no separate service? Important factors were the Government's indifference to airpower, fears of the political risks, and that the weak information exchange between the front and Canada meant an underestimation of air power's importance. Finally, while Turner was persistent in his efforts to promote a separate service, his failure to recruit Currie and the most influential Canadian pilots frustrated his objective.

### Further Deterioration

Currie and Turner had reached a cool but correct relationship after the initial clashes, but persistent rumours of Currie's imminent dismissal after the Passchendaele campaign upset the balance.<sup>73</sup> The purported reasons for Currie's dismissal included the Passchendaele high casualties, his ill health, or a poor

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<sup>71</sup> Overseas Militia Council Submissions, 13 July 1918, O-153-3 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC.

<sup>72</sup> Wise, *Canadian Airmen and the First World War*, v. 1: 579.

<sup>73</sup> For more on the rumours, see Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 93; Currie to Perley, 10 December 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC; Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 235.



## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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working relationship with GHQ. Today it is difficult to imagine how Currie's tenure was in peril given his performance. However, the extent of the rumours suggests that Currie had reason for concern, and this situation would have intensified his negative view of the administration in England.

A possible trigger to these rumours were two cables Perley sent to Borden in reaction to Borden's desire to include a senior general in the Cabinet in the lead up to the Federal election of 1917. Perley considered Currie the better choice politically as Currie was a Liberal, and with Currie ailing in October, Perley thought he might be willing to accept a cabinet post. Perley would then make the case to Haig that only a Canadian could command the corps, meaning Turner.<sup>74</sup> It is unlikely that Perley queried Haig, but Kemp did visit Haig in January 1918. Haig's diary entry records Kemp "asked my opinion about General Turner and agreed that he must keep him in charge of the Canadian organisation in England and that General Currie (now Commander Canadian Corps) should command in the field." This rather odd entry suggests Kemp was at least willing to discuss some combination of replacing Currie and Turner.<sup>75</sup> This is consistent with Kemp's dissatisfaction with both officers when he first took over the OMFC, which will be discussed in the next chapter.

The heavy losses at Passchendaele in the midst of the election campaign and Currie's lack of public support of the Government did not endear him to the politicians and probably helped contribute to the whispering campaign. The

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<sup>74</sup> Cable Perley to Borden, 7 September 1917, v9 File 3, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC. Cable Perley to Borden, 4 October 1917, v9 File 3, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>75</sup> Haig Diary, 18 January 1918 in Bourne, *Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters, 1914-1918*, 372.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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rumours were prevalent and credible enough that they reached Canada and caused the Liberal party to cable a party organiser in England enquiring if Currie had been relieved.<sup>76</sup> The final straw was a telegram sent to Currie from a newspaper editor addressed 'General Sir Arthur Currie, or to the Acting Commander of the Canadian Corps.' Currie was outraged and demanded Perley issue an official statement that he was not being replaced.<sup>77</sup> Perley never made such a statement.

Currie also lamented the atmosphere in London, complaining to Brigadier-General F.O.W. Loomis in January "I also learned that I had become very unpopular with the Commander-in-Chief and the Army. I was told that the Canadian Corps was not working harmoniously with the higher authorities at all."<sup>78</sup> This complaint stemmed in part from Currie's resistance to participating in the Passchendaele Offensive. It may, also, relate to the campaign Urquhart claimed certain British generals and Lipsett were waging to displace Currie with Lipsett.<sup>79</sup>

Currie's reaction to these threats indicates he was not a political naïf. He wrote Harold Daly, the former aide of Hughes, who was politically well connected, to contact select journalists to release Currie's side of the story. Currie was not happy with the support he was getting and claimed 'some people are not playing the game as they should.'<sup>80</sup> Currie was probably alluding to Perley and

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<sup>76</sup> Cable Goodard to Preston, 3 December 1917, MG 30 E46 v12, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>77</sup> Currie to Perley, 10 December 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>78</sup> Currie to Loomis, 27 January 1918, MG 30 E100 v1, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>79</sup> Draft Currie Biography, File 2, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives, 13. See also, Radley, *We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918*: 117.

<sup>80</sup> Currie to Daly, 10 December 1917, File A/2, MG 27 III F9 v1, Daly Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Turner, however Currie's complaints were unfair to Turner, as there is no evidence that Turner played any part in this campaign.

### Challenges of 1918

Turner's training organisation faced four principal challenges in 1918 in responding to the significant expansion of the Canadian Corps due to a major reorganisation; supplying replacements in expectation of the German spring offensive; keeping the corps up to strength because of severe casualties during the Hundred Days campaign; and simultaneously coping with effects of the Spanish Influenza. The degree to which it responded to these challenges would affect the corps' combat effectiveness.

While the election, to be discussed in the next chapter, ensured conscription's implementation, there was a lag before the conscripts arrived. In the interim, the main source of manpower in December and January were recovered wounded and boys who reached the age of 19.<sup>81</sup> How to deal with conscripts was a matter of great importance. Turner, of because his strong man-management skills, rejected Thacker's proposal for a special numbering system for conscripts as he did not want them to be specially distinguished.<sup>82</sup> Turner also issued an order to the area commanders to ensure they treated conscripts with the

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<sup>81</sup> British regulations stipulated that drafts had to be 19 before going on active duty. Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of January 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC. For more on the Young Soldier's Battalions and the issues of underage soldiers, see Tim Cook, "'He Was Determined to Go': Underage Soldiers in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Histoire sociale/Social history* 41, no. 81 (2008).

<sup>82</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 351.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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'same goodwill and respect as volunteers.'<sup>83</sup> When the conscripts started arriving, McDonald reported "The men throughout are an excellent type, easy to handle, have nothing to un-learn, and are exceedingly keen in their work."<sup>84</sup>

The imposition of the Military Service Act also meant the OMFC had large numbers of French-Canadians to train and send to the corps for the first time. In response to Turner's query on how to distribute the additional French-Canadians, Currie's division commanders were only willing to receive them in units of platoon size.<sup>85</sup> Both Turner and Kemp agreed to this policy. Turner did take steps to procure French-Canadian cadets from the corps and directed Thacker to ensure a French-Canadian officer accompanied drafts of fifty French Canadians despatched to an English speaking battalion.<sup>86</sup>

### Canadian Corps Reorganisation

The reorganisation of the Canadian Corps in early 1918 was the most notable instance of Turner being clearly misguided in an administrative matter. The British losses of the 1916/1917 campaigns and the resulting manpower shortage compelled the War Office to mandate a crucial reorganisation.<sup>87</sup> Over Haig's objections, the War Office ordered the disbandment of one battalion per

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<sup>83</sup> AG Circular Letter, 22 January 1918, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>84</sup> McDonald to Turner, 30 March 1918, T-4-36 v8, RG 9 III B1 v3107, LAC.

<sup>85</sup> This was in reaction to the bad experience of a French-Canadian company under French-Canadian officers in the 14th Battalion. Two men deserted from the company. Currie thought it unfair but was unwilling to overrule his division commanders. Currie to Turner, 14 March 1918, File 6, MG 30 E75 v3, Urquhart Fonds; LAC.

<sup>86</sup> Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of July 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC; Thacker to Turner, 8 August 1918, R-113-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v2940, LAC.

<sup>87</sup> As early as spring 1917 the British Cabinet was asking the War Office to look at reducing the number of battalions per division to nine because of manpower shortages. Perry, "Manpower and Organisational Problems in the Expansion of the British and Other Commonwealth Armies During the Two World Wars," 58.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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brigade.<sup>88</sup> The War Office approached Canadian authorities in early 1918 to effect a similar change and use the released battalions to raise a sixth division. The War Office also requested the Australians follow suit, but they rejected the idea.<sup>89</sup> Under this scheme with the 5<sup>th</sup> Division brought over to France, Canada could form a second corps and possibly a small army. This was an attractive proposition to the Government, Turner, and the many surplus officers remaining in England. For the Government it meant the surplus officers would have a position, Garnet Hughes would serve at the front, and Canada would gain more influence from a second corps.<sup>90</sup> For Turner, it meant the opportunity for possibly command of the second corps and a realisation of his desire for a combat command. Not surprisingly, both Kemp and Turner endorsed the plan but without first consulting Currie. They probably assumed Currie would jump at the opportunity of possibly commanding a Canadian army, but it was an error not to confer with him.

Currie's reaction, however, was strong disapprobation when he learned of the plan from Turner.<sup>91</sup> Currie hastened to London and met with Turner and Kemp to object. Contrary to the usual narrative that Currie had to fight tooth and nail to derail the plan, his objections were convincing, and his view prevailed without much resistance.<sup>92</sup> Currie thought the proposal inefficient and ineffective. He argued circumstances compelled the British to adopt this structure not that it was inherently superior. Changing the organisation would mean breaking up battle-

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<sup>88</sup> Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*: 275.

<sup>89</sup> Mallett, "The Interplay between Technology, Tactics and Organisation in the First AIF," 165.

<sup>90</sup> Cable Borden to Kemp, 6 February 1918, 73871, MG 26 H1 v139, Borden Fonds; LAC; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 155.

<sup>91</sup> Urquhart, *Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian*: 198; Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 100.

<sup>92</sup> Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*: 120.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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tested formations and replacing them with less effective ones. It was inefficient in overhead, as the requirements for additional support units far outweighed the increase in combat power. A particularly compelling argument to Turner and Kemp was that the staff needed for a sixth division, a second corps, and potentially an army would not be Canadian, so it meant a retreat from Canadianisation, as there were not enough trained and qualified Canadian officers to staff the new formations.<sup>93</sup>

Currie's objections were convincing but what made the difference was an alternative plan Currie advanced to increase combat power. He wanted to expand the engineers in each division to brigade strength to reduce the strain on the infantry by freeing them from providing working parties. He viewed the increase in engineers so vital that he preferred "to do without infantry than to go without Engineers."<sup>94</sup> He also wanted to increase the number of machine guns per division, signallers, motor transport capacity, and add one hundred supernumeraries to each battalion. Kemp and Turner accepted Currie's scheme. Currie in this instance was correct, and historians have rightly praised him for his principled stance for advocating a plan that meant he waived a potential promotion.

After the change in establishments received GHQ's approval, Turner now had to deliver the additional personnel for the corps. The infantry were not a serious problem, as the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was disbanded to free sufficient trained men

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<sup>93</sup> Reorganization Memo, 11 January 1918, 10-3-8, RG 9 III A1 v77, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Currie to OMFC, 27 February 1918, O-27-3, RG 9 III B1 v970, LAC; H.F.H. Hertzberg, "The Re-Organization of the Engineering Troops of a Canadian Division - Great War 1914-1918," *Canadian Defence Quarterly* 1, no. 4 (1923): 39.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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to provide the supernumeraries required. The expansion of the technical arms, however, was a different matter. These troops took the longest time to instruct, required specialised training equipment and supplies, and often depended on civilian-trained manpower. Turner's organisation had to immediately supply the equivalent of four battalions of engineers, four companies of machine gunners, additional signallers, and 700 motor transport personnel. Argyll House was able to satisfy these initial demands, except for drivers, but they emptied the replacement pools.<sup>95</sup> Turner wrote Currie in February patiently explaining why it was difficult to supply the needed replacements. The increase in the engineers' establishment required an expansion to the depot, and procuring additional training supplies, which was always a challenge. Currie did not grasp that an expansion in the establishment in France required a similar one in England and that there would necessarily be a lag in the supply of trained men.<sup>96</sup>

The staggering success of the German March offensive caused Currie to increase the firepower of his divisions by adding a third Machine Gun Company to each division's Machine Gun Battalion on 10 April. To obtain the extra personnel he drafted fifty men per battalion and gave them a crash course in machine guns. He did not inform Turner of his decision until 16 April, but Turner had the new establishment rapidly approved by 1 May.<sup>97</sup>

Even before the expansion, Currie complained vociferously about the poor state of Machine Gun replacements. He could not understand why given the lack

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<sup>95</sup> CASC MT Replacement Issues, File R-93-33, RG 9 III B1 v2938, LAC.

<sup>96</sup> Turner to Currie, 11 February 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>97</sup> Grafton, *The Canadian "Emma Gees": A History of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps*: 110.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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of combat since Passchendaele there were so few replacements available. Of course, Currie ignored that he had demanded an increase in the size of the CMGC and the Machine Gun Depot needed time to expand. In addition, originally Argyll House assumed they could use the 5<sup>th</sup> Division's Machine Gun Companies as replacements but instead they were used to increase the establishment in France.<sup>98</sup> In a typical fashion, Thacker and Turner scrambled to satisfy Currie by rescinding an order to retain recovered Machine Gunners in England, and accelerated training of machine gunners. Thacker pointed out that he had met all the demands for replacements, other than twenty-five specialist NCOs, contrary to Currie's assertion.<sup>99</sup>

Currie's increasing demands placed a tremendous strain on Turner's ability to respond. An example was Currie's request that Turner supply engineer replacements at a rate of 10% per month because he expected heavier losses with open warfare. Previously, the monthly wastage rate was 4% per month for engineers and 5% for pioneers. In effect, Currie was insisting Turner's organisation treble the number of engineer replacements.<sup>100</sup> Turner agreed to the demand when there were sufficient replacements from Canada, and the plan was put into effect 22 August.<sup>101</sup> Argyll House also struggled to satisfy the increased establishment for engineer officers. The situation was so dire that Turner requested

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<sup>98</sup> Thacker demobilised these companies then had to be remobilise them and send them to France. Progress Report Adjutant General's Branch February 1918, RG 9 III D3 v4864, LAC.

<sup>99</sup> Currie to HQ OMFC, 30 March 1918, U-118-33, RG 9 III B1 v3006, LAC; Thacker to Turner, 2 April 1918, U-118-33, RG 9 III B1 v3006, LAC.

<sup>100</sup> Previously the replacement rates was three companies of engineers and one battalion of Pioneers per division at 4% and 5% respectively, which increased to three battalions of engineers at 10% per month.

<sup>101</sup> Currie to HQ OMFC, 20 May 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC; Thacker to Turner, 22 August 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.



## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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engineering officers from Canada contrary to the previous policy of not accepting officers from Canada. As late as 20 July there was still an outstanding demand for 129 officers from Canada.<sup>102</sup>

Currie continued to complain about the number and state of training for signallers. Signal training was a continuing issue throughout 1918, especially given the increased establishment and use of wireless equipment that put an even greater strain on the limited training capabilities of Argyll House. McDonald explained Argyll House was expanding its training establishments, combing out already experienced signallers from infantry units, raising instructors' pay, and attempting to secure the necessary equipment.<sup>103</sup> McDonald confessed to the Canadian Corps BGGs, that it was almost impossible to get wireless equipment for training as all the sets manufactured were sent to the front.<sup>104</sup>

In May, Currie claimed his units were short of 540 battalion signallers but only 60 were available, and that men did not train on the equipment used in the corps. This is another instance where Currie seemed oblivious to the situation in England and the impossibility of meeting his demands.<sup>105</sup> Turner's response was a quite sharply worded rejoinder that there were no outstanding demands for signallers and if the deficiency had reached that alarming total "is not due to any lack of provision of this personnel on the part of Reserve Units in England." He

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<sup>102</sup> AAG to CGS, 20 July 1918, File R-93-33, RG 9 III B1 v2938, LAC.

<sup>103</sup> Currie to Cdn Representative, 10 December 1917, MG 30 E133 v1, McNaughton Fonds; LAC; McDonald to Cdn Representative, 1 February 1918, MG 30 E133 v1, McNaughton Fonds; LAC; Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of December 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>104</sup> "At GHQ Home Forces, a few days ago, they told me that every Wireless set that could be produced in the country by the end of July was required in France at once." McDonald to Radcliffe, 15 February 1918, RG 9 III B1 v3093, LAC.

<sup>105</sup> Currie to HQ OMFC, 1 May 1918, R-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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also blasted back about the training state that “the training of Signal personnel depends entirely upon the quality of the instructional personnel returned from the corps for that purpose.”<sup>106</sup>

Overall, Turner’s organisation struggled to supply the corps’ increased establishments in specialist troops. Equipment and training supply shortages and limitations in the supply of already trained technical personnel from the civilian sector severely limited the training capacity.<sup>107</sup> Turner and his staff despite their best efforts failed to source the necessary materials and did not respond aggressively enough to address these problems. Once again, the lack of experience on Turner’s staff in these specialist branches showed.

The other source of manpower was the 5<sup>th</sup> Division. After the election, the political necessity of keeping Garnet Hughes employed diminished and keeping 10,000 trained infantry tied up in England was indefensible.<sup>108</sup> In October 1917, the Canadian War Committee was considering breaking up the 5<sup>th</sup> Division given the replacement shortages and asked for Perley and Turner’s opinion.<sup>109</sup> Based on a detailed analysis, Thacker recommended the 5<sup>th</sup> Division be broken up; otherwise, there would be no infantry replacements after 1 May 1918.<sup>110</sup> Perley responded to a further cable from Borden ordering the disbandment of the 5<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>106</sup> Turner to Currie, 10 May 1918, R-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>107</sup> McDonald reported problems in the provision of training equipment and supplies in almost every month of 1918 in his General Staff reports.

<sup>108</sup> The division’s establishment was 12,000 infantry but its battalions were understrength. 5th CID Strength Return, 11 February 1918, File 14/11, MG 27 II D23 v14, Hughes Fonds; LAC.

<sup>109</sup> Cable Borden to Perley, 24 October 1917, 39125A, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>110</sup> Thacker to Turner, AG 21-1-1 (C), 1 November 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Division recommending to keep the organisation but use it for reinforcements.<sup>111</sup>

This was just before the election and the implication was it was not politically expedient to break up the division, yet.

The continued presence of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division in England while wounded men were returned to the front was a cause of public criticism.<sup>112</sup> As part of Currie's plan, the 5<sup>th</sup> Division disbanded and its infantry arrived in France as drafts, the MG companies to supplement the newly formed MG battalions, and the engineers to reinforce the engineer brigades. The 5<sup>th</sup> Division artillery had already been serving in France since August 1917.

The breakup created a problem of what to do with the surplus infantry captains, majors, and lieutenant-colonels; Garnet Hughes; and Sam Hughes' son-in-law, Byron Green.<sup>113</sup> After some initial reluctance and a plea from Kemp, Currie agreed to accept more surplus officers with most having to revert only a single rank. Any officer with experience overseas could return at their previous rank.<sup>114</sup> Currie also agreed to the policy that NCOs returning as commissioned officers would be despatched first and then in equal portions returning wounded officers and officers without overseas experience, such as those from the 5<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Cable Borden to Perley, 7 November 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC; Cable Perley to Borden, 8 November 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

<sup>112</sup> Cable Borden to Perley, 17 January 1918, 39154, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC; Macphail and Canada. Dept. of National Defence. Historical Section., *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-19. The Medical Services*: 152.

<sup>113</sup> Green commanded a battalion in the 5<sup>th</sup> Division.

<sup>114</sup> Currie agreed to take any Lieutenant-Colonel as a Major, any Major as a Captain, one Captain from each battalion would retain their rank and all others would go as Lieutenants. Currie to HQ OMFC, A.29.1.50, 21 January 1918, S-6, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Division.<sup>115</sup>

A further indication of the political significance of Garnet Hughes was Borden's concern with Hughes returning to Canada. Garnet Hughes demanded the War Office recall the British Regular Major-General L. Lipsett in command of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Division, but Kemp refused to intervene. Currie did not want Hughes, as he had been away from the front for a year and Hughes rejected Turner's offer of a training area at Hughes' current rank.<sup>116</sup> Eventually, Hughes accepted an unpaid position in the British Munitions Ministry and Green returned to Canada.<sup>117</sup> Contrary to the views of some historians, the breakup of the 5<sup>th</sup> Division did not solve the manpower crisis but did provide a vital buffer to supply the corps with well-trained reinforcements before the conscripts could be instructed and available.<sup>118</sup>

### Responding to the German March Offensive

The second major challenge was responding to the German March offensive. The German attack on 21 March was an immense shock. It was not

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<sup>115</sup> Memo Thacker to HQ Cnd Corps, A.G.1. 21-4-23, 27 March 1918, R-124-33, RG 9 III B1 v2941, LAC.

<sup>116</sup> Cable Kemp to Borden, 26 February 1918, MG 26 H1 v141, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>117</sup> Currie wrote "Garnet has been an exceedingly lucky Officer, beginning the war as a Major with practically no military experience whatever in military matters and, after spending eighteen months in France he found himself a Major General with a CB, a CMG and a DSO." Currie was equally fortunate and was the recipient of political pull at the beginning of the war. Currie to Bde Gen F.W. Hill, 15 August 1918, MG 30 E100 v1, Currie Fonds; LAC; Byron Green Service Jacket, RG 150 Acc 92-93/166 v3770, LAC., #3870

<sup>118</sup> Of the 10,000 infantry in the division, 7,200 were sent to supply the 100 supernumeraries and the 50 men used for the MG company from each battalion. The usual losses in holding the line quickly used up the remaining 2,800 men long before the Battle of Amiens in August 1918. A. M. J. Hyatt, "Sir Arthur Currie and Conscription: A Soldier's View," *Canadian Historical Review* L(1969): 295; Martenson, *We Stand on Guard: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Army*: 182.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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unexpected, but the extent of the success was. The Germans advanced further in a day than in any previous offensive, and it severely upset Haig's defensive arrangements. Currie was convinced that the British were fighting poorly, and his grave concerns were communicated to the OMFC, to Borden, and the British.<sup>119</sup> Turner immediately ordered training compressed to nine weeks and preparations made to send men with as little as six weeks training to ensure there were adequate manpower reserves.<sup>120</sup> Turner also directed Thacker to provide a list of officers suitable for senior positions should the corps suffer heavy losses.<sup>121</sup>

Instead of an attack, the corps had to stretch to cover more ground, as Haig rushed reinforcements to stem the German advance. On 26 March, Haig ordered three Canadian divisions to move south to Byng's Third Army and the Canadian Corps headquarters to go into reserve. Currie immediately protested the breakup of the corps to GHQ and to Kemp. Kemp promptly intervened with the Secretary of State for War. All but the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division was restored to Currie, but it led to Haig complaining to the visiting Minister of Militia later "the British Army alone and unaided by Canadian troops withstood the first terrific blow made by 80 German Divisions on March 21<sup>st</sup> until May 27<sup>th</sup>."<sup>122</sup> It was during this period of intense stress that Currie's chauffeur reported, "For the first time in my experience he appeared to be perturbed. He was very excited and seemed to lose control of his

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<sup>119</sup> Currie was quite vocal about his concerns regarding British preparation and fighting prowess during this period and it did leak back to the British. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 380; Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 243.

<sup>120</sup> McDonald to Thacker, 27 March 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC; AG to Training Areas, 30 March 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.

<sup>121</sup> Thacker to HQ, Can Corps, 6 April 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2887, LAC.

<sup>122</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 380.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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temper.”<sup>123</sup>

The stress also touched Turner, as he wrote an unusually brusque letter to Kemp complaining that the War Office was requiring Currie’s concurrence for all changes to establishments for Cavalry, Railway, and Forestry troops. Turner’s reaction was harsh: “This letter is directly contrary to any policy known to me to exist.... I cannot help but feel that the War Office has made a stupid blunder, as a result of General Currie’s letter.” Turner wanted to make it clear that Currie did not have any control over forces outside of the corps.<sup>124</sup>

The Germans never attacked the Canadian Corps’ position even with the attenuated forces stretched paper-thin. Currie and the corps developed a very strong position that may have dissuaded the Germans from attacking. A more likely factor is the Canadian front did not lead to important operational objectives, unlike the other sectors the Germans did attack.<sup>125</sup>

The impact of the German attack caused the new CIGS, General Sir Henry Wilson, to make a desperate request in June 1918. He asked the Canadians to replace one battalion per brigade with an American battalion thus freeing up forces to form a fifth division and to form another division out of its Forestry and Railway troops. Turner and Kemp refused to change the organisation of the corps. Kemp politely pointed out the short sightedness of Wilson’s Forestry and Rail request as it would cripple timber production and throttle essential railway

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<sup>123</sup> Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography*: 137.

<sup>124</sup> Turner to Kemp, 6 April 1918, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>125</sup> For a detailed study of the March offensives, see David T. Zabecki, *The German 1918 Offensives : A Case Study in the Operational Level of War* (London: Routledge, 2006).

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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construction.<sup>126</sup>

In England, the training organisation continued to work on producing replacements for the corps in case the Germans did attack the corps' front. To prevent the spread of disease Argyll House in April established a segregation camp that would hold 10,000 men in quarantine for a month.<sup>127</sup> While in the segregation camp men would receive elementary training and basic discipline, but this additional interruption disrupted training.<sup>128</sup> As a further economy measure, Turner dissolved the remaining Reserve Brigades. By June, Turner restored the full 14-week training syllabus, and by July, the training could be extended as the corps left the line, as there was little demand for replacements.<sup>129</sup> With the corps in reserve, it was possible for McDonald to spend a week with the corps to review issues and for the corps' training officers to visit England.<sup>130</sup>

Commanding on the Western Front was arduous, both physically and psychologically, and Currie, fiercely loyal to his officers, closely monitored them for signs of an incipient breakdown. Currie's view was that an officer who broke down was unfit for further front-line duty. To prevent this, Currie wanted to give commanders showing signs of breaking down a rest cure in England before they

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<sup>126</sup> Kemp to Wilson, 21 June 1918, R-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Wilson to Kemp, 14 June 1918; Turner to Kemp, 14 June 1918, M-7-36 v1, RG 9 III B1 v3088, LAC.

<sup>127</sup> Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of April 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>128</sup> See Turner's letter explaining that the first 4 weeks recruits were in England were lost because of the segregation. Turner to Currie, 3 September 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>129</sup> Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of June 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>130</sup> Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of July 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC; Currie to Turner, 25 July 1918, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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collapsed.<sup>131</sup> Turner and Currie worked out a scheme to transfer brigadier-generals and battalion commanders to command training units for four to six months. This step provided valuable front-line experience to the training areas and gave these officers a chance to recover from the rigours of the front.<sup>132</sup> The corps and Turner had already established an officer exchange programme of up to six months for qualified officers. It was limited to six months to avoid officers falling out of touch with the changing conditions at the front.<sup>133</sup> Turner's concern with these programs was the corps using it as a mechanism to dump weak officers on England. The issue was the corps would send mediocre officers who were not so poor as to warrant an adverse report. The result would be a form of Gresham's Law of 'bad money drives good money out of circulation,' as no competent officer would want to go to England if it earned a reputation as a holding tank for the weak, incompetent, or undesirable.<sup>134</sup>

Protecting the integrity of the training system was vital to Turner and it was the cause of further conflict with Currie. Currie wrote Kemp complaining Turner had rejected Brigadier-General F. Hill for a training command, whom Currie had recommended. Turner thought Hill an inebriate, which Currie denied. Currie's comment was a characteristically petulant "If my recommendations are not to be

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<sup>131</sup> Patrick Brennan, "Completely Worn out by Service in France" *Combat Stress and Breakdown among Senior Officers in the Canadian Corps*, *Canadian Military History* 18, no. 2 (2009): 10-11.

<sup>132</sup> Overseas Militia Council Submissions, 6 August 1918, O-153-3 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC.

<sup>133</sup> Cdn HQ Shoreham from O.C. Cdn Engineer Training Depot, 11 September 1917, RG 9 III B1 v3083, LAC.

<sup>134</sup> For an in-depth definition of the law, see George Selgin, "Gresham's Law," <http://eh.net/encyclopedia/article/selgin.gresham.law>. An example of the corps avoiding dealing with an inefficient officer is the case of the four-month delay in sending an adverse report from the corps on a captain acting as an instructor in England. AG to HQ Cdn Corps, 31 May 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2886, LAC.



## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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accepted what is the good of asking me to make them." Kemp forced Turner to give Shorncliffe Area Command to Hill in place of Brigadier-General Smart, who had to return to Canada.<sup>135</sup> Smart would later fiercely attack the OMFC when he returned to Canada in 1919.

### Hundred Days Campaign

The third challenge of 1918 was responding to the 45,835 losses the corps suffered in the Hundred Days Campaign.<sup>136</sup> Considering the Canadian Corps' total establishment was approximately 105,000 men it meant replacing a substantial portion of the corps' combat strength concentrated in the infantry, machine guns and engineers, and to a lesser degree in the signals and artillery. Turner responded by reducing the period of training to twelve weeks in August, ten weeks in September, and nine weeks in October and increasing the number of cadets under training from an average of 350 per month to 586 in September and 627 in October.<sup>137</sup> By October, musketry training was running seven days a week from dawn and dusk to qualify men for the front and all advanced instruction other than anti-gas training stopped. The strain was starting to show in October such that McDonald was warning that the system could not long sustain the pace.<sup>138</sup> The rate had to be maintained, as it was not certain until close to the Armistice

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<sup>135</sup> Currie to Kemp, 26 June 1918; Kemp to Currie, 29 June 1918, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Brennan, "Completely Worn out by Service in France" *Combat Stress and Breakdown among Senior Officers in the Canadian Corps*, 9.

<sup>136</sup> Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918*: 579.

<sup>137</sup> Summary on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of September 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>138</sup> Summary on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of October 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## **7 Fighting the Authorities**

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that the Germans would acknowledge their defeat. Currie in early October was convinced the Germans were not on the verge of surrender. He characterised the Germans as fighting harder than he had known and expected they would fight even harder next year.<sup>139</sup>

At the same time as the replacements demands were escalating, Argyll House had to deal with the worldwide influenza outbreak. Turner's organisation responded by closing wet canteens, theatres, and cinemas and discontinuing Church parades to limit the spread. The medical authorities placed the entire Bramshott Camp under quarantine, which meant men who had completed their training were not available for drafts.<sup>140</sup> Despite these challenges, the training organisation was able to satisfy the corps replacement demands but at the cost of compressing the training period. The main measure of the success of Turner's training organisation was the corps' combat power did not significantly degrade with the vast number of replacements provided, unlike the Somme Campaign where its combat effectiveness precipitously declined after the first engagements.

### **Nadir: Post-Armistice Clashes**

The end of the war rather than diminishing the tension seemed to exacerbate Currie's distrust. He was convinced that Turner and his staff were conducting a campaign to undermine him. Currie complained to Harold Daly "I

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<sup>139</sup> Currie to Alfred Miller, Managing Editor London Free Press, 4 October 1918, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>140</sup> Summary on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of October 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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am afraid the old gang is still doing business.”<sup>141</sup> Currie accused Turner and his staff of spending most of their time visiting hospitals where they “intimate that the Canadian Corps has suffered great and unnecessary casualties; going so far as to suggest that the leaders in the field have countenanced the men being sacrificed.”<sup>142</sup> Currie carped to a former ADC that Turner was spreading these lies.<sup>143</sup> Kemp responded to Currie’s accusations, denying there was any substance to them.<sup>144</sup>

Currie also attacked Turner over manpower policies in the post-armistice period. Turner, as was often the case, was able to demonstrate to Kemp that Currie’s complaints were exaggerated and in some cases the result of Currie changing his mind.<sup>145</sup>

Currie returned to his complaints in February 1919 denouncing Turner for attempting to turn Canadians in England against him. Currie railed, “I repeat these slanders are being encouraged.”<sup>146</sup> Currie claimed he could provide the name of a British General who stated there was ‘a sustained but veiled attempt’ to undermine him.<sup>147</sup> Currie also accused Turner and his staff of lying to officers that the corps did not want them. In at least one case when Turner investigated the case, the officer promptly repudiated his claim. Kemp once again tried to calm

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<sup>141</sup> Currie to Daly, 26 October 1918, MG 30 E100 v1, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>142</sup> Currie to Kemp, 23 November 1918, C-53, MG 27 II D9 v135, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Currie Diary Entry, 17 November 1918, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>143</sup> Currie’s exact words were “An officer in England of high as a rank as myself has been spending most of his time at hospitals and convalescent camps, condoling with the wounded and telling them that the casualties in the Corps have been altogether too high, and were unnecessary in many cases.” Currie to Alastair Fraser, 7 December 1918, MG 30 E100 v1, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>144</sup> Kemp to Currie, 30 November 1918, C-53, MG 27 II D9 v135, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>145</sup> Currie to Kemp, 23 November 1918; Turner to Kemp, 2 December 1918; Kemp to Currie, 6 December 1918, 19801226-277/58A 1 60.6, Currie Fonds; CWM.

<sup>146</sup> Currie to Kemp, 27 February 1919, C-20, MG 27 II D9 v132, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>147</sup> Currie to Kemp, 16 February 1919, C-20, MG 27 II D9 v132, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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down the increasingly excitable Currie by asserting there was no evidence of senior officers spreading rumours. He did suggest the problem originated with junior officers and other ranks. Kemp was trying gently to inform Currie that he did have a problem, but it was one of his own making. The rift between Currie and Turner was at risk of becoming public, so Kemp held a luncheon with Borden, Currie, and Turner, with statements afterwards to the Press denying any conflict. Currie did not care for the idea of the meeting.<sup>148</sup>

Currie's attacks finally raised Turner's hackles and he complained to Kemp that "I think it fair to myself and these Headquarters that the attention of the Corps Commander should be drawn to the fact that we resent criticism when it is unwarranted, and nothing causes greater dissatisfaction than generalities." He further stated if Currie complained he needed to provide details such as the officer's name, so Turner could investigate.<sup>149</sup> Currie's letters tended to omit details so making it difficult to refute his sometime-exaggerated claims.

Were Currie's claims legitimate? It is impossible to rule out Turner and his staff encouraged the slander, but it is highly unlikely. Currie was intensely sensitive, quick to take offence, and apt to see enemies everywhere, especially so, when exhausted, as after the Hundred Days Campaign. It is more likely that Currie, as Kemp maintained, magnified the usual grumbling and dissatisfaction of the other ranks into a grand conspiracy, with his rival Turner at its centre.

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<sup>148</sup> Kemp's Military Secretary, Major Bristol, writing an official in Canada, claimed falsely the luncheon killed the "scandal so often circulated that these two distinguished officers are anything but the best of friends." Bristol to Macinnes, 8 April 1919, 10-M-490, RG 9 III A1 v304, LAC; Currie Diary Entry, 5 April 1919, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>149</sup> Turner to Kemp, 21 March 1919, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Certainly, Sam Hughes was still an inveterate enemy but neither Turner nor Aitken were part of any conspiracy.<sup>150</sup> Turner's regular practice of visiting hospitals, something Currie did not often do, was possibly another contributing factor.<sup>151</sup> Currie's claim was entirely at odds with Turner's character. Another factor that argues against the Currie complaint was Kemp's defence of Turner. Turner was no great favourite of Kemp's and was the subject of repeated grievances to Borden, as will be seen in the next chapter. It is, therefore, difficult to believe Kemp would defend Turner as stoutly as he did, if there was any substance to Currie's complaints. Furthermore, two of the leading experts on Currie and the OMFC, Hyatt and Morton, attribute Currie's problems to his deep unpopularity with the other ranks rather than Turner's machinations.<sup>152</sup>

## Conclusion

The working relationship between Currie and Turner was not wholly dysfunctional but neither was it fully effective. The dynamic consisted of Currie demanding and Turner complying. Currie often couched his requirements in undiplomatic and at times intemperate language. Currie's expectation was whatever he required was to be fulfilled by Turner, and, for the most part, Turner accepted this. Turner's practice was to do all in his power to help the front. Turner, however, had a larger mandate than just Currie's Corps, as he was also

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<sup>150</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 272-281.

<sup>151</sup> *ibid.*, 242. Turner visited hospitals an average of two days a month. Turner Diary, 1918, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>152</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: ix; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 175.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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responsible for 50,000 men outside of the corps in Europe and the 100,000 in England. Currie did not recognise that the factors of finance, politics, and civilian control that he regularly railed against were the *sine qua non* of Turner's command. Currie could not distinguish between the necessary political, financial, and civilian constraints from the blatant political interference of Sam Hughes. His comment of "no freedom of action: financial considerations, personal considerations and all sorts of other things retarding what one considers progress" was Turner's reality, but Currie did not appreciate this.<sup>153</sup>

Five conclusions are evident from the Turner-Currie correspondence starting with Currie's assumption of corps command to the end of demobilisation. First, Turner diligently worked to satisfy Currie's requests. In case after case, Turner endeavoured to satisfy the requests coming from the corps. For instance in October 1918, Turner confirmed the promotion of two officers to Brigadier-General at Currie's request, at the cost of contributing to a bitter rift with the Deputy Minister.<sup>154</sup> In small issues, such as returning or retaining officers in England, Turner made every effort to satisfy Currie.<sup>155</sup> More importantly, on larger issues such as having half of the commanders of MG companies graded as Majors or changing the policy to give priority to returning wounded officers when filling officer vacancies, Turner satisfied the corps' needs and requests.<sup>156</sup> Another example was giving Currie authority to transfer men at the Infantry Depot in

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<sup>153</sup> Hyatt, "Sir Arthur Currie and Politicians: A Case of Study of Civil-Military Relations in the First World War," 159.

<sup>154</sup> Turner to Currie, 9 October 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>155</sup> Currie to Turner, 12 August 1917, File 6, MG 30 E75 v3, Urquhart Fonds; LAC.

<sup>156</sup> Turner to Currie, 24 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC; Currie to Turner, 24 August 1917, File 6, MG 30 E75 v3, Urquhart Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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France who had not served overseas between units reinforced by the reserve battalion.<sup>157</sup> What these examples show is Turner's absolute willingness to accede to Currie's requests. As Tim Cook put it "Although Turner had an uneasy relationship with Currie, he had always done his best to assist the corps commander."<sup>158</sup>

Currie was getting his way so often that the Minister of Militia in Canada, Sydney Mewburn, complained to Borden in April 1918 that Currie was setting policy and forcing Turner and the Government to acquiesce. Mewburn wanted the Government to perform this function, but Currie was still able to fix the course of action, such as demobilisation.<sup>159</sup> This was a matter of frustration to Kemp when he was the Minister of OMFC and contributed to his complaints that the military were not sufficiently under civilian control.

Second, Turner's general operating principle was to query the corps before making policy decisions that affected it. This is especially evident after the conflict over the appointment of administrative positions in the corps. Turner recognised that the Canadian Corps was a unique formation, so it was necessary to modify standard British policies. This was especially the case given Currie's difficult personality and hair-trigger responsiveness to any perceived threat to his autonomy or authority. An example is Turner proposing a different approach to breaking up battalions at the front because of manpower shortages, in reaction to

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<sup>157</sup> This allowed more flexibility in cases where one battalion had a surplus of replacements at the base while another was short. Currie to DAG, Base, 21 November 1917, R-98-33 v1, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.

<sup>158</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 269.

<sup>159</sup> Cable Mewburn to Borden, 28 April 1918, 75059-75060, MG 26 H1 v141, Borden Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Currie's concerns.<sup>160</sup>

Third, there is no evidence of the jealousy and obstruction that supposedly characterised Turner's relationship with Currie. George Stanley in his standard treatment of Canadian military history claimed "That this appointment should of aroused personal jealousies was natural; that the jealousies should of led to personal animosities, bitter recriminations, and political intrigue was indicative of immaturity and a lack of a proper sense of military discipline."<sup>161</sup> Even the accomplished historian Charles Stacey describes the unhappiness with Argyll House as "Static headquarters in safe areas always are, but in this instance personalities certainly made things worse, the more so as Turner had hoped to be Corps Commander."<sup>162</sup> However, what is missing is any evidence that the conflict that did exist was the result of Turner's jealousy.

What is evident is Turner's public appreciation of Currie, albeit it may have been just conventional politeness. For instance, his letter of congratulation to Currie for his success at Hill 70, "I congratulate you, with all my heart, on the splendid success achieved with the Corps lately."<sup>163</sup> Turner was supportive such as his letter to Currie in early September 1918 stating "I think one of the gratifying results up to the present has been the success achieved with a comparative small loss."<sup>164</sup>

Fourth, constants of Currie's correspondence with Turner were his persistent

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<sup>160</sup> Turner to Perley, 19 July 1917, File 7, MG 30 E133 v1, McNaughton Fonds; LAC; Currie to Sims, 29 July 1917, File 7, MG 30 E133 v1, McNaughton Fonds; LAC.

<sup>161</sup> Stanley, *Canada's Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People*: 312.

<sup>162</sup> C. P. Stacey, *Arms, Men and Governments: The War Policies of Canada, 1939-1945* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970), 206.

<sup>163</sup> Turner to Currie, 28 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>164</sup> Turner to Currie, 3 September 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.



## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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vigilance for any possible infringement on his perceived prerogatives and the often-curt tone of his letters. A single letter from the period leading up to the German March offensive regarding officer supply illustrates both of these themes. First, Currie was incensed that a letter referred to Turner as GOC Overseas Military Forces of Canada, which was not an authorised title and Currie was prepared to escalate the issue to the Minister. Next, he complained the 5<sup>th</sup> Division was dumping officers on the corps, units were not getting their commissioned NCOs returned, and he wanted an officer exchange for a hard-hit battalion. Turner's response also acts as an illustration of how Turner dealt with Currie's sometimes brusque and accusatory letters. He first apologised for the typist's oversight of omitting the term 'in the British Isles' in his title. Next, he ordered Thacker to satisfy Currie's request for an officer exchange and finally asked for more specifics of Currie's complaints so that he could investigate. This letter captures the dynamic of Turner satisfying Currie's relentless requests and Turner trying to manage Currie's suspicion and ill-tempered demands.<sup>165</sup> Currie did not apologise even when he was clearly in the wrong while Turner was contrite.

Another example of Currie's at times unbridled language came from October 1918 "The seconding of an Officer of a Trench Mortar Battery in France cannot seriously affect the training of Canadian Troops in England, which it is understood is the sole function of the Chief of the General Staff in England." Turner responded to this inflammatory letter soothingly that his involvement was

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<sup>165</sup> Currie to Turner, 1 March 1918, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC; Turner to Currie, 6 March 1918, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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only to track establishments. He then offered to accept whatever course Currie thought appropriate.<sup>166</sup>

Finally, what is striking is the banality of the majority of the exchanges between Turner and Currie and the lack of meaningful information exchange between the two. Currie was somewhat more forthcoming during the Hundred Days Campaign. Their letters relate to specific topics and do not deal with higher-level issues. In contrast stands the correspondence between Haig and Robertson who regularly met and exchanged views via letters.<sup>167</sup> Haig and Robertson were engaged in a fierce set of battles with their political masters, the 'Frocks,' so whatever centrifugal forces may have separated them were overborne by the central necessity of presenting an unified front, at least until late 1917. In the Canadian situation, Currie believed the enemy was the administration in England, meaning Perley and Turner. This made it difficult for Turner to develop a common front with Currie.<sup>168</sup> A further obstacle was Currie's assumption that Turner was still a competitor for command of the corps and this would have contributed to Currie's wariness with Turner.

Given the hostile and suspicious tone in some of Currie's letters it is not unsurprising Turner would not want to share his views with Currie. As a result, there was a tendency for England and France to operate in isolation. Two

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<sup>166</sup> Currie to Canadian Section, 17 October 1918; Turner to Currie, 26 October 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>167</sup> Some examples include Robertson to Haig, 7 January 1916, 7/6/10, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA; Haig to Robertson, 9 January 1916, 7/6/12, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA; Haig to CIGS, 24 January 1917, WO 158/22, TNA.

<sup>168</sup> According to Currie's Diary, Currie met Turner in France in May and visited Turner in England twice in June and twice in September. It was not until 2 January that Currie met with Turner again. Currie Diary, 1917, 1918, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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examples of this are Turner's ready acceptance of the reorganised corps without first discussing the matter with Currie, and Turner's failure to enrol Currie in advocating for a separate airforce.

The nature of the Turner-Currie relationship was a function of fundamentally different personalities, backgrounds, characters, and the inevitable tension between the front-line commanders and administrators. Currie and Turner were near contemporaries in age but came from decidedly different circumstances. Turner was wealthy, worked at his family's business, and lived in the city where he was born. Currie, on the other hand, moved across the country to make a new life. He switched careers twice and had the burden of knowing his business career had failed. Because he had none to start with, money was important to Currie. As evidence of this, Currie complained to Perley about not receiving the same pay and allowances as Byng, as well as requesting an increased separation allowance for his wife.<sup>169</sup> There is no evidence that Turner raised any issues regarding pay or allowance. Related to wealth matters was Currie's embezzlement secret that preyed on Currie's equanimity and would affect his view of Turner, who had no such worries. Finally, Turner had earned a VC and DSO and was known for his visits to the front-line trenches, while Currie adopted a less heroic stance about touring the front and hospitals.<sup>170</sup> Therefore, the very different circumstances and

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<sup>169</sup> Currie wanted British Pay and Canadian allowances. He was not entitled to these allowances but the Government did grant both wives a monthly separation allowance of \$60 per month. There were no provisions in the legislation for separation allowances for wives of Lieutenant-Generals. Cable Kemp to Mewburn, 27 April 1918, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Currie to Perley, 7 October 1917; Harrington to Perley, 29 October 1917, 10-2-29, RG 9 III A1 v67, LAC.

<sup>170</sup> During the Hundred Days campaign, Currie moved the Corps headquarters closer to the front to combat the perception he was shy of the front. Demill, "The 1928 Coburg Libel Trial of Sir

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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financial conditions probably contributed to the poor relationship, as Currie may have had the envy of the self-made man for one who has had everything handed to him.

Unlike the majority of senior British officers, they did not share a common educational background in attending the same types of schools and military academy.<sup>171</sup> Turner attended a relatively prestigious urban high school in Quebec City while Currie attended a much more rustic school in his small town. Again, unlike the majority of senior British officers, Turner and Currie did not attend a higher staff college. Currie did pass the three-month Canadian Militia Staff Course, but it was a pale shadow of the two-year staff course at Camberley. In addition, the majority of Currie's pre-war service was in the artillery while Turner's was entirely in the mounted rifles and cavalry. As a result, there was not a common professional language, background, and culture, to the same extent as with senior British officers, to help mediate their interactions.

Currie had little to no respect for Turner. Hyatt asserted "Currie had never been particularly fond of Sir Richard Turner, and he remained unimpressed with Turner's ability as a commander or as a chief of staff."<sup>172</sup> Understandably bitter about Turner's uncovering his flank at Second Ypres, Currie consistently made disparaging comments about Turner and his performance. At times, his comments were unfair or ill informed and appear animated by an animus towards Turner

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Arthur Currie and the Port Hope Evening Guide: The Rehabilitation of the Reputation of a Corps Commander," 35. For more on Currie's unheroic approach, see Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 212; Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 5.

<sup>171</sup> Sheffield, "Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army, Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army, 1902-22," 4.

<sup>172</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 130.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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unjustified by the circumstances.<sup>173</sup> This attitude permeated and shaped Currie's correspondence to his friends, associates, and to Turner.

Further, Currie and Turner were rivals. While Turner was the senior officer, Currie had won the greatest prize. Some writers suggest jealousy or some other unworthy emotion drove Turner's interactions with Currie, but there is no evidence to support this claim. Turner's objections to Currie's demands stemmed from a different perspective than Currie. In addition, because there was no clear superior and subordinate such as with Byng, the relationship would be more challenging than if one officer was at a different rank.

Both Currie and Turner had no previous administrative experience before their promotions. Currie's lack of administrative experience shaped this relationship. Currie had little appreciation of the challenges facing Turner and could not make allowances for them. Even his first academic biographer admitted "His correspondence with Sir George Perley showed little attempt to understand Perley's problems and often seem ungenerous."<sup>174</sup> An apologist might claim that as a field commander it was not Currie's responsibility to worry about Turner's constraints. This is a false position, however, as field commanders have to take into account the realities of what the rear can provide. To plan and operate

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<sup>173</sup> For instance, see Currie's assertion that Turner did not go to the front at St. Eloi. Morton, "Exerting Control: The Development of Canadian Authority over the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919," 13. Another example is Currie's statement that the 15th Battalion at Second Ypres ran away. How a unit that suffered 691 casualties can be accused of running away is difficult to accept as other than animus. Currie to May, 11 May 1915, File 34, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives; Dancocks, *Welcome to Flanders Fields: The First Canadian Battle of the Great War: Ypres, 1915*: 227. Another example is Currie to Hughes "They tell me that Turner is on joy-riding in Italy, I note, though, that the reinforcements we are receiving are classified as partially trained." Currie to Garnet Hughes, 2 May 1917, File 5, MG 27 II D23 v14, Hughes Fonds; LAC.

<sup>174</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 108.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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divorced from the actual capabilities to support these operations risks failure.

An example of Currie's unrealistic demands was his request for ten supernumerary officers per battalion in October 1917. They would 'soak up atmosphere,' assist in training, enable exchange with officers in the battalion needing a rest, and allowed the commanding officers to get to know the replacement officers. This was an admirable plan but it meant Turner's organisation needed to supply 480 infantry officers at once.<sup>175</sup>

The final and most salient factor was the always-present strain between the front and rear. As E.L.M. Burns, a Second World War Canadian corps commander put it "In whatever echelon of the military machine the soldier happened to find himself he had a profound conviction that the man in the echelon behind had a pretty easy and safe time of it."<sup>176</sup> The British also experienced this conflict as witnessed by the struggles that the MGC at GHQ had with the training arm in England.<sup>177</sup> An example of Currie's feeling was his comment that Argyll House 'did themselves very well indeed' when it came to foreign decorations while the front-line officers got nothing.<sup>178</sup>

There is an inescapable tension between organisations with different time horizons, decision criteria, reporting structures, and success metrics. In business, government, and the military the interfaces between departments will always

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<sup>175</sup> Ten officers per battalion times 48 battalions. G676/2-12, 11 October 1917, 103/6, RG 9 III C1 v3866, LAC.

<sup>176</sup> E. L. M. Burns, *General Mud; Memoirs of Two World Wars* (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1970), 4.

<sup>177</sup> French, "The 51st (Highland) Division During the First World War," 120.

<sup>178</sup> This was in response to a remarkably cheeky plea from Carson in February 1918 for a French decoration. Currie to Carson, 20 February 1918, MG 30 E100 v1, Currie Fonds; LAC. Currie also complained to Kemp about the decoration policy. Currie to Bristol, Private Secretary to Minister OMFC, 16 March 1918, File 9, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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generate stress and friction. Currie was wholly focused on the functional aspects of commanding a fighting force, while Turner had to bring into account the broader perspective of national goals and aspirations, financial matters, and political considerations, of which Currie was seemingly oblivious. Not surprisingly, the two had different agendas that did not coincide. For example, Turner claimed in March 1918 "it is safe to say that at least sixty recommendations in the past ten months have been put forward by the GOC Canadian Corps, which are not in accordance with the regulations and which are unsound from a view point of policy."<sup>179</sup> A matter that was beneficial for the corps might not be ideal for the larger context of the CEF. Another example of these different perspectives was the appointment of Brigadier-General Hill to Shorncliffe. Currie had legitimate reasons for wanting to give Hill a rest and Turner equally legitimate reasons for not wanting the encumbrance of an alcoholic.

Too often, historians ascribe these tensions to personalities when they are innate to the system. As Dominick Graham phrased it, "friction at overlapping functional points is natural and not simply the result of mismanagement or misbehavior."<sup>180</sup> Personalities can ameliorate or magnify the tensions but not eliminate them. Officers with a common background, education, social position, training, and administrative experience are more likely to reduce these stresses. Operating against a common enemy will also minimise the strains, as with the

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<sup>179</sup> Turner to Kemp, 12 March 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>180</sup> Dominick Graham, "Stress Areas and Gray Areas: The Utility of the Historical Method to the Military Profession," in David A. Charters, Marc Milner, and J. Brent Wilson (eds.), *Military History and the Military Profession* (Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 1992), 156.

## **7 Fighting the Authorities**

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relationship between Haig and Robertson. None of these factors however applied to the Turner and Currie dynamic.

Given all of these issues what is surprising is not that there was tension or that the interactions were not fully functional but that it worked at all. The fact that they did not wholly fail is in large part to Turner's larger horizon and commitment to duty. Turner accepted a considerable amount of abuse from Currie with only an occasional outburst in return. Turner worked diligently and effectively to give Currie all he needed and much of what he wanted. What is remarkable is the degree of forbearance Turner demonstrated in the face of constant provocation. Currie was certainly at war with the administration, but the administration was not at war with Currie. A final factor was the efforts of Perley and later Kemp to mediate between the two. The tenor of their correspondence to Currie in answer to his attacks was usually conciliatory and they attempted to reason with him. They may have had similar discussions with Turner, but these have left no record.

Post-war, Turner continued to try to reach out to and support Currie despite Currie's continued disdain. In 1920, Currie was angry once again over a supposed faux pas at a memorial event for Second Ypres in Flanders relating to Currie's brigade. It was a misunderstanding and Turner wrote Currie, "During the war period, I often thought there were outside influences that caused friction between you and me: Pray that it is all over."<sup>181</sup> Turner recruited Currie to participate in the creation of the Canadian Legion and sent a note of support prior to Currie's

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<sup>181</sup> Turner to Currie, 21 August 1920, MG 30 E100 v15, Currie Fonds; LAC.



## 7 Fighting the Authorities

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Coburg libel trial.<sup>182</sup> Turner testified at the trial and according to a newspaper account, 'When quizzed during the Currie trial Turner was enthusiastic in his praise of Currie,' but it did not fundamentally change Currie's view of Turner.<sup>183</sup>

Turner was the president of the dinner in honour of Currie after the culmination of the Coburg trial. Turner rose to give the toast and "the troops cheered him to the echo."<sup>184</sup>

Late in 1917, Sir George Perley stepped down as the Minister of OMFC and Sir Edward Kemp, the Minister of Militia in Canada, replaced him. Kemp was a different type of superior, and he would make considerable changes to the structure and control mechanisms within the OMFC. This restructuring and a difficult relationship with Kemp meant a challenging period for Turner and is the focus of the next chapter.

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<sup>182</sup> Turner to Currie, 31 March 1928, File 69, MG 30 E100 v19, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>183</sup> Currie wrote Turner "I feel I owe you a special word of gratitude. I appreciated more than I can say your offer to testify and I was more than glad to take advantage of it." Currie to Turner, 8 May 1928, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.6, 19710147-007, Turner Fonds; CWM; "Currie Trial Evidence Completed," *The Border Cities Star*, 28 April 1928.

<sup>184</sup> "Overseas Officers Feted Corps Commander," *Montreal Gazette*, 12 May 1928.

# 8

## FADE AWAY: TURNER 1918 - 1961

*It is largely due to his untiring efforts that the Canadian Military Organization in England has reached its present high state of efficiency.<sup>1</sup>*

Kemp's Press Release, 14 January 1918

*Besides there was an absolute lack of co-ordination between different important branches, which led to inefficiency, and perhaps what is of more importance, there was a lack of appreciation of what is understood by constitutional methods as against military control.<sup>2</sup>*

Kemp to Borden, 1 April 1918

Sir Edward Kemp, the new Minister of the OMFC, arrived in England in December 1917 determined to reform the department, and this interventionist minister diminished Turner's role and influence. This chapter discusses the remainder of Turner's military career starting with the election of 1917 until his retirement in August 1919, concentrating on Turner's dealings with Kemp. The chapter also covers the remainder of Turner's life, with a focus on his final major contribution in helping unify veterans' groups to establish what became the Royal Canadian Legion. As this is a military biography, only the bare contours of the remaining forty-three years of Turner's life post-armistice will be sketched.

Kemp became Minister, because Perley in September 1917 resigned to

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<sup>1</sup> Press Release, 14 January 1918, P-16, MG 27 II D9 v155, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>2</sup> Cable Kemp to Borden, 1 April 1918, 57572-57574, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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become the permanent High Commissioner.<sup>3</sup> Perley's workload resulting from holding two high-profile positions was exhausting. Perley, also, was disappointed when Borden refused to select Perley's nominee for a vacant Senate seat.<sup>4</sup> After the sacrifices Perley made and his contributions, Borden's rejection was a bitter blow. It also contributed to Perley's concern about his ability to retain his seat in Quebec in the coming federal election. With his apparent lack of political capital and the strong anti-conscription views of French-Canadians, Perley had legitimate concerns.<sup>5</sup> He subsequently changed his mind and tried to withdraw his resignation, but Borden had already arranged for Kemp to replace Perley after the election. In Kemp's place as the Minister of Militia, Borden selected a Liberal Militia Colonel, Sydney Mewburn.<sup>6</sup>

## Conscription and Election

Before Kemp took over as Minister, the divisive election of 1917 was held to resolve the issue of conscription. Borden was well aware of the problems with recruiting but blanched at the prospect of bringing in the draft, especially after the negative results from two Australian referenda on conscription. Gwatkin sent Borden a memo in April 1917 that laid out in detail how serious was the shortfall

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<sup>3</sup> Perley was an acting High Commissioner, as the High Commissioner could not sit in the Cabinet.

<sup>4</sup> The Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister appoints Senators. The Senate is the upper house of the Canadian Parliament.

<sup>5</sup> Perley to Borden, 14 September 1917, v9 File 3, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>6</sup> Biography S.C. Mewburn, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC. Mewburn's son died at Courcellette serving in the 18th Battalion. Mewburn's Burial File, 10-M-576, RG 9 III A1 v305, LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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in manpower, and pleaded that 50,000 men be compelled to serve.<sup>7</sup> Borden, initially, wanted to give volunteer recruiting another six months.<sup>8</sup> It was readily apparent, however, that this option was unrealistic.<sup>9</sup> With the Government's term about to expire and without an agreement from the opposition to extend it, an election was mandatory.<sup>10</sup> After Laurier, the Liberal leader, rejected a coalition offer, Borden adroitly undercut him by suborning pro-conscription Liberals into a Union government.<sup>11</sup> Not satisfied with this step, Borden also forced through changes to the Election Act that gave women who had family members in the military the vote, disenfranchised recent immigrants, and established conditions where soldiers' votes could be switched to different constituencies.<sup>12</sup>

Some historians have questioned why the Government took these drastic and fundamentally undemocratic steps.<sup>13</sup> It is likely it was related to the Australian conscription failure. Australia experienced the same collapse of recruiting in 1916, with the added problem of having to support the equivalent of seven divisions from a smaller population base.<sup>14</sup> The two referenda were both narrowly defeated. Of great concern to the Canadian Government was the Australian

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<sup>7</sup> Gwatkin estimated the CEF needed 20,000 to 30,000 men over the summer, but there were only 18,496 men in the CEF in Canada, and most of these were unsuitable or unavailable. Only 4,000 men were joining per month and some would be unfit for active service. Memorandum Relating to the Military Situation in Canada on the 1st of May 1917, GAQ 10-47c, RG 24 v1843, LAC.

<sup>8</sup> Cable Borden to Perley, 23 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Craig Brown, "Unrequited Faith: Recruiting in the CEF 1914-1919," *Revue Internationale D' Historie Militaire* 51(1982): 63.

<sup>10</sup> Granatstein, *Broken Promises: The History of Conscription in Canada*: 67.

<sup>11</sup> Hillmer and Granatstein, *Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World to the 1990s*: 62.

<sup>12</sup> Granatstein, *Broken Promises: The History of Conscription in Canada*: 63; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 134.

<sup>13</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 141.

<sup>14</sup> Australia had a male population in 1911 of 2.3 million and Canada a male population of 3.8 million. Perry, "Manpower and Organisational Problems in the Expansion of the British and Other Commonwealth Armies During the Two World Wars," 293.

## 8 Fade Away

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military voted narrowly against conscription in both referenda, with the front-line forces voting three to one against in the first referendum.<sup>15</sup>

The Government expected the senior overseas officers to promote conscription to Canadian voters and to ensure the soldiers voted for the Union Government. Turner fulfilled these expectations by delivering an endorsement of conscription when requested by the Government that included publishing a strident article in *Canada in Khaki* in support of more men.<sup>16</sup> He also actively worked to get the military to vote for the Unionists. According to the King's Regulations and Orders (KRO), military authorities were not to participate in active political campaigns and it constrained the types of activities allowed.<sup>17</sup> However, it is likely that Turner's subordinates violated these regulations in their efforts to support conscription. The primary complainant in this matter was a Liberal organiser and scrutineer W.T. Preston.<sup>18</sup> Preston would later gain infamy for being the author of the article that triggered Currie's libel lawsuit in 1928. Preston made wild claims about the election campaign that the authorities ordered known Liberals to die in suicidal missions. More plausibly, he accused Major-General Garnet Hughes and Brigadier-General F.S. Meighen, a Training Brigade commander, of organising committees of officers to lobby their men to

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<sup>15</sup> Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 115.; Robson, *The First A.I.F.: A Study of Its Recruitment 1914-1918*: 119.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Turner, "We Are Winning - But Send Us More Men," (ed.), *Canada in Khaki No. 2 : A Tribute to the Officers and Men Now Serving in the Overseas Military Forces of Canada* (London: The Pictorial Newspaper Co. Ltd., 1917).

<sup>17</sup> "An officer or soldier is forbidden to institute or take part in, any meetings, demonstrations or processions for party or political purposes in barracks, quarters or camps." *The King's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia 1917*: 430.

<sup>18</sup> Chubby Power, later an important cabinet minister in Mackenzie-King's Second World War government, in his unpublished memoirs, also suggested some officers allowed or tolerated violations. Memoir, Chapters I-VI, Loc 2150, Box 105, Power Fonds; QUA, 109.

## 8 Fade Away

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vote Unionist. At one point, Preston was arrested when he tried to intervene at a polling station.<sup>19</sup> He, subsequently, met Turner to complain about the purported violations, but Turner categorically denied the accusations.<sup>20</sup> Ten years later, Turner continued to complain that Preston caused him 'much annoyance' during the election and that he was a 'very slippery individual.'<sup>21</sup>

Turner was also sensitive to possible political dimensions of administrative decisions, so he ordered Thacker not to return surplus officers to Canada until after the election. This meant fewer disappointed officers in Canada to complain.<sup>22</sup> In another instance, Turner refused to order the transfer of French-speaking soldiers from their existing units, until after the election.<sup>23</sup>

Members of Turner's staff and others in the OMFC worked diligently for the Government.<sup>24</sup> After the election, Perley highlighted the election contributions of Aitken, Sims, and Donald Hogarth.<sup>25</sup> Turner also received a warm letter of gratitude from W.P. Purney, who was responsible for carrying out the election overseas.<sup>26</sup> It is likely that there were contraventions of the KRO, but not as dire as the untrustworthy Preston alleged. In the end, the military voted overwhelmingly for the Union government, and the margin of victory was such that the Unionist

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<sup>19</sup> Preston's account was he was arrested entering the camp, but the records of the 208th Battalion indicate differently. O.C. 208 Infantry Bn. To 13th Cdn. Inf. Brigade, 4 December 1917, E-4-10, RG 9 III B1 v1644, LAC.

<sup>20</sup> William Thomas Rochester Preston, *My Generation of Politics and Politicians* (Toronto: D. A. Rose, 1927), 365-370; Preston to Turner, 3 December 1917; Turner to Preston, MG 30 E46 v12, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>21</sup> Turner to Currie, 31 March 1928, File 69, MG 30 E100 v19, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>22</sup> AG1 Pope to DAG, 23 November 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2883, LAC.

<sup>23</sup> Turner to Thacker, 17 November 1917, R-97-33 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.

<sup>24</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 141.

<sup>25</sup> Perley to Borden, 10 December 1917, v10 File 3, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>26</sup> Purney's grandiloquent title was Overseas Clerk of the Crown in Chancery for Canada. Purney to Turner, 4 January 1918, MG 30 E46 v12, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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government did not count the switchable overseas military votes.

While Turner was bending the rules and publicly endorsing the need for conscription, Currie refused to support the draft publicly. When first appointed to the corps, Currie did issue a statement, but during the election, the Liberals used this statement to attack him. Currie reacted by withdrawing any public support and hiding behind his role as corps commander as being above politics, but he later invoked the political assistance of the Government during the German March Offensive, as discussed earlier.<sup>27</sup> The Government's subsequent shabby treatment of Currie may have stemmed from Currie's refusal to assist the Government in achieving a goal he was demanding.

### Kemp Arrives

Kemp arrived in England in December in poor health and with a strong conviction that the OMFC needed significant reform.<sup>28</sup> He believed Perley had left a mess he needed to clean up, and this would give him a jaundiced view of the incumbents in command positions. He came to the post confident about the reforms required, but he admitted later that the situation was more complicated than he realised.<sup>29</sup> His mood and dislike of England did not improve in the pessimistic atmosphere in London about the state of the war.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 286-287; Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 213.

<sup>28</sup> Kemp was ill much of December 1917. Cable Kemp to Borden, 8 January 1918, 57514-57515, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>29</sup> Kemp to Borden, 24 February 1918, MG 27 II D9 v129, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>30</sup> George L. Cook, "Sir Robert Borden, Lloyd George and British Military Policy, 1917-1918," *The Historical Journal* 14, no. 2 (1971): 382. For more on the pessimistic state of the British leadership, see Millman, *Pessimism and British War Policy, 1916-1918*.

## 8 Fade Away

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His primary concern was control, or the lack of control, of the military in England and forces outside of the corps. He reported to Borden after consulting with Currie but not Turner "I find the organization here somewhat peculiar in many ways, as it does not follow along the lines, altogether, of any organization of similar character either here or in Canada."<sup>31</sup> He believed the military wielded too much power and were not sufficiently under civilian control. He viewed Turner and Currie as taking 'little interest in public affairs in Canada,' and after three years overseas had no appreciation of the importance of public opinion.<sup>32</sup> Kemp's strictures did not take into account the 'peculiar' position of the CEF under the dual control of the Canadian Government and the War Office. Kemp's reference to organisations of a similar character is misleading, as Canadian forces in Canada and British troops had a single reporting structure, unlike the convoluted one of the CEF.

Kemp's frustration stemmed in part from the power Currie wielded in setting policy. As discussed in Chapter 7, Mewburn complained about Currie's establishing the direction and Turner and the Government having to follow.<sup>33</sup> Kemp, also, viewed the situation in England from his perspective as the former Minister of Militia having to defend the OMFC in the House of Commons, but lacking the necessary information to do so effectively. For example in August 1917, Perley, at Turner's behest, requested Kemp for relief from frivolous information demands from Canada. This was in response to a request in Question

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<sup>31</sup> Cable Kemp to Borden, 4 January 1918, 51130A, MG 26 H1 v96, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>32</sup> Kemp to Borden, 24 February 1918, MG 27 II D9 v129, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>33</sup> Cable Mewburn to Borden, 28 April 1918, 75059-75060, MG 26 H1 v141, Borden Fonds; LAC.



## 8 Fade Away

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Period for a list of officers working extra-regimentally and their costs. Thacker complained that this required a great deal of extra work for officers trying to win the war. Perley's closing comment was "this is the kind of question that might very well be left in abeyance until after the war."<sup>34</sup> For Kemp, who had to face MPs in Question Period, this request demonstrated the military's lack of political awareness, as these questions had to be answered. Turner and Thacker, however, had a legitimate point that many of the requests required far too much effort for the benefit provided. This was something Kemp, initially, did not appreciate.

Kemp determined that he needed two structural changes to the OMFC to address these issues – a military council and a revised organisation representing Canadian interests at GHQ. Kemp's first structural change was the creation of an Overseas Military Council (OMC), following British and Canadian practice. Kemp was intimately familiar with the council in Canada and viewed the situation in England as an aberration. Further, he thought Turner brought a too overtly military orientation to England when the situation was more akin to that in Canada than in France. Kemp, therefore, wanted greater civilian control and better coordination. He thought Turner and his staff made important policy decisions without factoring in civilian considerations and the impacts on various branches of the OMFC. He claimed Turner was averse to discussing policy matters with Currie as if they were his own views.<sup>35</sup> Given their contentious relationship, it is understandable Turner wanted Currie to recognise these issues were emanating from the Minister, but it did suggest that Turner was not necessarily in agreement with them.

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<sup>34</sup> Perley to Kemp, 9 August 1917, O-257-33, RG 9 III B1 v2903, LAC.

<sup>35</sup> Cable Kemp to Borden, 1 April 1918, 57572-57574, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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Kemp's solution to these problems was an OMC to consist of the Minister, Deputy Minister, Turner, and the heads of the branches.<sup>36</sup> Mewburn, the Minister of Militia and Defence, objected to the structure and wanted to make Turner an Inspector-General. Mewburn, in effect, wanted to sideline Turner much like what happened to Alderson.<sup>37</sup> Mewburn's attitude suggests there was a strain between the Canadian military in Canada and England. There is some evidence of tensions over issues such as delays in settling estates by Argyll House and the inadequate manner the Department in Canada investigated compassionate leave cases.<sup>38</sup> The Deputy Minister for the Ministry of Militia, Eugene Fiset, complained that it was 'useless' for him to write Argyll House officially as he would 'not even get an answer.'<sup>39</sup> The creation of the OMFC effectively sidelined the Ministry of Militia and there was bound to be bitterness over its relegation to little more than a draft finding organisation. Mewburn's actions may have been an attempt to wrestle some control back from the OMFC.

Contributing to this tension was the relative isolation of Canada, because of the limited information exchange between the front and England with the military in Canada. A notable flaw in the Canadian war effort was the absence of mechanisms to convey the war lessons to Canada. While there was a steady flow of political figures, such as Hughes, Perley, Kemp, and Borden between Canada

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<sup>36</sup> Cable Kemp to Borden, 23 March 1918, 57542, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>37</sup> Memo Mewburn to Borden, 26 March 1918, 57543, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.

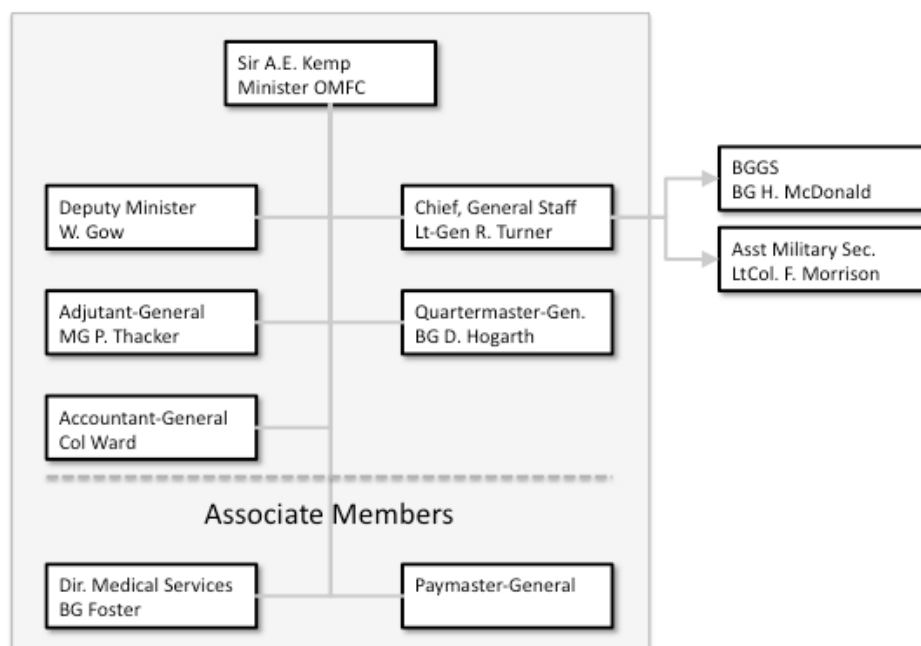
<sup>38</sup> For estates, see Bristol to Sherwood, 11 July 1917, 10-C-117, RG 9 III A1 v257, LAC. For compassionate leave cases, see Thacker to Secretary, Ministry OMFC, 5 July 1918, 10-C-431, RG 9 III A1 v261, LAC.

<sup>39</sup> Fiset's complaint triggered an investigation in Turner's Headquarters that did not turn up any cases of unanswered letters. Gow wrote back to Fiset asking for examples, but Fiset did not reply. Fiset to Midllebro, 18 September 1917, 10-G-147, RG 9 III A1 v277, LAC; Gow to Fiset, 17 November 1917, 10-G-147, RG 9 III A1 v277, LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

and England, no senior officer from Turner's or Currie's command visited Canada until almost the end of the war.<sup>40</sup> The only senior officers to visit England and France from Canada were the two Inspector-Generals for Eastern and Western Canada, who made relatively brief inspection tours in the spring of 1916 and 1917.<sup>41</sup> Only seven of the sixty-nine general officers who served in France returned to Canada during the war to take up appointments.<sup>42</sup> Generally, returning officers were either wounded or regarded as failures. This lack of officer exchange meant Canada operated in isolation.

**Figure 20 Overseas Military Council Organisation Chart**



The council first met 14 May 1918, convened a further 26 times, and made

<sup>40</sup> McDonald, Turner's chief staff officer, and Bishop left for Canada in October 1918.

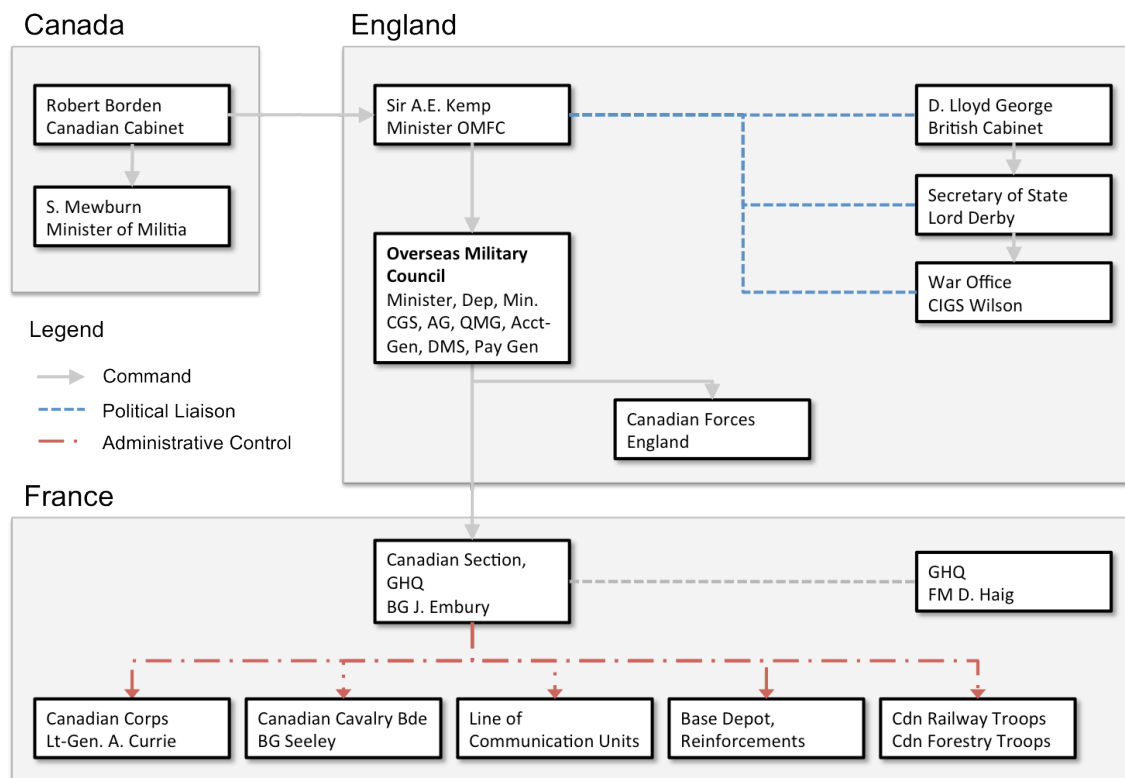
<sup>41</sup> For a generally unperceptive set of comments on his inspection of England and the Canadian Corps from John Hughes, another of Sam Hughes' brothers and the Inspector-General, Western Canada, see Inspector-General, Western Canada to Adjutant-General, Canadian Militia, 18 June 1917, 10-H-89, RG 9 III A1 v282, LAC. Lessard's report is available at Lessard Report, May 1916, GAQ 10-39, RG 24 v1840, LAC.

<sup>42</sup> A.M.J. Hyatt, "Canadian Generals of the First World War and the Popular View of Military Leadership," *Histoire Sociale - Social History* XII(1979): 425.

## 8 Fade Away

434 decisions.<sup>43</sup> The council dealt with a wide variety of topics, including promotions, establishments, compassionate policy, officer exchanges, and cadet uniforms.<sup>44</sup> It must have consumed a great deal of time of busy staff officers as the records for the OMC include hundreds of pages of submissions, which all the members had to read and approve.

**Figure 21 OMFC 1918 Organisation Chart**



To align the new OMC more closely with the structure in Canada, Kemp changed Turner's title to Chief of the General Staff (CGS), as of 18 May.<sup>45</sup> Turner

<sup>43</sup> Overseas Military Council Submissions, 14 May 1918, O-153-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC; Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 160.

<sup>44</sup> Overseas Militia Council Submissions, 6 August 1918, O-153-3 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC; *ibid*; Overseas Militia Council Submissions, 13 July 1918, O-153-3 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC; Overseas Militia Council Submissions, November 1918, O-153-3 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC.

<sup>45</sup> Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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supplied Kemp with a letter to explain the new title and role to the War Office.<sup>46</sup>

Kemp revised the letter and made one crucial addition by making Turner explicitly responsible for the administration of Canadian units in France outside of the Canadian Corps, as the responsibility was uncertain before.<sup>47</sup>

In this reform, nominally, Turner continued as the Chief Military Advisor, was responsible for coordination of the General Staff, Adjutant-General and Quartermaster-General, and remained responsible for administration and training of forces in England, with the added explicit control over non-corps forces at the front. The OMC constrained his real authority, however, as the Council decided all matters of policy, senior officer promotions, issues concerning multiple branches, large expenditures, and establishments. As a result, effectively the new organisation meant a demotion for Turner, as the OMC subsumed some of his former authority. Despite this, Turner's reaction in his correspondence with Kemp shows ready acceptance of this new title and role.

Kemp's second structural change was an attempt to improve control over and communications with Canadian forces outside of England and to pacify Currie. Sims continued as the Canadian Representative at GHQ and was the conduit for information between Canadian formations in France and Belgium, the OMFC, and GHQ. Kemp, however, was not satisfied that Sims could effectively represent Canadian interests to GHQ, because of his rank and origin as a Hughes' appointee. Further, as there was no central Canadian authority in France over Canadian units outside of the corps, Canadian control over these formations was

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<sup>46</sup> Turner to Kemp, 29 April 1918, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>47</sup> Kemp to Secretary of State for War, 1 May 1918, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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nominal. Currie, furthermore, disliked Sims and regarded him as a meddler, a bottleneck, and lacking the power to make decisions. Currie wanted Sims removed.<sup>48</sup>

As an interim step to mollify Currie, Kemp agreed that Turner and Currie could communicate directly on purely Canadian matters without passing through Sims.<sup>49</sup> On several occasions, Argyll House routed correspondence on Canadian matters through Sims, which outraged Currie.<sup>50</sup> After one such incident, Currie attacked Turner claiming, "In a well disciplined Corps, disciplinary action would be taken for such a violation of instructions."<sup>51</sup> Kemp placating Currie explained there was a difference of opinion of what was a Canadian domestic matter. Kemp did not want to disrupt the understanding that Perley had reached with GHQ, so his interpretation, shared by Turner and Gow, of what was a Canadian domestic matter was conservative. Kemp assured Currie that he was working on addressing Currie's larger concerns with representation at GHQ.<sup>52</sup>

Kemp's solution was a Canadian Section at GHQ, which was similar to a proposal Thacker made to Turner in November 1917 regarding the administration of forces in France.<sup>53</sup> The Canadian Section served the primary functions of representing Canadian interests at GHQ, acting as the primary conduit for communications between Argyll House, Canadian forces in the field, and

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<sup>48</sup> Currie to Kemp, 25 February 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Currie to Kemp, 6 March 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Currie to Minister, OMFC, 25 February 1918, C-41-3, RG 9 III B1 v910, LAC.

<sup>49</sup> AG Order A.G. 36-1-14, 11 February 1918, C-41-3, RG 9 III B1 v910, LAC.

<sup>50</sup> Currie to HQ, OMFC, 11 March 1918, C-41-3, RG 9 III B1 v910, LAC.

<sup>51</sup> Currie to Kemp, 14 March 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>52</sup> Kemp to Currie, 18 March 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>53</sup> General Officer Commander, 30 January 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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administration of the 47,000 Canadians outside of the Canadian Corps in France and Belgium.<sup>54</sup> It paralleled most of the organisation of the OMFC with branches for the Adjutant-General, Quartermaster-General, Assistant Military Secretary, Medical, Pay, and Chaplain services. Kemp shrewdly appointed Brigadier-General J.F.L. Embury to head the Canadian Section. Embury had commanded the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, and served as a Brigadier-General in the Canadian Corps and the 5<sup>th</sup> Division in England, and was serving as a Judge of the Court of King's Bench in Saskatchewan when selected.<sup>55</sup> Embury, therefore, had the necessary seniority, experience, and gravitas to have influence at GHQ and was acceptable to Currie and Turner. The selection helped allay Currie's fears that the section would act as a watchdog for the Minister.<sup>56</sup>

Turner's role in establishing the Canadian Section was two fold. First, he defeated an attempt by Currie to take over as the personal representative at GHQ. In February, Currie claimed GHQ desired that he act as the personal representative for at least corps matters.<sup>57</sup> Turner did not approve, pointing out that, as a subordinate of Haig, the corps commander might be in an invidious position in presenting the Canadian point of view to GHQ; possibly without having the full information on issues, such as availability of reinforcements. Further, Currie's desire to advance the interests of his officers and men meant his

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<sup>54</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 161; GHQ Official Notice O.B./1041/1, 31 August 1918, C-41-3, RG 9 III B1 v910, LAC. Of the approximately 150,000 Canadians on the continent on 11 November 1918, 105,000 were in the Canadian Corps and the remainder in Railway and Forestry Corps, service, and replacement units. Demobilisation Factors, Folder 41, 74/672 Box 8, DHH.

<sup>55</sup> Kemp to Secretary of State for War, 15 June 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>56</sup> Harris, "From Subordinate to Ally," 123.

<sup>57</sup> Currie to Minister, OMFC, 25 February 1918, C-41-3, RG 9 III B1 v910, LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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recommendations could not 'always be taken at their face value' as they at times violated regulations or sound policy.<sup>58</sup> Turner wanted a third-party at GHQ who could represent the views of the entire OMFC and not just the Canadian Corps.

Second, Turner and Kemp negotiated the terms of reference for the new organisation with the War Office. The War Office was far more amenable to the changes than GHQ, which was concerned about any infringement on its operational control (and GHQ defined operational control broadly).<sup>59</sup> This is understandable given the recent experience Haig had endured with the protests over the break up of the Canadian Corps during the German March Offensive. The negotiations with GHQ were a factor in delays in setting up the Canadian Section.

Argyll House was the subject of attacks from the Canadian Corps and Canada. Beyond the complaints about the technical services to the corps, Morton has claimed, "Argyll House had become a symbol of insensitive, arrogant bureaucracy."<sup>60</sup> This is a common complaint about rear administrations, but there are few substantive and documented examples of grievances. One of the few was Sutherland Brown's complaint in a confidential letter about the attitude of officers in Turner's command in trying to save money at the expense of justice to front-line officers.<sup>61</sup> It is likely that after a year or more removed from the front some officers were more responsive to bureaucratic imperatives than the front. Despite

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<sup>58</sup> Turner to Kemp, 12 March 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>59</sup> C. P. Stacey, *Canada and the Age of Conflict: A History of Canadian External Policies*, 2 vols. (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977), 197.

<sup>60</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 201.

<sup>61</sup> Sutherland Brown to Unknown (Currie?), 1 April 1918, M-15-3, RG 9 III B1 v965, LAC.



## 8 Fade Away

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Turner's oft-repeated statements about serving the front line, it is probable that the message did not reach everyone. It does not appear, however, that Argyll House was any more susceptible to these problems than other rear organisations.

Some Canadian newspapers regularly assailed Argyll House about tensions with the corps in France, extravagant staff levels, and the cowardice of officers sheltering in England. In part, this was a means of attacking the government. There were tensions with France, but the preponderance of the blame for the dysfunctional relationship lay with Currie rather than Argyll House, as discussed in Chapter 7. The complaint about excess staffing levels started as early as January 1917 with Hughes complaining about the number of officers at the headquarters.<sup>62</sup> Newspapers and especially the *Manitoba Free Press* and *Toronto Star* attacked Argyll House for employing many more officers on commissions, boards, command, and staff positions than were necessary. Turner repeatedly provided statistics demonstrating the increasing efficiency of staffing levels.<sup>63</sup> Turner's organisation was employing more officers than was strictly necessary in 1917 and early 1918, as a consequence, of having to find places for politically powerful surplus officers. Turner's further staff reductions in 1918 demonstrate there was some excess. After the election, however, it was no longer necessary to mollify these officers, as the political impact of their returning to Canada diminished. Given the steady decrease in staffing levels overall in the OMFC, it is difficult to sustain the charge that Argyll House was grossly over-staffed as

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<sup>62</sup> Notes on Speech to House of Commons, 30 January 1917, 1-18, MG 27 II D23 v1, Hughes Fonds; LAC.

<sup>63</sup> Comparative Statement of Staffs Employed, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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claimed.

The other major charge hurled at Argyll House was that it was rife with shirkers. As the *Manitoba Free Press* phrased it,

The control of the Canadian forces in England is in the hands of a clique whose chief activities are directed toward the evading the dangers of the front line trenches and capitalizing for their own benefit to the greatest possible extent the glory earned by the troops in the field.<sup>64</sup>

This calumny was a fabrication. Of the sixty-seven officers employed at Argyll House on 11 June 1918, forty-nine or 73.3% had served overseas, and of those that had not served at the front, eleven were unfit or overage and seven or only 10.4% were fit for General Service. This last category would include officers who had specialised qualifications.<sup>65</sup> Another example is the Reserve Artillery Brigade in April 1918 with all 67 of its officers and all but 24 of its 394 other ranks having seen active service. The twenty-four who had not done so included underage soldiers and specialists with unique skills.<sup>66</sup> To ensure there were no grounds for complaint in July 1918, Turner mandated the immediate replacement all officers fit for General Service and who had not seen active duty.<sup>67</sup>

The source of these complaints was typically disgruntled officers, who anti-government newspapers eagerly exploited to attack Argyll House and by extension the government. One of the strongest cases was that of Brigadier-General C.A. Smart, who made a series of damning charges when he arrived in Canada after losing his command to an officer from the corps, as discussed in

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<sup>64</sup> "IX.—Military Problems Overseas," *Manitoba Free Press*, 2 March 1918.

<sup>65</sup> Officers Employed at OMFC HQ, 11 June 1918, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>66</sup> Sharman to Turner, 26 April 1918, M-29-36 v1, RG 9 III B1 v3090, LAC.

<sup>67</sup> Policy CGS, 17 July 1918, O-83-33, RG 9 III B1 v3101, LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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Chapter 7. These attacks especially nettled Turner, who wrote Kemp twice in April 1919 to refute the claims and to disparage Smart.<sup>68</sup> Another example was a long letter published in a newspaper from a draft conducting officer listing a litany of transgressions committed by Argyll House. Unfortunately, for the creditability of the report, Turner discovered the officer was a bigamist and coward.<sup>69</sup>

Turner asked that the Government defend his staff from these unwarranted attacks, but he did not ask for protection for himself. Turner was always assiduous about safeguarding his people. McDonald earlier, in June 1918, asked that the Minister take steps to refute the attacks made on the honour and integrity of the officer corps in England.<sup>70</sup> Turner agreed and presented a memorandum to Kemp contesting the newspaper charges.<sup>71</sup> Kemp did make efforts to defend his officers through newspaper articles, but it was difficult to do so from England.<sup>72</sup> His complaints did trigger tighter censorship regulations in Canada that Mewburn thought would "cause some consternation with the press."<sup>73</sup>

Typically, Turner was not the direct target of the attacks as his prestige and reputation made it difficult to challenge him directly. The approach adopted was

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<sup>68</sup> Turner to Kemp, 5 April 1919, MG 27 II D9 v136, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Turner to Kemp, 3 April 1919, MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC. For the voluminous correspondence in drafting a response to Smart's charges, see Brigadier-General Charles Smart File, 10-S-68, RG 9 III A1 v331, LAC.

<sup>69</sup> His battalion had adversely reported on him for cowardice. A draft conducting officer was responsible for accompanying drafts sailing to England to enforce discipline. Turner to Sharman, 28 April 1918, M-29-36 v1, RG 9 III B1 v3090, LAC. For the investigation into this officer, see Lieutenant Quinney File, 10-Q-9, RG 9 III A1 v324, LAC.

<sup>70</sup> McDonald to Turner, 18 June 1918, M-29-36, RG 9 III B1 v3091, LAC.

<sup>71</sup> Memorandum to the Hon. The Minister, 18 June 1918, C-73, MG 27 II D9 v136, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>72</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 170.

<sup>73</sup> Mewburn to Bristol, 13 April 1918, 10-C-394, RG 9 III A1 v261, LAC. For more on censorship, see Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996), 66.

## 8 Fade Away

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to denigrate him by claiming, as did Brigadier-General Smart, that Turner was “weak on administration and discipline and has surrounded himself with a lot of weak officers, and has listened too much to tittle-tattle and intrigue. He is a weak man.”<sup>74</sup> As discussed earlier, it is difficult to justify this charge, as both Kemp and Currie, who were in the best position to judge Turner, did not make these claims when they cavilled about Turner.

Aligned with the newspaper criticisms of the OMFC was an inflammatory reorganisation memo authored by McRae and sent to Currie and most likely Clifford Sifton, the prominent former Manitoba Liberal and now Unionist politician.<sup>75</sup> The memo advocated an organisation similar to that of the Australians with the corps commander responsible for all the forces in England and France assisted by a chief administrative officer. The claim was that it would result in a great saving in duplicate staffs, better manpower utilisation, and elimination of delay.<sup>76</sup> Currie worried Kemp would learn he possessed the memo, so he forwarded it to Kemp.<sup>77</sup> Currie was careful to position that he had not initiated the memo, but was prepared to discuss it if requested.<sup>78</sup>

Kemp’s reaction to the proposal was not positive. He characterised it as “if it was as easy for Canada to manage the problem of its citizen soldiers, ... as it is to

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<sup>74</sup> Statements Made by General Smart, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>75</sup> Historians have not previously identified the author of the memo. For instance see Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 158. However, a former subordinate of McRae’s Lieutenant-Colonel C.D.H. McAlpine and Hughes’ son-in-law claimed McRae was the author in a letter to Currie’s first biographer. Given he was a senior subordinate of McRae, it is likely he would know if McRae was the author. McAlpine to Urquhart, 12 November 1934, File 12, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives..

<sup>76</sup> Memo Canadian Overseas Military Organization, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>77</sup> McAlpine to Urquhart, 12 November 1934, File 12, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.

<sup>78</sup> Currie to Kemp, 16 May 1918, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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write anonymous documents, we would all be enjoying the rest and quietness of the most peaceful days in our lives."<sup>79</sup> Kemp also passed the memo to Turner for his comments. Turner argued the Canadian government received direct access to the Secretary of State for War on matters of policy, which would be unlikely in proposed reorganisation. He also indicated that he was already effectively fulfilling the role of Chief Administrative Officer. His strongest argument was the comparison with Australia was misleading because Australian training was essentially under British control. Also, the Australians had few units outside of the Australian Corps, unlike the Canadian situation, with the tens of thousands of personnel serving in the Canadian Railway and Forestry Troops, Canadian Cavalry Brigade, and medical establishments.<sup>80</sup>

McRae's second front was Sifton. McRae had made his first fortune as a land agent opening up Saskatchewan, while Sifton was the Minister of the Interior responsible for promoting western settlement.<sup>81</sup> Sifton abandoned the Liberals in 1911 over reciprocity (free trade) with the US and was instrumental in persuading key western Liberals to join the Union government on the issue of conscription, so he was a figure of considerable influence.<sup>82</sup> Sifton visited England in April 1918, and McRae probably briefed him. As well, Rattray, a Liberal and a confidant of Currie's in a staff position in England, took the opportunity to complain about Argyll House to Sifton.<sup>83</sup> These complaints doubtless persuaded Sifton to take

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<sup>79</sup> Kemp to Currie, 22 May 1918, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>80</sup> Memorandum Canadian Overseas Military Organization, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>81</sup> O'Keefe, *Merchant Prince: The Story of Alexander Duncan McRae*: 70.

<sup>82</sup> "Sifton, Sir Clifford," <http://www.biographi.ca/009004-119.01-e.php?Biold=41997>.

<sup>83</sup> Rattray to Currie, 24 April 1918, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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action, as his newspaper, the *Manitoba Free Press*, published an article in May 1918 strongly suggesting a fundamental reorganisation of the OMFC was imminent. It quoted at length an anonymous senior officer, who was familiar with the situation that lobbied, for an administration with an overall GOC in charge.<sup>84</sup> In all probability, the officer quoted was McRae.

The article affected Kemp, as it was closely identified with Sifton, a leading member of the Union Government, so had the imprimatur of some authority.<sup>85</sup> Two cables from Gow and Mewburn reassured Kemp to ignore any reports of the abolition of the OMFC.<sup>86</sup> The memo angered Kemp, and he attempted to find out who wrote it.<sup>87</sup> He either was unsuccessful in identifying McRae or decided that McRae was out of reach because there were no official sanctions against him.

McRae had transferred in February 1918 to Aitken's new Ministry of Information as Deputy Minister, ostensibly because McRae impressed Aitken.<sup>88</sup> Turner did not readily replace his staff and especially competent ones, so the move is suspicious. McRae's memo indicates significant dissatisfaction with the organisation of the OMFC and suggests a serious disagreement with Turner. As McRae wrote the memo after his transfer, it implies his move may not have been voluntary.

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<sup>84</sup> "The Coming Reorganization of Argyle House," *Manitoba Free Press*, 23 May 1918.

<sup>85</sup> John Dafoe, the publisher of the *Manitoba Free Press* was close to Borden and Sifton and Sifton was the owner of the *Free Press*. Cook, *The Politics of John W. Dafoe and the Free Press*: 87.

<sup>86</sup> Gow was in Canada on sick leave. See below. Cable Gow to Kemp, 25 May 1918, C-39, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Cable Mewburn to Kemp, 29 May 1918, C-39, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>87</sup> Kemp to Mewburn. 4 June 1918, C-39, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Cable Kemp to Currie, 1 June 1918, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>88</sup> Beaverbrook to Kemp, 20 February 1918, MG 27 II G1 A1766, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC; O'Keefe, *Merchant Prince: The Story of Alexander Duncan McRae*: 91.

## 8 Fade Away

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McRae's replacement was the politically connected Lieutenant-Colonel Donald Hogarth. Hogarth, aged thirty-nine, had no pre-war military experience but was a business associate of John Carrick, who was in turn close to Sam Hughes. Hogarth served in the CASC in the Canadian Corps, but bounced between France and England suggesting he had a less than stellar career.<sup>89</sup> Hughes paid close attention to Hogarth, and issued a number of instructions related to promotions and appointments for him.<sup>90</sup> Hogarth was also a Conservative political operative, and Perley praised him for his contribution to the 1917 election campaign.<sup>91</sup> Turner brought him back to England as the Director of Supplies and Transport over more senior officers – a move that elicited a pointed query from Currie.<sup>92</sup> Hogarth's appointment was a logical step as he was in essence McRae's deputy, but it does suggest political influence played a role.

A significant clash with the OMFC Deputy Minister in October 1918 coloured Turner's reputation for poor civil-military relations. Before 1918, there was no evidence of tension between the two. Gow's health broke down in late April 1918, and he took sick leave in Canada for an extended period.<sup>93</sup> When he returned he was in a 'somewhat petulant' frame of mind.<sup>94</sup> In October 1918, Kemp travelled to Canada to deal with political matters, and Gow attempted to

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<sup>89</sup> Douglas McDonald Hogarth Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4424 - 13, LAC.

<sup>90</sup> Captain H. White to Carson, 11 July 1916, 6-H-118, RG 9 III A1 v156, LAC; Cable Hughes to Carson 3 May 1916, 6-H-118, RG 9 III A1 v156, LAC; Cable Hughes to Carson 14 December 1915, 6-H-118, RG 9 III A1 v156, LAC.

<sup>91</sup> Borden to Perley, 24 November 1915, v4, File 3, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC; Perley to Borden, 10 December 1917, v10 File 3, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.

<sup>92</sup> Turner to Currie, 1 October 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>93</sup> Cable Kemp to Borden, 28 April 1918, 51197, MG 26 H1 v96, Borden Fonds; LAC. Gow was still in Canada in August 1918. Harrington Letter, 3 August 1918, 10-T-158, RG 9 III A1 v339, LAC.

<sup>94</sup> Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics*: 176.

## 8 Fade Away

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persuade Kemp to grant him *carte blanche* to run the department during Kemp's absence. Kemp quite rightly refused by pointing out the constitutional irregularity of Gow's demands.

While Kemp was out of the country, Gow and Turner clashed over relatively minor matters but were indicative of Gow's attempted usurpation of Kemp's authority and Turner's refusal to accept it. They clashed over delays in promotions of two Brigadier-Generals, assigning cars, kit allowances, and allowing McDonald and Billy Bishop to travel to Canada.<sup>95</sup> The two exchanged telegraphs with a probably increasingly frustrated Kemp complaining about the other. Gow inflated the grievance into a claim that Turner's actions were "a case of 'The King and the Army against Parliament' over again."<sup>96</sup> In a number of cases, Turner made decisions that would normally require the Minister's approval, including the promotion of two Brigadier-Generals that Currie requested.<sup>97</sup> Turner's response was that his decisions were provisional until he received the Minister's approval. Referring to Gow's last memorandum, Turner stated "The last paragraph of this memorandum illustrates graphically Colonel Gow's intent for mischief and endeavour during your absence to arrogate to himself supreme authority."<sup>98</sup>

The situation was so rancorous that Gow resigned on 25 October because of Turner's "unfair, ungenerous, and unwarranted conduct."<sup>99</sup> Despite Turner's stated regret at the incident, Gow claimed he only shook Turner's hand when he

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<sup>95</sup> Gow to Kemp, 2 October 1918, G-2, MG 27 II D9 v143, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Kemp to Turner, 25 October 1918, G-2, MG 27 II D9 v143, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>96</sup> Gow to Kemp, 26 October 1918, G-2, MG 27 II D9 v143, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>97</sup> Turner to Currie, 9 October 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>98</sup> Cable Turner to Kemp, 4 November 1918, G-2, MG 27 II D9 v143, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>99</sup> Gow to Kemp, 2 January 1919, G-2, MG 27 II D9 v143, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Overseas Militia Council Submissions, November 1918, O-153-3 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC.



## 8 Fade Away

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left because of the presence of a junior officer.<sup>100</sup> This clash influenced Borden's view of Turner, and contributed to the impression that he was difficult.<sup>101</sup> A close reading of the evidence suggests that Gow returned too soon from sick leave and tried to take on responsibilities beyond his authority. While Turner is not blameless, he was on stronger constitutional grounds than Gow. Edwin Pye, a member of Duguid's historical staff, claimed Gow's actions while Kemp was away were the actual trigger for Gow's resignation. Pye stated, "It seems to me that Sir R. [Robert Borden] had a finger in the pie and in his memoirs, has dragged a red herring across the trail."<sup>102</sup>

## Demobilisation

The Canadian demobilisation after the First World War was a failure. Thirteen riots tarnished the sterling reputation of the CEF and resulted in large property losses, the deaths of five Canadians and one British policeman, and many injuries.<sup>103</sup> The Canadian authorities faced the insuperable challenge of balancing equity with the ability to process and transport 345,000 veterans and dependants, and the economy to absorb this multitude.<sup>104</sup> Shortages in sea transport and the limited rail capacity from Canada's only two ice-free ports of

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<sup>100</sup> Refusal to shake hands would be a terrible affront and considered boorish behaviour. Gow to Turner, 2 January 1919, G-2, MG 27 II D9 v143, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Turner to Kemp, 28 October 1918, G-2, MG 27 II D9 v143, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Laird Borden and Henry Borden, *Robert Laird Borden: His Memoirs*, 2 vols. (Toronto,: The Macmillan Company of Canada, limited, 1938), 871.

<sup>102</sup> Resignation of Gow, 24 January 1939, Box 2 Folder 8, 74/672, Directorate of History and Heritage.

<sup>103</sup> Disturbances in Canadian Camps and Areas 1918-1919, GAQ 10-39F, RG 24 v1841, DHH.

<sup>104</sup> The 345,000 total consisted of 130,000 men in England, 152,000 more in France and Belgium, 38,000 dependents, and 25,000 ex-Imperial troops. Demobilisation Factors, Folder 41, 74/672 Box 8, DHH.

## 8 Fade Away

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Halifax and St. John severely constrained demobilisation. Shipping capacity was further restricted when higher standards were imposed after returning soldiers complained bitterly and publicly about terrible accommodations on the ships returning them to Canada.<sup>105</sup>

The Demobilisation Committee initially planned to follow a similar British scheme of selectively releasing men based on economic factors – a plan the British had to abandon after protests and riots.<sup>106</sup> The plan changed to a more obviously fair approach of first in first out, but Currie convinced Kemp and Borden for reasons of discipline and recognition for the corps to adopt his plan of returning the Canadian Corps by units.<sup>107</sup> Unlike the more successful plan adopted by Monash of the Australians that shipped men home in 1,000 man batches chosen from units based on length of service, the Canadian plan was clearly inequitable.<sup>108</sup> There were no Australian demobilisation riots, despite their reputation for poor discipline. The massive losses of the Hundred Days campaign resulted in the corps' units consisting of a large number of conscripts. These conscripts were all of relatively short service in comparison to many serving in England. Currie's plan resulted in the conscripts returning to Canada before long-

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<sup>105</sup> Jeffery R. Rivard, "Bringing the Boys Home: A Study of the Canadian Demobilization Policy after the First and Second World Wars" (Masters, University of New Brunswick, 1999), 48; Cable White to Borden, 30 December 1918, 136632, MG 26 H1 v241, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>106</sup> Canadian Overseas Demobilization Committee First (Interim) Report, 22 July 1918, O-153-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC; Stephen Richards Graubard, "Military Demobilisation in Great Britain Following the First World War," *Journal of Modern History* 19, no. 4 (1947): 298-304; Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army*. 341.

<sup>107</sup> Rivard, "Bringing the Boys Home: A Study of the Canadian Demobilization Policy after the First and Second World Wars," 27; Meeting Notes with Minister, 6 November 1918, File 194, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>108</sup> Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 265-277.

## 8 Fade Away

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service men stationed in England and this engendered discontent.<sup>109</sup> In addition, the Canadians would know that the earlier riots of British troops at Calais, Dover, and Folkestone had resulted in accelerating demobilisation.<sup>110</sup> This inequity set the stage for a calamity.

In the febrile environment of British demobilisation riots, constant strikes that affected the pace of Canadian demobilisation, and the triumph of the Russian Bolsheviks, there was a real fear that control over the troops was slipping. Naturally, the men wanted to go home and their patience with the constant indignities, subordination, and petty annoyances of wartime service was fast disappearing.<sup>111</sup> The proximate trigger for the riots were festering problems of lack of pay, poor food, cold weather, and constant and unexplained postponements overlaid by the anxiety to get home and clashes with British civilians.<sup>112</sup> The sailing postponements were the result of strikes delaying the refitting of ships to meet the new higher Canadian accommodation standards and large liners being assigned to other countries, as Hogarth's department mistakenly believed Canadian ports could not handle these vessels.<sup>113</sup> The weak discipline and poor command in the segregation camps exacerbated the situation. Turner and his staff

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<sup>109</sup> For instance, see the complaints from representatives of the 44th Battalion, 44 Canadian Infantry, 11 February 1919, MG 27 II D9 v166, Kemp Fonds; LAC; Julian Putkowski, *The Kinmel Park Camp Riots 1919* (Flintshire Historical Society, 1989). See also, Turner to Kemp, 7 March 1919, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC; Desmond Morton, "'Kicking and Complaining': Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-1919," *Canadian Historical Review* 91, no. 3 (1980): 337.

<sup>110</sup> Comments on Morton's "Kicking and Complaining," 14 May 1980, Julian Putkowski, Misc 61 Item 900, IWM.

<sup>111</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 267.

<sup>112</sup> Court of Enquiry - Disturbances, Kinmel Park Camp, 22 March 1919, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC; Morton, "'Kicking and Complaining': Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-1919," 341-343.

<sup>113</sup> Memorandum of Conference Held on Saturday June 21st, 1919, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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were lamentably poor at communicating why there were delays, resulting in rumours, fears, and frustrations spiralling out of control into rioting.<sup>114</sup>

This lack of communications was unfortunate as Turner's speeches at the camps after riots resulted in the men readily returning to discipline upon hearing the explanation for the delays. It took considerable courage for Turner to enter into the charged atmosphere of these camps. Turner had sufficient credibility and respect that the men listened, obeyed, and even cheered him.<sup>115</sup> After the particularly brutal riot at Epsom Police Station resulting in the death of a policeman, Turner issued a stern Order of the Day indicating there would be no tolerance for further problems and the riots finally ended.<sup>116</sup> Certain segments of the British press extensively covered and exploited the riots to the point that Turner wrote the King to complain about the treatment.<sup>117</sup>

Turner's reputation for running a tight ship with his political masters suffered, as Kemp warned Turner to strengthen his staff, since it would be 'distressing' if anything should mar his officer's good records because of the demobilisation problems.<sup>118</sup> Shipping shortages, delays, and strikes were out of Turner's control, but he was not proactive in addressing the many problems with the camps and in communicating with the troops. Turner and his staff were

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<sup>114</sup> Disturbances in Canadian Camps and Areas 1918-1919, GAQ 10-39F, RG 24 v1841, DHH.

<sup>115</sup> Kemp to Borden, 12 March 1919, 55882-55885, MG 26 H v102, Borden Fonds; LAC; Article Sketch, 17 March 1919, RG 9 III A1 v106, LAC; Turner to Kemp, 7 March 1919, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC; Howard Coombs, "The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience, 1812 to 1919," in Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston, Ont.: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2007), 421.

<sup>116</sup> Special Order of the Day, 20 June 1919, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>117</sup> For a bitter denunciation of the coverage see, Canadian Troops Overseas and the British Press, 15 July 1919, MG 27 II D9 v170, Kemp Fonds; LAC. For further complaints about British treatment, see Turner to Kemp, 28 July 1919, 10-R-7, RG 9 III A1 v323, LAC.

<sup>118</sup> Kemp to Turner, 9 April 1918, MG 27 II D9 v162, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

clearly tired, and it showed in their performance.<sup>119</sup>

### Analysis

Turner's command during the Kemp regime was less effective than under Perley. Kemp was the prime agent in the major initiatives and relegated Turner to the more passive role of their execution. Kemp was far more of a hands-on manager than Perley. He did not interfere with purely military matters, although he and Turner disagreed about what were purely military issues. Turner worked more effectively under Perley's hands-off approach and did not mesh well with Kemp. Personalities undoubtedly played a role, as Kemp was a self-made man, with a great deal of confidence in his abilities. Turner, from a wealthy family, was more attuned to someone of a similar background, such as Perley. It is instructive to note that Turner's greatest challenges as an administrator were with two men who rose from humble beginnings – Currie and Kemp. A further factor in the poor relationship was Kemp's experience in Canada in dealing with PF officers in the Ministry. These officers were thoroughly conversant with and subservient to civilian authority having survived the Hughes regime and Hughes' intense dislike of the PF. These officers would not push back, unlike Currie and Turner, who were not wholly dependent on the Minister for their position. As a result, the more military and self-assured attitudes of Currie and Turner would contribute to Kemp's diatribes.

The available correspondence between Turner and Kemp does not reveal

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<sup>119</sup> Kemp reported Thacker as "now rather broken down." Kemp to Mewburn, 23 July 1919, 10-T-280, RG 9 III A1 v341, LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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the context behind Kemp's complaints to Borden. Turner's communications with Kemp were respectful, and give no indication he challenged civilian control. Further, there were no signs of resistance to Kemp's changes, and neither was there a tone or sub-text that suggests Turner was anything other than in perfect harmony with Kemp. Turner's actions during the election, his taking on sons of important politicians as staff officers, and his communications with key figures in Canada indicate a politically aware individual and are at odds with Kemp's claims that Turner was politically insensitive.<sup>120</sup> What is also puzzling was that while Kemp was disparaging Turner he was also vigorously defending Turner and Argyll House to Mewburn, Borden, and Currie.

Given the number of Kemp's complaints it is apparent Kemp was convinced there were problems. It is likely that the conflicts occurred in meetings where no documentary evidence is available. These points of conflict probably revolved around the issues of the OMC curtailing Turner's authority, the Canadian Section at GHQ, the relationship between Turner and Currie, and Turner's repeated attempts to drive the Government to support a separate air force. In addition, Kemp may have reacted to the poor advice he received from Turner regarding the Canadian Corps' reorganisation. It is apparent that the rift between Kemp and Turner existed throughout and was an important factor in the Government making no further use of him in a military role after the war.

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<sup>120</sup> At various times, Turner included on his staff, the sons of Robert Rogers, Sir Joseph Flavelle, the head of the Imperial Munitions Board, the Under-Secretary of State for External Affairs, Sir Joseph Pope, and Kingston M.P., William Nickle. Perley to Sir Joseph Pope, 7 December 1916, 10-P-52, RG 9 III A1 v318, LAC; Composition of Overseas Dominion Forces, May 1917, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

### Turner Post-war

Turner's post-war military career presented a conundrum to the Government, because his distinguished service, seniority, and relative youth (forty-seven in 1919), justified a major role in the post-war army. Currie, however, had an even greater claim, and it was apparent that it would be impossible for the two to work together effectively. In December 1918, the Finance Minister suggested appointing Turner Chairman of the Pension Board to sideline him. Borden scuttled the idea because he did not think Turner had the temperament for the position and referred to Gow's resignation as an example.<sup>121</sup> Ironically, Turner would later serve on the Pension Commission for many years with success.<sup>122</sup>

Unlike Currie, Turner had a business to return to and was not dependent on government largesse, so Turner decided not to seek any military appointment.<sup>123</sup> Turner's father had died in 1917 and so Turner was the sole owner of the family firm.<sup>124</sup> In April 1919, Turner requested to be relieved of his responsibilities by July, but the exhausted Turner had to wait to August to return to Quebec City with his family.<sup>125</sup> He was officially demobilised in November.<sup>126</sup> His reception in Quebec City was far more muted than his return from the Boer War and, like Currie, he did not receive any formal recognition from the Government.<sup>127</sup>

Turner returned to Quebec City to run his family business, but he did not

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<sup>121</sup> Borden to White, 9 December 1918, 55554, MG 26 H v102, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>122</sup> "Turner Retires from Pension Commission," *Montreal Gazette*, 6 September 1941.

<sup>123</sup> Turner to Mewburn, 29 May 1919, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

<sup>124</sup> "Hon. Richard Turner Obituary," *Montreal Gazette*, 23 December 1917.

<sup>125</sup> Kemp to Borden, 31 July 1919, 51433, MG 26 H1 v96, Borden Fonds; LAC.

<sup>126</sup> Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC.

<sup>127</sup> Most of the planned reception for Turner and family was cancelled because of the arrival of the Prince of Wales. Turner Diary Entry, 16 August 1919, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

## 8 Fade Away

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forget his old comrades. For instance, he followed up in 1920 with the Adjutant-General regarding a medal he recommended for a soldier who brought up ammunition under intense fire during Second Ypres.<sup>128</sup> Turner was a popular figure with veterans and attended reunions, commemorations, and unveilings across the country, including the tenth anniversary of the formation of the 15<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the unveiling of a memorial to the 28<sup>th</sup> Battalion in Regina in 1926, and the Ypres commemorative dinner in 1930.<sup>129</sup> He attended the unveiling of the Canadian memorial at St. Julien in 1933 and the Vimy Pilgrimage of 1936.<sup>130</sup> He represented the Duke of Connaught at the funeral of his former minister Sir George Perley in 1938.<sup>131</sup> He also wrote forewords to the regimental histories of the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> Battalions.<sup>132</sup>

### Last Service: Canadian Legion

The establishment of what became the Royal Canadian Legion was Turner's final major service to Canada by leading the unification of all the fragmented major veterans' organisations, but two, into the Canadian Legion of the British Empire Service League and later the Royal Canadian Legion.

By 1925, the veterans' movement had split into multiple camps that ranged from broad-based organisations that aspired to universal representation to ones

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<sup>128</sup> Turner to Gimblett, 27 March 1920, File 72, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.

<sup>129</sup> Beattie, *48th Highlanders of Canada, 1891-1928*: 433; "28th Battalion Plaque Unveiling," *Montreal Gazette*, 10 August 1926; "Second Ypres Commemorative Dinner," *Montreal Gazette*, 14 April 1930.

<sup>130</sup> Photographs, MG 30 E236 v4, Villiers Fonds; LAC; D. E. Macintyre, *Canada at Vimy* (Toronto: P. Martin Associates, 1967).

<sup>131</sup> "Sir George Perley Funeral," *Montreal Gazette*, 8 January 1938.

<sup>132</sup> Fetherstonhaugh, *The Royal Montreal Regiment: 14th Battalion, C.E.F. 1914-1925*; Beattie, *48th Highlanders of Canada, 1891-1928*.



## 8 Fade Away

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with restrictive membership, such as blinded veterans. The result was a disjointed movement with little political power or influence, habitually strapped for funds, and that could not effectively represent veterans' interests. Despite repeated attempts at unification and amalgamation, the Canadian veterans movement was on the brink of collapse and irrelevance because of the fragmentation of veterans' organisations - a fate not unwelcome to the Government.<sup>133</sup>

Before the war, other than a few regimental associations, the Army Navy Veterans (ANV) was the sole representative of veterans' interests and any veteran of the British or Canadian forces could join. During the war, the first new veterans' organisation formed in February 1916 in Montreal as the Canadian Association of Returned Soldiers.<sup>134</sup> In April 1916, the Toronto regiment started their own Returned Soldier's Association and in Winnipeg, another group launched The Great War Veterans Association (GWVA), with its first meeting on 12 April 1917.<sup>135</sup> Eventually by 1925, at least fifteen groups were formed, but the GWVA had the greatest success in recruiting, and as a result, had the greatest influence.<sup>136</sup> During the war, the GWVA met with a special Parliamentary committee and the Prime Minister.<sup>137</sup>

These groups had varied membership standards and different political objectives. Some organisations, such as the GWVA, were restricted to only

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<sup>133</sup> Clifford H. Bowering, *Service: The Story of the Royal Canadian Legion* (Dominion Command, Canadian Legion, 1960), 3.

<sup>134</sup> Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930*: 65.

<sup>135</sup> Great War Veterans Association Minute Book, 12 April 1917, MG 28 I298 v1, LAC.

<sup>136</sup> Bowering, *Service: The Story of the Royal Canadian Legion*: 6.

<sup>137</sup> Great War Veterans Association Minute Book, June 1917; 26 March 1918, MG 28 I298 v1, LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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Canadians who had served in England and France, while others, like the ANV, were more broadly based. The GWVA was egalitarian, and officers were not welcome, in reaction to the regimentation and hierarchy of the Army.<sup>138</sup> All members were called comrade rather than by their former rank. As Desmond Morton put it,

The goals of these organizations were to maintain ties forged in war, preserve the memories of those who sacrificed and inculcate loyalty and ensure proper care of the sick, injured and wounded including care of dependents – homes pensions and other items that would make the hearts of the finance department grow cold.<sup>139</sup>

In 1919, a demand for an immediate \$2,000 gratuity for all veterans widened the rift between veterans' organisations.<sup>140</sup> Veterans were rightly suspicious that despite the Government's frequent claims of unqualified support, that when it came time to collect, the rules, regulations, and red tape would result in little actual money. Rather, they preferred to receive a gratuity now, than rely on the uncertain generosity of future governments. However, the leadership of the GWVA and other veterans' organisations were well aware that the Government would not entertain such a notion, and to advocate for it would imperil their influence with the Government. Not advocating resulted in the loss of support.

All the veterans' organisations relied exclusively on the limited financial support of the membership. This restricted their ability to hire staff, develop programs, and lobby for veterans' interests. As wartime memories of comradeship

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<sup>138</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 314.

<sup>139</sup> Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930*: 69.

<sup>140</sup> *ibid.*, 65.

## 8 Fade Away

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faded, with the veterans' groups apparently powerless, the membership withered and with it the ability to raise money. Reduced funding and membership plus the bitterness of inter-veteran group politics meant less leverage with the Government, which rendered these organisations even less effective and the downward spiral accelerated.<sup>141</sup>

Meanwhile, in the UK there was a similar problem of four main veterans groups competing for the allegiance of the returned soldier. By June 1921, all but the most radical of groups had agreed to amalgamate into the British Legion. In spite of his modern reputation, a key figure in this successful drive to unification was Field Marshal Haig. Immediately after the war, he established considerable credibility with the rank and file by refusing a title, until the condition of the returned serviceman was addressed. He first persuaded the officer organisations to merge into a single institution. He then built on this success to advocate for unification.<sup>142</sup> To further the cause of the returned serviceman, Haig travelled to South Africa in 1921 to establish the British Empire Service League that was to act as an umbrella organisation for all the British, Dominion, and Indian veterans.<sup>143</sup> The president of the GWVA attended the meeting in an unofficial capacity. In the final minutes of the meeting, all of the participating nations nominated a

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<sup>141</sup> Bowering, *Service: The Story of the Royal Canadian Legion*: 3; Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930*: 178, 196.

<sup>142</sup> Niall Barr and Gary Sheffield, "Douglas Haig, the Common Soldier, and the British Legion," in Brian Bond and Nigel Cave (eds.), *Haig, a Reappraisal 70 Years On* (London: Leo Cooper, 1999), 228. It is a common misconception fostered by the British Legion that Haig was the founder; a claim Haig did not make himself. See also, Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army*. 353-354.

<sup>143</sup> Melanie Wiber, "The Royal Canadian Legion: A New Perspective on Voluntary Associations" (Masters, University of Alberta, 1981), 43-44.

## 8 Fade Away

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representative to the advisory committee except Canada.<sup>144</sup>

Haig's success was aided by the promise that the amalgamated organisation would get access to the British portion of the profits of the wartime Army and Navy Canteen fund. In Canada's case, the share of the profits amounted to two million dollars. The Canadian Government had distributed a small amount but withheld most of it rather than dispensing the funds to multiple small and ineffective organisations that in some cases held inimical views to the Government.<sup>145</sup>

It was clear that unification of the myriad groups was necessary, but it was difficult to find common grounds for unification. Smaller specialised groups, such as for the blind, worried their concerns would be lost in a larger organisation. Broader based groups could not resolve their fundamental philosophical differences over policy and membership rules. In 1921, the veterans' groups made an abortive attempt at unification that resulted in a loose federation called the Dominion Veterans' Alliance, but it was not a great success. All the groups were in favour of unification but only on their terms.<sup>146</sup>

As early as 1921, the GWVA offered Currie the Presidency, but he turned it down on the grounds "the clouds which had enshrouded his name had not cleared away and that until they had he did not feel justified in allowing himself to accept the nomination as President of the G.W.V.A."<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> British Empire Service League, MG 28 I298 v74, LAC.

<sup>145</sup> Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930*: 188.

<sup>146</sup> Great War Veterans Association Minute Book, 5 July 1921, MG 28 I298 v1, LAC; Bowering, *Service: The Story of the Royal Canadian Legion*: 10.

<sup>147</sup> R.B. Maxwell to Turner, Undated, MG 28 I298 v73, LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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Haig's proposed visit to Canada in 1925 was the catalyst for the drive for unification. Initially there was resistance to the visit because of the chaotic state of the veterans' movement. Haig's response was that was the reason he needed to visit.<sup>148</sup> Haig's trip was a triumph.<sup>149</sup> He provided the needed impetus finally to drive the unification process to success, as he took a personal interest in fostering amalgamation.

Haig first approached Currie to lead the process, but Currie would do so only if the board of the GWVA was replaced, which was not acceptable, as he well knew.<sup>150</sup> In his place, the board, with Haig's personal representative present, passed a resolution on 22 June 1925 asking Turner to lead the Association into unity. In a departure from previous practice, all the Dominion executives with their wartime ranks signed the telegram sent to Turner. Turner did not share Currie's qualms about the board and accepted. Haig then appointed Turner as his representative in Canada. Turner's selection was in part because of his stature with officers and his lack of formal links to the GWVA and other veterans' organisations. As a result, he was a neutral in the negotiations leading to unification.<sup>151</sup> In addition, his evident popularity with the rank and file, especially the veterans who served with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division, was advantageous. Currie did not have the repute he was to have later in the decade with the men after the success

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<sup>148</sup> James Hale, *Branching Out: The Story of the Royal Canadian Legion* (Ottawa: Royal Canadian Legion, 1995), 12.

<sup>149</sup> For the details of the visit and its success, see John Scott, "'Three Cheers for Earl Haig' Canadian Veterans and the Visit of Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig to Canada in the Summer of 1925," *Canadian Military History* 5, no. 1 (1996).

<sup>150</sup> Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930*: 197.

<sup>151</sup> Jack Jarvie and Diana Swift, *The Royal Canadian Legion, 1926-1986* (Toronto, Ont., Canada: Discovery Books, 1985), 27.

## 8 Fade Away

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of the 1928 libel trial. According to Tim Cook, Currie's "attitude towards veterans was at time ungenerous, bordering on callous."<sup>152</sup> This attitude clearly affected his relationship with the rank and file, who were the heart and soul and much of the leadership of the veterans' organisations.

With his customary energy and despatch, Turner held the first meeting in Ottawa eight days later. Turner urged conciliation with the other organisations and mandated that the attacks by GWVA publications of other organisations and Pension Board officials stop immediately.<sup>153</sup> Clearly, Turner was in charge and driving the process. He appointed trustees for each province, who were usually former senior officers. Turner then spent the time between June and the Unity Conference in November arranging, negotiating, and applying pressure to ensure the conference was successful.

The National Unity Conference was held in Winnipeg on 25 November 1925 with forty-six delegates attending from all the veterans' organisations. From the minutes, it was apparent that the majority of the delegates attended with the intention of accepting unification. The first step of the conference was to pass a unanimous resolution of gratitude to Turner for his leadership and painstaking care in assembling the convention. The conference generally was a success as all but two organisations, one being the ANV under the former Brigadier-General W. Griesbach, agreeing to amalgamate into a single organisation representing veterans. Turner also suggested "as they were Canadians it was essential to have

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<sup>152</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 314.

<sup>153</sup> Great War Veterans Association Minute Book, 30 June 1925, MG 28 I298 v1, LAC.

## 8 Fade Away

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the word "Canadian" included in the name."<sup>154</sup> The conference selected Turner and Currie as Honorary Presidents, Haig as the Grand President, and Sir Percy Lake as President. Lake was a Canadian, who served in the British Regular Army, was a former GOC Canada, and commander in Mesopotamia, who retired to Canada. Turner and Lake then travelled to convince the membership to join the new Legion and in this, they were successful.<sup>155</sup>

Shortly after the Conference, Griesbach, replying to a plaintive letter from Currie about his Honorary Presidency, assured Currie that the position would not require any effort positive or negative from him. Griesbach also indicated that the ANV was not interested in amalgamation, in part, because he did not have a high opinion of the personnel in the GWVA. Further, he added

Sir Richard Turner and Sir Percy Lake came on the scene with very little knowledge of the struggles which have taken place to get high standards. As they are entirely ignorant of all that has happened in the past, they are not likely to be able to grapple with the problems of the present and future."<sup>156</sup>

Griesbach proved to be a poor prognosticator as Turner, Lake, and the executive turned the Canadian Legion into a far more effective and successful organisation than he anticipated.<sup>157</sup>

Currie was unwilling to expend the effort or deal with the challenges of the veterans' movement, unlike Turner. Even as late as 1928, Turner was importuning Currie, who was recovering from a stroke, to get involved promising that he

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<sup>154</sup> Report of Proceedings of the National Unity Conference and Draft Constitution, File 44, MG 28 I298 v43, LAC.

<sup>155</sup> "Ontario Veterans to Meet," *Montreal Gazette*, 15 April 1926.

<sup>156</sup> Griesbach to Currie, 21 December 1925, File 4, MG 30 E100 v27, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>157</sup> The ANV is still a separate organisation from the Royal Canadian Legion.

## 8 Fade Away

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would receive unanimous support if he ran for the Presidency and that the detail work could be taken over by assistants to make the effort lighter. The response from those close to Currie was that if there were no question of competition he would accept the position.<sup>158</sup> Eventually, Currie accepted the Presidency, especially with his increased popularity with the men.

Other than serving two terms on the Quebec City Protestant School Board, Turner held no elected office and did not participate in politics. He, also, held the position of Honorary Colonel of the 13<sup>th</sup> Canadian Scottish Light Cavalry, 13<sup>th</sup> Brigade CFA, and the Royal Rifle Regiment of Canada.<sup>159</sup> He also served on the Canadian Pension Commission retiring in 1941.<sup>160</sup>

Turner retained his robust constitution until almost the end of his life; for instance, he marched in the parade of VC winners in London in 1956 at the age of eighty-four.<sup>161</sup> His wife of fifty-eight years died in 1958 and Turner himself passed away on 21 June 1961 aged eighty-nine. Turner passed on full of years, distinguished deeds, impressive honours, and sterling service to his country, but he is little known or respected today. His obituary in the *Montreal Gazette* described him as cheerful and modest and "he always tried to do his part, and for him that was enough."<sup>162</sup>

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<sup>158</sup> Currie, the Principal at McGill University, was in ill health at this time and a McGill official answered his correspondence. Turner to Currie, 3 June 1928; Acting Principal to Turner, 5 June 1928, File 69, MG 30 E100 v19, Currie Fonds; LAC.

<sup>159</sup> Richard Turner Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9842 - 47, LAC.

<sup>160</sup> "Turner Retires from Pension Commission."

<sup>161</sup> "Turner to March," *Quebec Chronicle-Telegraph*, 24 May 1956.

<sup>162</sup> "Turner Obituary," *Montreal Gazette*, 22 June 1961.



# CONCLUSION

*The General must know how to get his men their rations and every other kind of stores needed for war. He must have imagination to originate plans, practical sense, and energy to carry them through. He must be observant, untiring, shrewd; lavish and miserly; generous and stingy; rash and conservative. All these and many other qualities, natural and acquired, he must have. He should also, as a matter of course, know his tactics; for a disorderly mob is no more an army than a heap of building materials is a home.*

Socrates<sup>1</sup>

Turner was an atypical Canadian general of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century – charismatic, courageous, conscientious, capable, engaging, modest, and in the trenches. More typically, Canadian generals of this period were competent, but dour, cool, remote, and uncharismatic technocrats unable to inspire their troops.<sup>2</sup> Modern historiography, however, portrays a Richard Turner much at variance with this characterisation. In the absence of comprehensive personal records, Turner was a blank matrix, upon which historians pressed a misleading image.

To present an accurate picture of Turner as a military figure, it is necessary

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<sup>1</sup> *Leadership Statements and Quotes, DA PAM 600–65*, (Washington, DC: Department of the Army, 1985), 18.

<sup>2</sup> Currie, as Hyatt described “was not a heroic leader, *san peur et sans reproche*.” Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography*: 53. Unlike Turner, Currie garnered little affection from his troops. Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 210. Lieutenant-Colonel Otter, the commander of the First Canadian Contingent in the Boer War was described as, a “dour, humourless man with no capacity to inspire. Granatstein, *Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*: 38. Commanders in the Second World War were described as “Harry Crerar was sly and cool, for example, while Guy Simonds was cerebral and cool, and Charles Foulkes had the personality of a cold fish.” Douglas E. Delaney, *The Soldiers General: Bert Hoffmeister at War*, Studies in Canadian Military History, (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005), XI. On Simonds “Neither he nor Crerar had the common touch that inspired a body of men.” Dominick Graham, *The Price of Command: A Biography of General Guy Simonds* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1993), 60.

## Conclusion

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to analyze the validity of the principal critiques of Turner in light of the evidence presented in the thesis. It is then possible to provide an informed assessment of Turner. It is also obligatory to compare Turner and Currie, given Currie's stature in Canadian historiography.

## Historiography

The popular construct of Turner emanates, in part, from the drive to enhance Currie's reputation.<sup>3</sup> Currie and Turner's esteem have had dramatically different trajectories since the 1920s, with Turner's, like Haig's, falling precipitously. Every compelling story requires the protagonist to struggle against a foil. In the first half of the war, Sam Hughes fulfils this role admirably in Currie's story, but with Hughes' removal in late 1916, another antihero is necessary and Turner is the best available candidate.

The standard narrative on Turner is not wholly fallacious, but its focus is almost exclusively on his failures rather than a balanced view.<sup>4</sup> The extent to which the criticisms of Turner are unjustified is illustrated by Turner's treatment in *Cassar's Hell in Flanders Fields*. Cassar castigates Turner for not conducting reconnaissance for the attack on Kitcheners Wood on the night of April 22, but exonerates Brigadier-General Hull for not doing so, because it was dark when Hull received his orders for his morning attack on 25 April. Turner received his attack orders at 8:52 p.m. for an attack at midnight, while Hull received his orders

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<sup>3</sup> For an example of this process in the historiography of Allenby, see Hughes, "General Allenby and the Campaign of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, June 1917-November 1919," 12.

<sup>4</sup> Cassar, *Hell in Flanders Fields: Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres*: 131,243; G.A. 15 Order to 3rd Brigade, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.

## **Conclusion**

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at 8:00 p.m. for an attack originally planned for 3:00 a.m. In other words, Hull is excused for not conducting a reconnaissance even though he received his orders almost an hour before Turner received his orders. What is missed in this narrative, is his moral courage in standing up to superiors, his successes, such as Courcellette, his troops and officers' affection and respect, his rational Canadian nationalism, and his significant contributions to the Canadian war effort.

This conventional portrayal includes five major critiques that are erroneous, exaggerated, or arguable. Historians consider Turner's selection, appointments, and retention were the result of his close ties to the Conservative Party – he was a "Tory hack." Scholars regard him as an incompetent field commander, who failed disastrously at Second Ypres, Festubert, St. Eloi, and the Somme. The dominant interpretation further claims Byng effectively sacked him after the Somme; the OMFC's transformation was primarily attributable to Perley; and Turner obstructed Currie, while Currie was the corps commander.

The thesis has demonstrated that the first critique is fallacious, as Hughes championed Turner because of his high regard for Turner's courage and capability, as demonstrated by Turner's record in the Boer War, his VC, and performance as a regimental and brigade commander after the Boer War – Turner was a model Militia officer in Hughes' eyes. These same factors induced Hughes to appoint Currie and later protect him from the consequences of his felonious behaviour. Turner's espousal of Hughes and his interests also contributed to Hughes's support but was not the primary motivation.

What much of the criticism of Turner's combat record overlooks was the

## Conclusion

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limited scope for command in battle afforded to brigade and divisional commanders and conditions in which Turner fought. Sir Henry Karslake, a gunner and staff officer during the war, captured the reality of intermediary command on the Western Front "commanders were cogs in the machine. Whether they got decorated or degummed [sacked] largely depended, not on their plans, but on how the enemy on their sector behaved on a particular occasion."<sup>5</sup>

Turner's performance at Second Ypres was poor, but explicable given the front, forces, and catastrophic situation he faced. He demonstrated he learned from his experiences and, while not as capable as Currie, Turner was still a far more effective combat commander than is acknowledged. His division's performance at Courcellette was the outstanding Canadian victory at the Somme and illustrated what Turner could accomplish. He was not in the first rank of commanders because of his earlier failures and poor reputation with the British, but neither was he the worst.<sup>6</sup>

Turner's transfer to England was not a demotion or a dismissal, but Perley's desire to appoint a capable combat general to fix a disastrous situation. There is no evidence that Byng wanted to dismiss Turner. The fact that Byng recommended Currie initially should be sufficient proof that Byng just wanted to

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<sup>5</sup> Keith Jeffery, *Field Marshal Sir Henry Wilson: A Political Soldier* (Oxford, England: Oxford University Press, 2006), 167.

<sup>6</sup> Mercer and Watson vie for that dubious honour. Mercer had a short career, and his death at Mount Sorrel has shielded him from criticism of the poor readiness of the 3rd Division in that battle. Watson's 4th Division had a long run of poor fortune. In 1917 alone, it suffered 'a proper slaughter' in the gas raid of March 1917, it failed to initially capture all of its objectives at Vimy, unlike the other divisions, and it suffered heavy losses in the continuation of Hill 70. MacKinnon, "Major-General Malcolm Smith Mercer: The Highest Ranking Canadian Officer Killed in the Great War by Friendly Fire."; Tim Cook, "'A Proper Slaughter' the March 1917 Gas Attack at Vimy," *Canadian Military History* 8, no. 2 (1999); Brennan, "Major-General David Watson: A Critical Appraisal of Canadian Generalship in the Great War."

## **Conclusion**

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address the lamentable training situation in England. Currie's refusal to accept the position meant Turner was the logical candidate.

Turner and his staff were instrumental in the transformation of the OMFC. It was Turner and his staff who initiated, executed, and supervised the metamorphosis. Perley was an important figure in providing the necessary support for the changes, but the primary credit for the military improvements belongs to Turner.

The conflict with Currie was the inevitable outcome of institutional imperatives and Currie's challenging personality and not the result of obstructionist jealousy by Turner. Turner demonstrated considerable forbearance in the face of Currie's prickly and unsympathetic behaviour. Currie has to bear the predominant share of the blame for the conflict. Despite Currie's provocations, Turner conscientiously met the majority of Currie's demands.

In summary, the five major critiques do not stand up to scrutiny.

## **Assessment**

Turner was a strong leader who led by example, but he had limited success at extending his influence outside of his formation, the Hughes' clique, and Sir George Perley.<sup>7</sup> Turner's perceived combat failures and clashes with Alderson impaired his image with Haig and eliminated any opportunity for influence. His

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<sup>7</sup> This section is based in part on a framework provided by the US Army's leadership manual FM 6-22 modified to account for the different expectations and context of the First World War. *Army Leadership Competent, Confident, and Agile FM 6-22*; Jon J. Fallesen, *Army Leader Characteristics for Full Range Operations: Comments on FM 6-22, Army Leadership*, (Center for Army Leadership, 2006).

## Conclusion

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tendency to protest what he regarded as flawed orders would also have reduced his stature with the British. In this respect, Currie was far more effective. In England, Turner had considerable influence in matters under Perley, but Kemp limited his autonomy. Currie's ability to dictate the demobilisation policy is an example of Currie's influence and Turner's relative impotence under Kemp.

Turner was a proficient communicator for his time and place. His written work was not polished, but was competent and capable of transmitting his ideas, unlike Alderson's circumlocutions.<sup>8</sup> Turner was a persuasive speaker judging from the reaction during the camp disturbances during demobilisation and the connection to his troops. Turner was better at reaching the men than Currie.

As John Bourne states "One of the main duties of a divisional commander was to identify, encourage and promote able subordinates."<sup>9</sup> Assessing Turner in this respect is challenging, so as a proxy, a comparison between Turner and Currie's record of promotion of officers, who served under them and reached brigade and divisional command during the war, is used.<sup>10</sup> Currie is the contrast, as he faced the same circumstances as Turner and is generally regarded as an effective developer of subordinates.<sup>11</sup> The comparison is imperfect, as multiple considerations factored into promotions, but it provides an indication of the relative effectiveness of Turner and Currie.

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<sup>8</sup> Beyond an almost indecipherable script, Alderson had a circuitous writing style.

<sup>9</sup> J.M. Bourne, "Major General W.C.G. Heneker: A Divisional Commander of the Great War," in Matthew Hughes and Matthew S. Seligmann (eds.), *Leadership in Conflict 1914-1918* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 2000), 62.

<sup>10</sup> The comparison is restricted to battalion commanders and staff officers, who served under Turner and Currie from September 1914 to November 1916, to correspond with Turner's period of combat command.

<sup>11</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 141; Horn and Harris, *Warrior Chiefs*, 50-51.

## Conclusion

**Figure 22 Promotion Comparison – Turner/Currie<sup>12</sup>**

Turner		
Name	Origin	Appointments
G. B. Hughes <sup>§</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup> Brigade Staff	1 <sup>st</sup> Brigade 5 <sup>th</sup> Division <sup>†</sup>
F. O. W. Loomis*	13 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 7 <sup>th</sup> Brigade, 11 <sup>th</sup> Brigade 3 <sup>rd</sup> Division
J. F. L. Embury	28 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade
R. G. E. Leckie	16 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade
L. G. F. M. Lord Brooke <sup>§</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup> Brigade	12 <sup>th</sup> Brigade
D. Watson	5 <sup>th</sup> Brigade	4 <sup>th</sup> Division
J. M. Ross	29 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	5 <sup>th</sup> Brigade, 10 <sup>th</sup> Brigade
T. L. Tremblay	22 <sup>nd</sup> Battalion	5 <sup>th</sup> Brigade
A. H. Bell	31 <sup>st</sup> Battalion	6 <sup>th</sup> Brigade
A. Ross	28 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	6 <sup>th</sup> Brigade
W. St. P. Hughes <sup>§</sup>	21 <sup>st</sup> Battalion	10 <sup>th</sup> Brigade

§ Political appointee

\* Shared appointee

† Did not reach front

Currie		
Name	Origin	Appointments
G. E. McCuaig	13 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	1 <sup>st</sup> Brigade, 4 <sup>th</sup> Brigade
L. J. Lipsett	8 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade 3 <sup>rd</sup> Division
F. O. W. Loomis*	13 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	2 <sup>nd</sup> Brigade, 7 <sup>th</sup> Brigade, 11 <sup>th</sup> Brigade 3 <sup>rd</sup> Division
G. S. Tuxford	5 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	3 <sup>rd</sup> Brigade
H. M. Dyer	5 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	7 <sup>th</sup> Brigade
F. W. Hill	1 <sup>st</sup> Battalion	9 <sup>th</sup> Brigade

<sup>12</sup> Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*: 540-543; *Canada in the Great World War: An Authentic Account of the Military History of Canada from the Earliest Days to the Close of the War of the Nations*, (Toronto: United publishers of Canada, limited, 1918), 315-372.

## Conclusion

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D. M. Ormond	10 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	9 <sup>th</sup> Brigade
V. W. Odium	7 <sup>th</sup> Battalion	11 <sup>th</sup> Brigade

\* Shared appointee

Under Currie, eight officers reached brigade or divisional command – one of whom, F.O.W. Loomis, also served under Turner. Two of these officers, Loomis and Lipsett, reached divisional command. Eight of Turner's officers, excluding political appointees, gained brigade or divisional commands. The three political appointees – Lord Brooke, William Hughes, and Garnet Hughes – should not be included, as their selection was a function of political interference from Sam Hughes. Watson had proven himself an excellent battalion commander and would likely have been promoted notwithstanding his political credentials. Even without the political appointees, Turner's record was comparable to Currie's. Turner supported and advocated the interests of his staff. He would attempt to advance his officers, and this brought him into conflict with Alderson, who wanted British officers on Turner's staff.<sup>13</sup>

Turner had an inconsistent pattern of getting results. He was successful during the Boer War in a junior position but faltered in the unwinnable circumstances of Second Ypres and St. Eloi. His pattern was poor results in his initial battle at each senior command level followed by greater success in subsequent engagements, as at Festubert and Courcellette. As GOC Canadian Forces, Turner achieved significant improvements in the OMFC and made a valuable contribution to the fighting power of the Canadian Corps. Furthermore,

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<sup>13</sup> Sims to Aitken, 6 June 1916, A1765, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC; Turner to Carson, 7 April 1916, RG 9 III A1 v116, LAC; Turner to Carson, 24 January 1916, 6-Mc-163, RG 9 III A1 v184, LAC.



## Conclusion

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he was successful in his challenging endeavour to unify the myriad Canadian veterans' organisations.

A leader of character encompasses the intertwined concepts of empathy, army values, and warrior ethos. Turner embodied the warrior ethos more so than did the typical Canadian general. His courage, both moral and physical, was self-evident. It was indicative of his character that his first reaction to the catastrophe at Second Ypres was to demonstrate his resolve to his officers and men by strapping on his revolver and vowing to die rather than surrender.

J.F.C. Fuller in his post-war screed about generalship criticised British generals for losing touch with the front-line. Generals were tied to the telephone in their chateaux, rather than leading.<sup>14</sup> The limitations of communications, however, necessitated generals remain close to their telephones in order to command. GHQ ordered divisional commanders to position themselves where intercommunication with neighbouring formations and superiors were facilitated.<sup>15</sup> Turner, on the other hand, interpreted this order liberally and was a regular sight in the forward trenches, which endeared him to his troops. Turner, as a result, could better appreciate what his men were enduring and the actual conditions at the front. He was not a chateau general.

His letters to his wife, his interactions with his troops, and his actions clearly demonstrate his empathy. His willingness to bypass army regulations to get his men the clothing they needed in 1915 and his attempts to postpone the 1 October

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<sup>14</sup> J. F. C. Fuller, *Generalship, Its Diseases and Their Cure: A Study of the Personal Factor in Command* (London: Faber and Faber, 1933), 18, 54.

<sup>15</sup> Confidential Order, Chief of General Staff, GHQ to Second Army C.B. 888, 3 October 1915, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.

## Conclusion

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1916 attack are two examples. He was genuinely appreciative of his men. In one of his letters home, he wrote after Ypres, "thinking of them brings tears to my eyes for my gallant lads, Officers and men."<sup>16</sup>

A tension exists between empathy and army values requiring the sacrifice of soldiers in pursuit of the mission. Turner's protests over poor plans and his probable refusal to throw away lives at St. Eloi highlights his unwillingness to squander troops on profitless operations. This was at odds with the BEF's culture, which was, as Tim Travers phrased it "always to be enthusiastic about attacking, regardless of drawbacks."<sup>17</sup> Turner probably acquired a reputation as a 'bellyacher' and this blighted his chances at commanding the Canadian Corps.

In his approach to the outward displays of discipline, dress, and deportment, Turner was not aligned with Haig's expectations.<sup>18</sup> Turner lacked Currie's punctiliousness in ensuring all the brass work was polished. He was more willing to make allowances for the realities of the front-line and was less harsh in his discipline. This contributed to his positive soldier-commander relationship, but while usually effective, it contributed to the problems experienced by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division with trench foot in 1915 and lowered Haig's opinion of him.

To Turner duty outweighed his own ambitions. While ambition is a necessary characteristic for any senior role in business, government, and the

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<sup>16</sup> Turner to Hetty, 15 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

<sup>17</sup> Travers, *The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918*: 13.

<sup>18</sup> Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 189; Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army*. 143.

## Conclusion

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military, Turner sacrificed his aspirations for obedience.<sup>19</sup> His grudging acceptance of command in England and his refusal to demand Perley live up to his promise to consider Turner for command of the Canadian Corps all point to an officer for whom duty was paramount. To a modern audience, Turner's enlisting Hughes and Aitken's assistance is too closely associated with the malign aspects of Hughes' interference in the CEF to be acceptable. Turner's actions, however, were well within the bounds of the Canadian Militia's ethos. Turner, Currie, and numerous other officers benefited from Hughes' involvement and many were not reticent in leveraging their political connections, as the numerous letters to Carson, Hughes, and other politicians attest.<sup>20</sup> Only later in the war did this type of interference diminish, and Turner played a critical role in working to purge it from the system.

Another term often seen in comments about Turner was his modesty. An illustration is a comment in a letter to his wife that he hopes his son will grow up to be as good as the men that serve with him – not serve under him but with him.<sup>21</sup> These were not public pronouncements, but his private thoughts shared with his wife. Another example is his letter to his wife commenting that Smith-Dorrien said Turner had twice saved him in South Africa and at Ypres, but Turner

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<sup>19</sup> As Dominick Graham writes, "It has to be accepted that commanders, like politicians, are, even should be, ambitious, self-willed men who pit themselves against other men of similar mettle." Dominick Graham and Shelford Bidwell, *Coalitions, Politicians & Generals: Some Aspects of Command in Two World Wars*, 1st English ed. (London: Brassey's (UK), 1993), 93.

<sup>20</sup> See the following for examples of this behaviour Currie to Carson 8 July 1916, 6-R-122, RG 9 III A1 v207, LAC; Gunn File, File 6-G-18, RG 9 III A1 v148, LAC; *ibid*; Major-General Sir Samuel Steele File, S-9, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

<sup>21</sup> Turner to Hetty, 30 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

## Conclusion

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added "This is awfully conceited on my part in writing it, so please keep it very much to yourself."<sup>22</sup> Even his obituary remarked on his modesty.<sup>23</sup>

Turner was not a physically imposing man, which makes his ability to project a commanding presence all that more impressive. Physically, Turner was slightly over average height, had a slim build, a weak chin, blue eyes, a fair complexion, fair hair and he wore glasses. As he aged, he looked less like a mild clerk and developed more gravitas. In photographs, he was usually smiling, and it appears as if laughter came easily to him. His habit of visiting the frontlines, his speaking skills, confident deportment, intrepid nature, his VC, and his engaging personality all contributed to his success in developing his authority over battle hardened troops. He was personable, even charming and was, as a result, well liked and respected by his men, officers, and staff.<sup>24</sup> Contributing to this reputation was his habit of visiting the front line, which always endeared senior officers to the troops.<sup>25</sup> Another crucial factor was his VC, which lent Turner considerable credibility with all ranks. Even Alderson when disparaging Turner referenced his valour as demonstrated by his VC.

He was fit and vigorous. His diary's reports of working twenty-two hour days at the Somme indicate an officer with an exceptional capacity for hard work

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<sup>22</sup> Turner to Hetty, 25 June 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

<sup>23</sup> "Turner Obituary."

<sup>24</sup> Some examples of comments include, Cotton to Mother, 19 November 1915, 93/24/1, IWM; Parson Diary Entry, 24 October 1915, MG 30 E117 v3, Parson Fonds; LAC; Nickle Interview, Tape 5, RG 41 v10, LAC.

<sup>25</sup> Harold W McGill and Marjorie Norris, *Medicine and Duty: The World War I Memoir of Captain Harold W. McGill, Medical Officer, 31st Battalion, C.E.F.*, vol. no. 23, Legacies Shared (Calgary: University of Calgary Press, 2007), 192; Interview J.M. Fryday and G. Gibson, 27th Bn, RG 41 v11, LAC; Fraser and Roy, *The Journal of Private Fraser, 1914-1918: Canadian Expeditionary Force: 75; Flanders Fields #7 Apprentices at Arms*: Snape Interview, RG 41 v6, LAC.

## Conclusion

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and stamina. He continued this pace while in command in England. He does not appear to have suffered from any long period of illness or incapacity during the war other than suffering a broken collarbone. He had the advantage of relative youth in comparison to the average British divisional commander, who in 1915 was nine years older than Turner.<sup>26</sup>

Wavell, in his perceptive description of generalship based on his experiences in the Great War, considered robustness – the ability to survive and thrive in an environment of incessant shocks and surprises – the critical aspect of combat generalship.<sup>27</sup> Turner demonstrated resilience during the Boer War, but not at the disastrous situation of Second Ypres, as his decision to retreat to the GHQ line shows. He displayed a greater equanimity and ability to handle the shocks and strains in his battles as a divisional commander. Turner's quick intelligence contributed to him being less phlegmatic in the heat of battle than Currie and was probably one of the reasons Alderson considered him less level-headed than Currie.<sup>28</sup>

Good judgement, developed through experience, enables leaders to assess a situation, arrive at a reasonable opinion, and render a sensible decision. Turner generally satisfied these requirements. In a combat role, Turner did not just register disagreements with plans but proposed alternatives, such as at St. Eloi and on the Somme. The victory at Courcellette demonstrated sound judgement in

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<sup>26</sup> The average age of the British division commander dropped from 53 in 1915 to 49 at the end of the war. Robbins, *British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18: Defeat into Victory*: 527; Age of GOC in the Canadian Corps, GAQ 10-55, RG 24 v1843, LAC.

<sup>27</sup> Archibald Percival Wavell, *Generals and Generalship*, The Lees Knowles Lectures, 1939 (Toronto: Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1941), 2.

<sup>28</sup> Alderson to Second Army G271, 18 April 1916, WO 158/296, TNA.

## Conclusion

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preparation and battle leadership. He showed greater discernment than did GHQ in the staying power of the Germans, as he repeatedly dismissed claims the Germans were on their last legs.<sup>29</sup> His decisions, while the head of the OMFC, were appropriate, as the improvement in the effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation demonstrates. Where he failed was in allowing political support of Sam Hughes to intrude excessively in his decision making, such as his pressure to change the survey results on the Ross Rifle. His support for Hughes was a combination of Turner's respect for his 'many good qualities,' a reciprocal response to Hughes' championing of Turner, and a failure of character.<sup>30</sup>

Turner possessed the coup d'oeil necessary for a junior cavalry officer during Boer War but lacked it at the higher levels of command. His greatest failing as a senior combat officer was his inability to correctly filter and form the welter of information flooding into the headquarters into an approximation of the actual situation at the front. Lacking this rare talent to discern the battle's pattern from afar, Turner tended to limit his battle decisions by a wariness of what the Germans might do. Given the German penchant for launching stinging counterattacks, this caution was understandable and appropriate.

Turner was innovative within the context of the extant paradigm. He did not develop novel solutions but being pragmatic, he looked to proven formulae. His steps to establish the command and organisational structure of the OMFC were a

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<sup>29</sup> Turner to Hetty, 15 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM; Turner to Hetty, 12 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM; Turner Diary Entry, 7 October 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

<sup>30</sup> Turner Diary Entry, 15-17 November 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

## **Conclusion**

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clear derivation of the existing War Office model, adjusted for the Canadian situation. It was not revolutionary but was appropriate and effective, especially for an institution tightly integrated with and partially subordinated to the British system. Turner was not innovative in tactics and doctrine. His 'lessons learned' arising from St. Eloi and Somme dealt with the symptoms of problems and not the underlying causes.

He had an open mind to new technology, as evidenced by his embrace of air power or his request to Carson in 1915 to obtain a device to listen to German communications.<sup>31</sup> Related to this affinity, as well as, his political sensitivity, was his attempts to salvage Sam Hughes' equipment projects, such as the Ross Rifle, Bain Wagons and MacAdam Shovel.<sup>32</sup> He endeavoured to find ways to make them useful, which was laudable, but he persevered with his support too long.

Turner, like many who think and talk fast, was not always the most tactful.<sup>33</sup> His interactions with Byng, Perley, his subordinates, and peers were positive from the available evidence. His clashes with Alderson, Currie, and Gow, however, indicate a personality that lacked a necessary element of tact to defuse confrontations. In all three cases, however, the other combatant equally, or in Currie's case predominantly, share the blame for the conflict. Kemp's negative comments about Turner suggest that Turner had lost his temper or reacted in a way that offended Kemp, but no evidence exists, other than Kemp's reaction.

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<sup>31</sup> Turner to Carson, 3 October 1915, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.

<sup>32</sup> Turner to Carson, 11 February 1916, 4-5-13b, RG 9 III A1 v12, LAC; Carson to Hughes 15 October 1915, 4-10-52, R 9 III A1 v21, LAC; Turner to Carson, 8 December 1915, RG 24 v6937, LAC.

<sup>33</sup> An officer meeting with Turner complained that Turner spoke too quickly. Lt.Col Harvie to Odlum, 27 August 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.

## Conclusion

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Turner lacked the skill of a Marlborough or Eisenhower in dealing with difficult personalities and achieving their end-goals.

Turner, when appointed to command the 3<sup>rd</sup> Brigade, was as qualified as any Canadian Militia officer, but he lacked some of the necessary domain knowledge. He was further handicapped by a lack of staff training, which led to an under appreciation of the vital necessity of qualified staff officers. Leading at the brigade and divisional level, however, was an accelerated course in advanced command training. His progress as a divisional commander and improved performance at Courcellette shows a learning curve in a structured combat situation.

Turner, like most of his class and generation in English Canada and Australia, had a dual identity – as a subject of the British Empire and a citizen of Canada.<sup>34</sup> He was a strong supporter of Canadian aspirations for more autonomy. In this respect, he was a stronger nationalist than Currie. Over the course of the war, Turner's identity increasingly became Canadian. His frustration with British attitudes and newspaper coverage in the demobilisation period accelerated this identity shift, but not to the point where he abandoned his connections to the Empire.

As a negative characteristic, he could hold a strong grudge against those he felt judged him unfairly, such as Alderson. He could be petty and prickly at times,

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<sup>34</sup> For more on this dual identity, see Brennan, "The Other Battle: Imperialist Versus Nationalist Sympathies within the Officers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919."; Andrews, *The Anzac Illusion: Anglo-Australian Relations During World War I*: 31. Canadians were subjects of the British Empire until 1947, when the Canadian Citizenship Act was passed and created Canadian citizenship. "History of Passports," <http://www.pptc.gc.ca/pptc/hist.aspx?lang=eng>.



## **Conclusion**

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as witnessed by his conflict with Gow. He also would change his opinion of officers under political pressure, such as his recanting of the negative assessment of William Hughes.<sup>35</sup> He was also defensive about his reputation and was certain to resent any disparagement of his performance or honour, hence his conflicts with Alderson. He was well aware of Alderson's enmity and kept the message logs from Second Ypres to defend his actions.<sup>36</sup> A further issue was his tendency to retain officers who had not proven competent, such as Garnet Hughes and C.A. Ker.

## **Turner and Currie**

An assessment of Turner is incomplete without a comparison with his great rival – Arthur Currie. It is essential to recognise the fundamental difference between the Canadian Corps of 1915/1916 and that of 1917/1918. In all the vital dimensions of weaponry, ammunition supply, doctrine, logistics, and command and staff training, the Canadian Corps in the later years of the war was far superior to that of the first half, and Currie is rightly credited with contributing to this improvement. In addition, the Germans were comparatively weaker in 1917 and especially in 1918, than in 1915/1916. As a result, it is misleading to directly compare Currie's results during the Hundred Days campaign to those of Turner at St. Eloi. A better comparison is Currie's record in 1916, which like Turner's, was equivocal. Preceding Currie's great success at Mount Sorrel on 13 June was the defeat of the initial counterattacks. Currie had his share of failures at the Somme,

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<sup>35</sup> Carson to Aitken, 9 June 1916, 8-5-8F, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC.

<sup>36</sup> Turner to Hastings, 13 April 1918, Folder 41/File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC.

## Conclusion

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including 26 September and 8 October, without the compensation of a signal victory, such as Courcellette.<sup>37</sup> Based on the 1916 record, both officers showed strong capabilities, as well as failures.

Turner, with his experience in England, was a more rounded officer than Currie. He showed he could win victories at the Somme and could handle the multifaceted challenges of administration. He had a better appreciation of the political dimensions of senior command than Currie.<sup>38</sup> As Napoleon stated "The ability to comprehend the political dimension of war is also implicit and unchanging."<sup>39</sup> Currie was a gifted combat commander and well suited to his role as commander of the Canadian Corps, but Currie's relative lack of success as the Inspector-General after the war also illustrates his limitations in dealing with the political aspects of senior command.<sup>40</sup> Turner, more than Currie, appreciated that the rough and tumble and necessary compromises of party politics, however distasteful to the military mind, were an inextricable feature of an army subordinated to a civilian government.

Could Turner have successfully commanded the Canadian Corps? Turner demonstrated a learning curve and his performance at the Somme proved he had grown to be an effective divisional commander. Based on his record, he probably could have been a capable corps commander, as well. Nonetheless, Currie was a better choice for corps command because of Haig's confidence in Currie – a

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<sup>37</sup> For more on the failures of 26 September and 8 October, see Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 157.

<sup>38</sup> As Gary Sheffield argues "High-level command is as much about politics as operations." Sheffield, *The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army*. 152.

<sup>39</sup> Jonathon Riley, *Napoleon as a General* (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2007), 4.

<sup>40</sup> For more on Currie's challenges as the Inspector-General, see Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 289-291.

## Conclusion

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confidence Haig did not have in Turner. As a result, Currie received approval for better plans and more guns, shells, and time. These were critical elements of the Canadian success. Turner would have been in the position of other unfavoured corps commanders that the high command expected to make do with their allotment of resources, time, and plan – no matter how exiguous the resources, limited the time, or flawed the plan. Further, Turner was a better administrator than Currie. As Riley points out in his biography of Napoleon, “the general may have to fill a series of incompatible roles: politician, leader, manager, supply specialist, public relations man - as well as strategist, operational commander and tactician.”<sup>41</sup> Currie’s strengths were as an operational commander and tactician, while Turner embodied those qualities to a lesser degree but added the attributes of politician, leader, supply specialist, and public relations man and so was better suited to his administrative role.

Richard Turner served Canada well in two wars and materially assisted veterans in the post-war period. Initially, like all his contemporaries, he struggled with the new circumstances of trench warfare on the Western Front, but he showed a propensity to learn from the situation and by 1916 had become an effective divisional commander. He proved to be an excellent administrator, and this played an underestimated part in the Canadian success in the final years of the war. He was also a strong but balanced nationalist and supported the aspirations for increased Canadian control. Moreover, this study has shown that his leadership qualities and the high esteem in which he was held by troops were

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<sup>41</sup> Riley, *Napoleon as a General*: 5.

## **Conclusion**

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crucial to CEF's success. He is poorly thought of today, and that is unfortunate, as he deserves more respect for what he accomplished and contributed.

# APPENDIX

## Appendix 1 Awards<sup>1</sup>

**Lieutenant-General Sir Richard Ernest William Turner, VC, KCB, KCMG, DSO**

Victoria Cross

Knight Commander of the Most Honourable Order of the Bath

Knight Commander of the Most Distinguished Order of St Michael and St. George

Distinguished Service Order

Queen's South Africa Medal 1899-1902 with clasps Johannesburg, Diamond Hill,  
Belfast, Cape Colony, Orange Free State, South Africa

1914-1915 Star

British War Medal

Victory Medal

Mentioned in Despatches (6 times)

Canadian Auxiliary Forces Officers' Decoration

Canadian Forces' Decoration with Clasp

Legion d'Honneur, Croix de Commandeur (France)

Croix de Guerre avec Palme (France)

Order of White Eagle with Swords (Russia)

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Turner Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9842 - 47, LAC.

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RG 150	Service files
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MG 26 H	Borden Fonds
MG 27 II D9	Kemp Fonds
MG 27 II D12	Perley Fonds
MG 27 II D23	Hughes Family Fonds
MG 27 II G1	Beaverbrook Fonds
MG 27 III F9	Daly Fonds
MG 28 I298	Royal Canadian Legion Fonds
MG 30 D150	Macphail Fonds
MG 30 E5	Bovey Fonds
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MG 30 E8	Creelman Fonds
MG 30 E15	Griesbach Fonds
MG 30 E16	Hewgill Fonds

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MG 30 E75	Urquhart Fonds
MG 30 E78	O'Connor Fonds
MG 30 E81	Morrison Fonds
MG 30 E84	Leckie Fonds
MG 30 E100	Currie Fonds
MG 30 E117	Parson Fonds
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