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

by

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A thesis submitted to the University of Birmingham for the degree of DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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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.

My supervisor, Professor Gary Sheffield, went far beyond the call of duty in persuading the University administration to allow me to study, while residing in Canada and for fighting again to allow an early submission. Professor Sheffield was willing to take on a remote student, and despite the distance, he provided superb direction, pointed me to the correct path, and saved me from many faux pas. It was a pleasure working with a scholar of such deep and encyclopaedic knowledge of the First World War.

One of the pleasant surprises of this expedition was the willingness of scholars to respond to questions from an obscure PhD student. Dr. Andrew Iarocci reviewed all of the thesis chapters and his comments were most helpful. He also was generous with his time and willingness to discuss the intricacies of the Canadian administration in England. Dr. David Campbell helpfully provided
scans of Douglas Haig’s diaries and discussed obscure aspects of the Battles of St. Eloi and Courcelette. 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.

Sharing in the myriad joys and agonies of the journey was a fellow PhD pilgrim, Roger Deeks. I owe a great debt to Roger for our weekly Skype sessions where we discussed and commiserated, for his incisive and probing comments on the chapters he reviewed, and his tremendous assistance when I visited Birmingham. Roger is a staunch friend and wise counsellor.

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.
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<td>AIF</td>
<td>Australian Imperial Force</td>
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<td>AMS</td>
<td>Assistant Military Secretary</td>
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<td>BEF</td>
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<td>BGGS</td>
<td>Brigadier-General, General Staff</td>
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<td>CASC</td>
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<tr>
<td>CEF</td>
<td>Canadian Expeditionary Force</td>
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<td>CETD</td>
<td>Canadian Engineers Training Depot</td>
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<tr>
<td>CFA</td>
<td>Canadian Field Artillery</td>
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<tr>
<td>CIGS</td>
<td>Chief of the Imperial General Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>CMGC</td>
<td>Canadian Machine Gun Corps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRA</td>
<td>Commander, Royal Artillery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CRE</td>
<td>Commander, Royal Engineers</td>
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<td>CRT</td>
<td>Canadian Railway Troops</td>
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<td>DSO</td>
<td>Distinguished Service Order</td>
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<td>FSR</td>
<td>Field Service Regulations</td>
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<tr>
<td>CGS</td>
<td>Chief of the General Staff</td>
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<tr>
<td>GHQ</td>
<td>General Headquarters</td>
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<td>GOC</td>
<td>General Officer Commanding</td>
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<td>OMFC</td>
<td>Overseas Military Forces of Canada</td>
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<td>PF</td>
<td>Permanent Force</td>
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<td>PPCLI</td>
<td>Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry</td>
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<td>QOCH</td>
<td>Queen’s Own Canadian Hussars</td>
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<td>RCD</td>
<td>Royal Canadian Dragoons</td>
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<td>RCR</td>
<td>Royal Canadian Regiment</td>
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<td>RMC</td>
<td>Royal Military College (Kingston)</td>
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<td>RO</td>
<td>Routine Orders</td>
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<td>SMLE</td>
<td>Short Magazine Lee-Enfield</td>
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<td>VC</td>
<td>Victoria Cross</td>
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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 2nd Division and 16th Battalion. British, Australian, French, and New Zealand units include a national designation, such as the 3rd 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 14th Battalion, 3rd Brigade, 51st Highland Division, II Corps, and Reserve Army. Italics designate German units, for example the 45th 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

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.’ 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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1 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.

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. He commanded the 3rd Brigade in the 1st Canadian Division at the Battles of Second Ypres and Festubert. In August 1915, Turner received command of the newly formed 2nd Division, while Currie took over the 1st Division in September 1915. Turner commanded the 2nd Division at the Battles of St. Eloi Craters and the Somme. Appointed commander of

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3 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.
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. This thesis will address this lacuna in our understanding by delineating the full scope of Turner’s military career.

4 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.
Introduction

Historiography

Turner’s historiography is sparse. There is no full-length biographical study, other than a perfunctory article in the journal Canadian Military History.¹ Other works that provide some limited coverage are a Master’s thesis on the Battle of St. Eloi, an excellent PhD thesis on the 2nd Division, and three articles on St. Eloi.² 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.³

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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¹ Leppard, "The Dashing Subaltern - Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect."
figure,’ but ‘he deserves better.’\textsuperscript{8} 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 Courcelette 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.”\textsuperscript{9}

David Campbell’s thesis on the 2\textsuperscript{nd} 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\textsuperscript{nd} Division, Turner disappears from the account when he moves to England. Campbell has also published two articles on the battles of St. Eloi and Courcelette that are generally favourable to Turner.\textsuperscript{10}

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.\textsuperscript{11} They characterised Turner as a repeated failure as a combat commander at Second Ypres, Festubert, St. Eloi, and the Somme.\textsuperscript{12}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{8} Leppard, “The Dashing Subaltern - Sir Richard Turner in Retrospect,” 21.
  \item \textsuperscript{9} ibid.
  \item \textsuperscript{10} David Charles Gregory Campbell, “A Forgotten Victory: Courcelette, 15 September 1916,” \textit{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.”
  \item \textsuperscript{11} Examples include “Brave men do not necessarily make good generals” and “Personally fearless, he was unsuited for command in the field.” Brereton Greenhous, \textit{Canada and the Battle of Vimy Ridge, 9-12 April 1917} ([Ottawa: Dept. of National Defence, Directorate of History], 1992), 27; George H Cassar, \textit{Hell in Flanders Fields: Canadians at the Second Battle of Ypres} (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2010), 61.
  \item \textsuperscript{12} 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, \textit{Baptism}
They also asserted that his promotion to General Officer Commanding (GOC) 2nd Division and subsequent retention in command were due to unjustified political interference. They also claimed Turner sacrificed his men for political advantage. 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.

*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.”


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.”


“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.”


Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace*: 86.
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. A conspicuous exception is Desmond Morton who accurately observed in *When Your Number is Up* that Perley left Turner to make the military decisions.

Another major strand of the standard narrative was Turner clashed with Currie, while Turner was in England, to the detriment of the Canadian Corps. The more informed historians, however, do not accept Currie’s claims that Turner deliberately subverted him.

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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16 “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.


18 “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.

19 “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.
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him and do so in a positive light. 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.

During the war and immediately post-war, Turner had a distinguished reputation, much like Douglas Haig. 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. 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

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.


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).
Currie.\textsuperscript{24}

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.\textsuperscript{25} Turner feuded repeatedly with Duguid over Duguid’s portrayal of the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Brigade and, by extension his role in its command, especially during the Battle of Second Ypres.\textsuperscript{26} 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.\textsuperscript{27} 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.\textsuperscript{28}

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

\textsuperscript{24} 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, \textit{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," \textit{Canadian Military History} 10, no. 3 (2001).


\textsuperscript{27} Comments on Official History, DHS 10-10-E, RG 24 v1756, LAC; Memorandum, HQ 683-1-30-5 v2, RG 24 v1756, LAC.

\textsuperscript{28} Cook, \textit{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.
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 Courcelette was short and uncontroversial.29

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.30 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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standard narrative, discussed above. These works concentrated on the combat operations of the Canadian Corps. 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. 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. 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. Morton explores the evolution of Canadian administration from the chaos of Sam Hughes to the more


34 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).
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
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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 Courcelette, a ‘forgotten victory.’ 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;

35 Campbell, "A Forgotten Victory: Courcelette, 15 September 1916."
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. 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.

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A formidable challenge facing the biographer is to steer between Scylla and Charybdis of advocating or loathing the subject. 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.

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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An absence of evidence restricts the ability to portray Turner outside of his military role.
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.
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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. 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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40 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.
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.\footnote{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.}

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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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 3rd 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 2nd 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 Courcelette 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
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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.
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. They had five daughters, as well. Turner’s father was

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1 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) (Ottawa1914), 341; 1901 Canadian Census, Quebec, 10, Ward Saint-Louis, Family 87, (Quebec1901); 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

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.²

R.E.W. Turner attended private schools and graduated from Quebec City High School in 1889.³ 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.⁴

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

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

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As a result, the Canadian military in 1892 was at low ebb.\textsuperscript{8}

The QOCH was a city unit, with training on weeknights in armouries.\textsuperscript{9}

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.\textsuperscript{10} 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.\textsuperscript{11}

The General Officer Commanding the Militia of Canada, who was always a British Regular Army officer, was in charge of the Canadian military.\textsuperscript{12} The post of GOC was a graveyard of careers – all but one of the GOCs left before their term expired.\textsuperscript{13} 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.\textsuperscript{14}

This myth, one shared by Australia and New Zealand, put faith in the innate


\textsuperscript{12} Miller, \textit{A Knight in Politics : A Biography of Sir Frederick Borden}: 97-99.

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

superiority of the ‘hard riding and straight shooting’ citizen soldier over the professional.\textsuperscript{15} 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.\textsuperscript{16} It was beneficial, if not essential, for an officer to belong to the right party if he wanted promotion.\textsuperscript{17} One GOC, Lord Douglas Dundonald, claimed his career effectively ended in attempting to stop patronage in the Militia.\textsuperscript{18}

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.\textsuperscript{19} 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.”\textsuperscript{20} They also offered social respectability and the opportunity to gain business and social contacts.\textsuperscript{21} The camaraderie of the regiment, outdoor pursuits, and military training also appealed

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Grey, A Military History of Australia: 77.
\item Miller, A Knight in Politics: A Biography of Sir Frederick Borden: 90.
\item 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.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
to the adventurous. Turner, throughout, his life belonged to hunting and fishing clubs and listed riding as a hobby.  

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.” 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. 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.

The QOCH was a longstanding cavalry regiment, based in Quebec City. 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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26 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).
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. 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 25th 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.” 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. Leppard’s assertion that Turner’s promotions were due to Tory political influence and nepotism, rather than his own merits is highly doubtful.

28 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.
29 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.
30 Richard Turner Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9842 - 47, LAC.
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.\textsuperscript{32} 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.\textsuperscript{33} 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.\textsuperscript{34} 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.\textsuperscript{35} 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

\textsuperscript{32} 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.

\textsuperscript{33} Turner was appointed to two one-year terms on the Quebec City Protestant School Board. \textsuperscript{*}Turner Appointed to Protestant School Board,* Quebec City Daily Telegraph, 13 June 1923.


\textsuperscript{35} Cable Perley to Borden, 22 November 1916, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.
Conservative party. 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.

South African Campaign

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 owlish 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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37 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).
38 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.
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. 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.

39 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.
40 Defence, The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914).
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. The name of Turner’s unit, the 1st 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. This is the name used in the chapter. Turner thought the change absurd, and told Lessard so. This was an early example of Turner’s willingness to confront authority.

On 28 December, Turner was appointed to command the 3rd troop, from
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Quebec City, of ‘B’ Squadron RCD. Turner, like many other officers, reverted to a lower rank to participate in the campaign. He was eager to go, and worried that he would have to remain behind when not selected for the first contingent.

The RCD were Mounted Rifles, who trained and were equipped to fight both mounted and dismounted as infantry. 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. 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

44 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.
45 Permanent Force officers held all the senior positions, meaning Militia officers, such as Turner, had to revert if they wanted to join the contingent.
46 Turner Diary Entry, 1 November 1899, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.
47 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).
48 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.
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.\textsuperscript{49} Turner and his wife had one son and two daughters.\textsuperscript{50} 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\textsuperscript{th} 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’.\textsuperscript{51} 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\textsuperscript{st} Mounted Infantry Corps, a brigade strength unit. Alderson, because
of his successful experience in leading Canadians, including the RCD, would
command the 1\textsuperscript{st} 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.\textsuperscript{52} However, as Turner was three levels removed from
Alderson, it is unlikely Alderson would have had much opportunity to judge his

\textsuperscript{49} 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.
\textsuperscript{50} Harold, Kathleen, and Evelyn.
\textsuperscript{51} Turner Diary Entry, January 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{52} See Chapters 2 and 3 for more details on Turner’s fractious relationship with Alderson.
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capabilities in this campaign.\textsuperscript{53}

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.\textsuperscript{54} 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.\textsuperscript{55}

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.”\textsuperscript{56}

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

\begin{itemize}
\item 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.
\item Miller, \textit{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.
\item “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.vacacc.gc.ca/remembers/sub.cfm/source=collection/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.
\item Turner Diary Entry, 20 July 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\end{itemize}
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.\textsuperscript{57}

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.\textsuperscript{58} 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.’\textsuperscript{59}

There were constant engagements and in one case, in October, Turner demonstrated his leadership skills and \textit{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

\textsuperscript{57} 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.

\textsuperscript{58} Turner Diary Entry, 25 October 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{59} For more on farm burning, see, Chris Madsen, “Canadian Troops and Farm Burning in the South African War,” \textit{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.
showed good judgment in extricating us from a very nasty operation.” 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.

Turner won the Victoria Cross (VC) at the Battle of Liliefontein 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. 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. Smith-Dorrien assigned the difficult role of the rear guard to the RCD, along with two guns and a machine gun in support.

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

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60 Comrades All, MG 30 E339 v1, Hilder Fonds; LAC, 56; Miller, Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902: 257.
61 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.
62 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 Liliefontein, 7 November 1900,” in Donald E. Graves (eds.), Fighting for Canada: Seven Battles, 1758-1945 (Toronto: R. Brass Studio, 2000), 217.
63 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.
64 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.
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.\(^\text{65}\)

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.\(^\text{66}\) 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.\(^\text{67}\) The surviving

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\(^\text{67}\) Robertson, “The Royal Canadian Dragoons and the Anglo-Boer War, 1900,” 195.
Canadian were able to scramble away.\(^{68}\)

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.\(^{69}\)

Turner’s actions were sufficient for the third Victoria Cross awarded that day.\(^{70}\) 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.\(^{71}\) Turner’s courageous act despite his wounds falls into classic officer action of saving a combat situation.\(^{72}\) 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.\(^{73}\) 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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\(^{68}\) One of the 12 pdr. guns now is prominently displayed in the Canadian War Museum in Ottawa.

\(^{69}\) Turner Diary Entry, 22 and 28 November 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.


\(^{71}\) Comrades All, MG 30 E339 v1, Hilder Fonds; LAC, 60. In the end, the RCD did not get their march through London, as promised.


\(^{73}\) 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.
beyond the circumstances of the act condition their awarding.\textsuperscript{74} 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.\textsuperscript{75} 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.”\textsuperscript{76} Turner sailed to England, where he met his wife.

Turner demonstrated sound judgment, \textit{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.\textsuperscript{77} 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

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{74} Hugh A. Halliday, \textit{Valour Reconsidered: Inquiries into the Victoria Cross and Other Awards for Extreme Bravery} (Toronto: Robin Brass Studio, 2006), 2.
  \item \textsuperscript{75} Turner Diary Entry, 15 and 28 November; 13 December 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.
  \item \textsuperscript{76} Turner Diary Entry, 6 February 1901, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.
  \item \textsuperscript{77} 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, \textit{Supplementary Report: Organization, Equipment, Despatch and Service of Canadian Contingents During the War in South Africa, 1899-1900}: 99.
\end{itemize}
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.78 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 2nd Troop “respect you and know you as a man, and a gentleman and a brave officer.”79

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78 The son of Lord Roberts was killed attempting to retrieve the guns. Thomas Pakenham, The Boer War (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979), 240-246.
79 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.
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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.” 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.

80 Turner Diary Entry, 20 July 1900, MG 30 E46 Roll M-300, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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,
veterinary, intelligence, engineering and signals corps. 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. 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. 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.

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. 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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82 Messenger, Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18: 15.

83 Miller, A Knight in Politics : A Biography of Sir Frederick Borden: 176.


85 ibid., 130.
and Dominion forces were identical in all respects, other than equipment.\textsuperscript{86} 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.\textsuperscript{87} 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.”\textsuperscript{88} The 1905 and 1906 inspections recommended him suitable for command of a brigade.\textsuperscript{89} After a four-year period in command, Turner transferred to lead the 3\textsuperscript{rd} Cavalry Brigade based in Quebec City on 3 February 1907.\textsuperscript{90} 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.\textsuperscript{91} 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


\textsuperscript{87} 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.

\textsuperscript{88} Inspection Report, 10 QOCH, 25 June 1904, HQ 145, RG 24 v6413, LAC.

\textsuperscript{89} Inspection Report, 10 QOCH, 26 May 1905, HQ 145, RG 24 v6413, LAC.


\textsuperscript{91} Beahen, \textit{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.
the Reserve Officer list.\textsuperscript{92} 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.\textsuperscript{93}

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.\textsuperscript{94}

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.

\textsuperscript{92} Richard Turner Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9842 - 47, LAC.
‘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.¹

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.² 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

¹ Turner Diary Entry, 11 June 1915, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.
challenges for Canada. Like the British, Australians, and New Zealanders, Canada vastly increased its armed forces. 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. In the first two contingents, PF officers held only nine of the forty-four senior positions. At the start of the war, Canada had only twelve Camberley trained staff officers and so had to rely on British supplied staff. 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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4 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.


6 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.
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.  

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. 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. 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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7 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.
9 For more on the issues with the British mobilisation, see Simkins, Kitchener's Army: The Raising of Britain's New Armies, 1914-1916.
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
subject.\textsuperscript{10}

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.\textsuperscript{11} 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.

\textsuperscript{10} Thacker to Secretary War Office, A.G. 1-2-36, 4 February 1918, O-29-33, RG 9 Ill B1 v2881, LAC.

\textsuperscript{11} The Canadian Government paid the British for all weapons, rations, and ammunition on a per capita basis. See Chapter 6 for more details.
Figure 2  Comparison of Effective Strengths by Arms Between British and Canadian Forces in France, 3 June 1918\(^\text{12}\)

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

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

\(^{12}\) Comparison of Effective Strengths by Arms between British and Canadian Forces in France, 3 June 1918, 52839, MG 26 H1 v98, Borden Fonds; LAC.
### 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.¹³

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.”¹⁴ 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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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.\textsuperscript{15} One-third of the Canadian officers in the two first contingents did not even have the undemanding Militia qualifications for their post.\textsuperscript{16} Turner wrote his wife that he was "studying hard as there is a lot to learn."\textsuperscript{17}

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.\textsuperscript{18} 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.\textsuperscript{19} 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

\textsuperscript{15} Morton, \textit{A Peculiar Kind of Politics}: 31.


\textsuperscript{17} Turner Diary Entry, 4 October 1914, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

\textsuperscript{18} Cook, \textit{At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916}: 41.

\textsuperscript{19} 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.
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 3rd Brigade requested him. The history of the 15th Battalion indicated the unit was elated with Turner’s selection. 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.

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

20 Tuxford Comments, File 39, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.
22 Connaught to Kitchener, 19 August 1914, WG/21, PRO 30/57/56, Kitchener Papers; TNA.
23 Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC.
24 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 19.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.
Montreal, the 15th from Toronto and the 16th, 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.26 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.”27 Turner selected Lieutenant-Colonel Garnet Burke Hughes.28 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 50th Regiment in Victoria.29 Garnet Hughes knew Turner, was a friend of Currie’s, and, most importantly, was the

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26 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.


28 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.

29 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.
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.”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 out-

rank, the recently promoted, Major-General Sam Hughes. Hughes asked Turner

about Alderson and, based on his experience in the Boer War, Turner thought

Alderson acceptable.

Alderson, a small fastidious man, was a distinguished retired officer, who

had specialised in the mounted infantry. 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. He was a well-known horseman and had published on the subject.


30 Turner Diary Entry, 11 December 1914, 19710147-001/DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner

Fonds; CWM.

31 Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 25.

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

33 Lieut-Gen. Sir Edwin Alderson, KCB, The Khaki Call, XII.1, W.A. Griesbach, GAQ 4-15K, RG

24 v1813, LAC.

34 “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’

was an experienced trainer and was able to instil needed discipline in the 1st Division. Regarded by the Canadians as a gentleman, but not inspiring, or particularly brilliant, he played a pivotal role in preparing the 1st 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.\(^36\) Turner’s initial relationship with Alderson was satisfactory.\(^37\)

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.\(^38\) More time was lost when the battalion organisation switched repeatedly between eight and four companies.

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\(^36\) 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.

\(^37\) Turner Diary Entry, 11 December 1914, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

until it stabilised at four in January 1915. 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. As a result, Turner lost valuable time for training and evaluating his brigade and staff.

Despite these impediments, the division, by contemporary standards, was reasonably well trained, contrary to the usual description of the division. 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.

The division crossed to France on 7 February, making it the first non-regular division to reach the front in the British Army. The division served a tour with the 6th 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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40 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.
41 Andrew Iarocci, *Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 51.
42 For a strong refutation that the division was poorly trained, see ibid., 10.
43 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.
division to acclimatise to the conditions on the Western Front and do additional
needed training.  

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. 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 2nd Brigade, on 24 April.

The Canadians took over by British standards poorly prepared defences overlooked by German positions. Turner’s 3rd Brigade held the left sector of the division front, with Currie’s 2nd 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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46 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.
belt of wire.\(^{47}\) Turner’s headquarters was at Chateau du Nord in the GHQ line.\(^{48}\) 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.\(^{49}\) There was no contingency plan to expand the scope of the attack.\(^{50}\) 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
detachments without adequate staff or communications. For instance, Turner at one point commanded nine battalions, while Mercer, GOC 1st 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. 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.

52 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).
Map 2 Ypres, The Gas Attack, 22 April 1915

Map 1, Ypres the Gas Attack, 22 April 1915, page 66
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 15th Battalion of the 3rd 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 3rd Brigade in a catastrophic position. Turner’s situation was one of 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.” Turner responded quickly by hustling his reserves

54 ‘Turner to Hetty, 3 May 1915,’ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.
forward.\footnote{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.}

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.\footnote{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.} 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.\footnote{A. Fortescue Duguid, The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914 - 1919, (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1938), 225,29.} 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.\footnote{Hughes meant the attack was developing from the northwest, from Turco Farm.}\footnote{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.} Historians have often characterised these reports as ‘panicky’, indicating Turner’s and Hughes’ loss of control.\footnote{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.} 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.’ During this period three divisional staff officers visited Turner’s headquarters, who apparently either did not realise or inform the division that
The 3rd Brigade lines were intact. 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. 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. 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. 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

61 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.
62 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.
63 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.
64 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.
launched the only successful counterattack by the British during the battle.\textsuperscript{65}

Even in 1918, with far better trained officers and staff, Currie refrained from making night attacks.\textsuperscript{66}

\textbf{Map 3} The Apex Lost, 24 April 1915

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

\textsuperscript{65} McWilliams, \textit{Gas!: The Battle for Ypres, 1915}: 215.
\textsuperscript{66} Cook, \textit{Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918}: 460.
superiority. 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.

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

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67 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.

68 Duguid to Edmonds, (Undated, Missing First Page), DHS 3-17 (vol 1), RG 24 v1739, LAC.
misinterpreted the order, with the majority believing it was the former. 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. It was clear even before the retreat; Turner looked to his rear as demonstrated by a warning message to the 3rd Brigade, Canadian Field Artillery (CFA) that a retreat to the GHQ line might be necessary. 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. 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. This was the beginning of a great rift.

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

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

72 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.

73 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.
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 3rd 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 2nd Brigade until 1:45 p.m. of the retreat. 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. 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 15th Battalion line. Given the main thrust of the German attack was westward, the GHQ line was not wholly out of position.

74 1:45 P.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 24 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.
75 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.
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\textsuperscript{nd} 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.\textsuperscript{76}

**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.\textsuperscript{77} A key skill needed by senior commanders was to manage their energy and failure to do so resulted in breakdowns.\textsuperscript{78}

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

\textsuperscript{76} 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.

\textsuperscript{77} Turner to Hetty, 9 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.

\textsuperscript{78} *Army Leadership Competent, Confident, and Agile FM 6-22*, (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2006), 11-18.
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.\textsuperscript{79} 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.”\textsuperscript{80} For example, one message from the 15\textsuperscript{th} Battalion in the front line took eighty-five minutes to reach Turner’s Headquarters.\textsuperscript{81}

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.\textsuperscript{82} 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.\textsuperscript{83} 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

\textsuperscript{79} Iarocci, \textit{Shoestring Soldiers: The 1st Canadian Division at War, 1914-1915}: 10, 140.
\textsuperscript{80} Gordon-Hall to Urquhart, 27 January 1938, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.
\textsuperscript{81} 11:25 P.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 22 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{82} Turner commanded at various times his four battalions (13\textsuperscript{th}, 14\textsuperscript{th}, 15\textsuperscript{th} and 16\textsuperscript{th}), the 2\textsuperscript{nd}, 3\textsuperscript{rd}, 7\textsuperscript{th} and 10\textsuperscript{th} battalions and the 1\textsuperscript{st} Royal Irish Regiment. Duguid to Edmonds 18 May 1925, DHS 3-17 (vol 1), RG 24 v1739, LAC.
battalions, and this contributed to the poor control exerted by the division.84

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.85 The commander of the 7th Battalion, while assigned to the 3rd Brigade, complained that he had no instructions or contact with Turner or his staff.86

By the evening of 24 April at staff conference, Hughes was unable to coherently describe the brigade’s positions.87 Earlier in the day, Paul Villiers, a 3rd Brigade staff captain, stumbled badly when he tried reporting the brigade’s positions to Major-General Thomas Snow of the 28th British Division. Snow, reportedly the rudest man in the British Army, was enraged when his rapid-fire questions and constant interruptions flustered Villiers.88 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.89 He had to be restrained and evacuated.

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

85 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 22 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.
86 Ypres Battle Description, MG 30 E300 v24, Odulum Fonds; LAC.
87 Gordon-Hall to Urquhart, 15 November 1934, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.
88 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.
89 Ypres Memoirs, MG 30 E236 v4, Villiers Fonds; LAC; Napier Comments, File 50, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.
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. Alderson moved rapidly to transfer Garnet out of the brigade by having him appointed GSO 2 of the 2nd Division in England on 27 May 1915. Turner fought Alderson over whom to appoint in his place, and Turner prevailed in appointing Villiers as his new Brigade-Major.

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 24th. Attack orders set unrealistic movement schedules given the conditions. An example was the order for the 10th 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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90 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.
91 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.
92 Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.
93 Alderson’s order did not specify which battalions to use and Turner used the 10th and 16th, while Alderson wanted the 14th and 16th employed. Duguid, *The Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919*, 1: 236-237.
the start line in time for the attack.\textsuperscript{94} 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.\textsuperscript{95} 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.\textsuperscript{96} British observers
considered Alderson did not properly grip the situation.\textsuperscript{97}

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.”\textsuperscript{98} Currie also lost
confidence in the division and was frustrated with Alderson.\textsuperscript{99}

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\textsuperscript{nd} Brigade held and the 3\textsuperscript{rd} did not.\textsuperscript{100} 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

\textsuperscript{94} Dixon, \textit{Magnificent but Not War: The Battle for Ypres, 1915}: 105.
\textsuperscript{95} 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.
\textsuperscript{96} Kenneth Radley, \textit{We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918} (St. Catharines,
\textsuperscript{97} Edmonds to Duguid, 18 March 1925, DHS 3-17 (vol 1), RG 24 v1739, LAC.
\textsuperscript{98} 1135 A.M., 3rd Brigade Message Logs, 24 April 1915, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{99} Dancocks, \textit{Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography}: 50; Robert Laird Borden, \textit{Letters to Limbo} (Toronto:
University of Toronto Press, 1971), 59.
\textsuperscript{100} Defence of Ypres Account, File 73, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.
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. As Cecil Romer phrased it, “the Currie of April 1915 was not the Currie of August 1918.” 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. 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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101 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.

102 Romer Comments, 7, MG 4027 Acc. No 391 Ref 1-2, Urquhart Fonds; McGill.

103 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.
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. 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 25th April.”

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. It was so severe that the staff had to escape by swimming across a moat that surrounded the farm. A 2nd 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. 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.”

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.

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104 For instance, see Turner to Hetty, 15 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.
105 Staff Visits to 3rd Brigade, 8-1-10, RG 9 III A1 v28, LAC.
106 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.
107 Turner to Hetty, 9 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.
108 Napier Comments, File 50, MG 4027 C3, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.
110 Dr. Michael Meier, ‘Concussion Efects,’ 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.
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.\textsuperscript{111} Hughes attack was unjust and deeply wounding, and Alderson responded with a detailed letter refuting the claims.\textsuperscript{112} While Turner and Garnet Hughes were not directly involved in the exchange, it probably further undermined Alderson’s trust in Turner.

**Festubert**

The 1\textsuperscript{st} 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\textsuperscript{rd} 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.\textsuperscript{113} 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.\textsuperscript{114}

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

\textsuperscript{111} Hughes to Borden, 28 May 1915, 31777-31779, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{112} 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.

\textsuperscript{113} 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.

\textsuperscript{114} Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916*: 190.
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.\textsuperscript{115}

Second, General Sir Douglas Haig, commander of the First Army, assigned Alderson command of the 51\textsuperscript{st} Highland Division and the artillery of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} British and 7\textsuperscript{th} British Divisions, in a repeat of the errors at Second Ypres of over-loading commanders.\textsuperscript{116} 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\textsuperscript{th} Battalion claimed to Carson that both Currie and Turner went to Alderson to complain about how he was running the division.\textsuperscript{117} Haig was so furious about Alderson’s performance that he chastised Alderson and Romer about the ‘sketchy methods of Command’ of the

\textsuperscript{115} 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.

\textsuperscript{116} 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, \textit{Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson, 1914-18} (Oxford, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Basil Blackwell, 1992), 97; Radley, \textit{We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918}: 130.

\textsuperscript{117} Meighen to Carson, 25 May 1915, 6-M-10, RG 9 III A1 v174, LAC.
division and brigade staffs.\textsuperscript{118} 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\textsuperscript{nd} Division.\textsuperscript{119} The history of


\textsuperscript{119} 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 17 August 1917, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.
the 13th 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.”\textsuperscript{120} Turner’s first eight months in command of the 2nd Division and his conduct of the purported fiasco at St. Eloi Craters is the subject of the next chapter.

\textsuperscript{120} R. C Fetherstonhaugh, \textit{The 13th Battalion Royal Highlanders of Canada, 1914-1919} (13th Battalion, Royal Highlanders of Canada, 1925), 68.
3
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\textsuperscript{nd} 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.\textsuperscript{1} 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.\textsuperscript{2} 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\textsuperscript{nd} Division and Turner’s command up of the division to St. Eloi.

Formation of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division

The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division’s formation followed a different path than that of the 1\textsuperscript{st}

\textsuperscript{1} The battle extended beyond 16 April as the Germans retook several more craters, but the primary aspect of the battle ends on that date.

\textsuperscript{2} Dancocks, Gallant Canadians: The Story of the Tenth Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1914-1919: 81.
3 We Are in Desolate Places

Division. The British accepted a second contingent on 31 October 1914.³ Rather than being mobilised centrally, as was the 1st Division, the 2nd 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.⁴

The division consisted of the 4th, 5th and 6th Brigades. The 4th Brigade was from Ontario, with the 18th, 19th, 20th, and 21st Battalions. The 5th Brigade was a mix of units from the Maritimes and Quebec, consisting of the 22nd (French Canadian), 24th, 25th, and 26th Battalions. The 5th Brigade was unique, in possessing the only francophone battalion in the Canadian Corps. The 6th Brigade included battalions from all four western provinces - 27th, 28th, 29th, and 31st 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.

The training of the 2nd Division in Canada faced the same issues that confronted Territorial and New Army divisions in Britain, with inexperienced NCOs and officers inculcating outdated concepts. 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 2nd 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 1st Division, all but one of the battalion commanders in the 2nd Division were Militia officers, as were all the company commanders and the adjutants. First wave British New Army

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6 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 1st Division had two British Regular Army officers in
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.\(^7\)

### Figure 5  2nd Division Battalion Commanders’ Origins\(^8\)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Officer</th>
<th>2nd Division</th>
<th>Canadian Command</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>E. Wigle</td>
<td>18th Battalion</td>
<td>21st Regiment</td>
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<td>J. McLaren</td>
<td>19th Battalion</td>
<td>91st Regiment</td>
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<td>J. Allan</td>
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<td>H. Tobin</td>
<td>29th Battalion</td>
<td>Brigade-Major, 23rd Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Bell</td>
<td>31st Battalion</td>
<td>Captain, PF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An instructive comparison is with the 21\(^{st}\) British and 24\(^{th}\) 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\(^{nd}\) 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\(^{st}\) Division being command of battalions at Second Ypres, Lieutenant-Colonel A Birchall of the 4\(^{th}\) Battalion and Lieutenant-Colonel L. Lipsett of the 8\(^{th}\) Battalion.

\(^7\) 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.

\(^8\) Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914).*
active or retired Regulars. The staffs of the two divisions had more trained and experienced staff officers than did the 2nd Division. As a result, it is not surprising that the 2nd 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 2nd Division. Originally, Hughes thought to command the division, but Borden again dissuaded him, and instead Hughes recommended the PF officer, Major-General Sam Steele. 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. Kitchener, given Steele’s age (66) and inexperience, rejected him and offered any unemployed major-general on the Active List as a commander. Any

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10 Carson to Hughes, 23 February 1915, 8-5-10, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.
11 Hughes to Borden, 25 February 1915, 31763, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.
12 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 Stratchcona’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).
13 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,
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.\textsuperscript{14}

Sir John French preferred Currie command the 2\textsuperscript{nd} 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.’\textsuperscript{15} Alderson did not show this document to Turner, as required.\textsuperscript{16} 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.\textsuperscript{17} On learning of Turner’s appointment, Alderson was to lament “Canadian politics have been too strong for all of us.”\textsuperscript{18} Turner’s appointment was generally popular, however, as even an anti-government
paper, the *Manitoba Free Press*, approved. Turner officially took over command on 17 August.

In May, Hughes appointed three PF officers to command the brigades. Colonel Septimus Dennison commanded the 4th 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. 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.

Colonel J.P. Landry, initially, commanded the 5th 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. 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.

Watson, the new commander of the 5th Brigade, was a Militia officer who...
had commanded the 2nd 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. Watson would later rise to command the 4th 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.”

The commander of the 6th 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.

The GSO 1 was Lieutenant-Colonel H.D. De Pree, a British artillery officer,
who joined from the Lahore Division, at the end of May 1915.\textsuperscript{27} The GSO 2 was Major C.A. Ker, who transferred from the 21\textsuperscript{st} British Division.\textsuperscript{28} Ker, an artillery officer, was familiar to Canadians, as he was serving at RMC in Kingston, at the start of the war.\textsuperscript{29} De Pree moved at the end of January 1916, and Ker took over as GSO 1.\textsuperscript{30} The head administrative officer was Colonel P.E. Thacker, a PF, and Camberley trained staff officer.\textsuperscript{31} 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.\textsuperscript{32} 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.\textsuperscript{33} Captain Andrew Macphail, a doctor and noted Canadian literary figure, commented Turner “won instant devotion,
even from myself, who am not disposed to yield devotion upon first demand.\textsuperscript{34}

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).\textsuperscript{35} Turner instructed the brigades to conduct trench and open warfare training, and each brigade had to carry out a trench attack.\textsuperscript{36}

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.\textsuperscript{37} 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\textsuperscript{th} Battalion caused a near riot in the battalion.\textsuperscript{38} 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\textsuperscript{th} Battalion. Turner subsequently changed his mind, as the RCR was not ready for active service, and he thought


\textsuperscript{36} 2nd Division GS War Diary, 7 and 8 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.

\textsuperscript{37} 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.

better leadership could salvage the 20th Battalion, which it did under Lieutenant-Colonel C. Rogers.\textsuperscript{39}

**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 1st Division, there was no gradual introduction to the front-line and mentoring with an experienced division. The arrival of the 2nd Division also meant the formation of the Canadian Corps, with Alderson as corps commander and Currie taking over the 1st Division.

The defences the 2nd 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.\textsuperscript{40} 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.\textsuperscript{41} 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.\textsuperscript{42}

\textsuperscript{39} Turner to Carson, 9 September 1915, 8-5-8a, RG 9 III A1 v43, LAC.
\textsuperscript{40} Cooper, *Fourth Canadian Infantry Brigade: History of Operations, April 1915 to Demobilization*: 9.
\textsuperscript{41} Turner to Carson, 6 November 1915, 4-5-25, RG 9 III A1 v13, LAC.
\textsuperscript{42} 2nd C.I.D. Summary of Operations, 21 September - 7 October 1915, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.
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\textsuperscript{th} Brigade on five separate days.\textsuperscript{43} 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.\textsuperscript{44} Turner would spend hours investigating the situation, talking to the officers and men, and ensuring they knew their duties. He also

\textsuperscript{43} Watson Diary Entries, 23 September to 3 October 1915, MG 30 E69 Roll M-10, Watson Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{44} Holmes, Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918: 170.
tasked his ADCs to always carry copies of illustrated newspapers to hand out to men on his tours. This fitted the contemporary British model of man management.

Like most new formations in the terrible weather conditions of the winter of 1915/1916, the 2nd Division experienced its share of problems. The first was the poor response of the 25th 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. The only true protection was the trench; mines removed this last vestige of control and protection possessed by the soldier, hence the anxiety.

That some men panicked indicated problems with the battalion, therefore, Watson promptly replaced the commander and the second in command. 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 6th Brigade after inspecting their positions. Men in the 27th Battalion were not wearing required

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46 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).
49 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.
equipment, their rifles were dirty, and the infantry was not in proper communications with the artillery. Turner assured Alderson that the 6th Brigade was dealing with the problems.\textsuperscript{50} Alderson, however, undoubtedly took note of the offending officers, including Turner, Ketchen, and Lieutenant-Colonel I. Snider of the 27th Battalion, as all three would figure prominently at St. Eloi Craters.

The most damaging fault was prevalence of trench foot in the 2nd Division, in October and November of 1915, when conditions were at their worst. The 2nd 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 1st 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.\textsuperscript{51}

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.\textsuperscript{52} He also obtained boots, socks, and undershirts 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

\textsuperscript{50} Instruction to 2nd Cdn. Division, G.284, 28 November 1915, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.
\textsuperscript{51} Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 75-78.
\textsuperscript{52} 2nd Cdn Div A&Q Circular, 12 December 1915, RG 24 v6991, LAC.
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. 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.

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.” According to Max Aitken, Sam Hughes’ personal representative to GHQ and consummate fixer, Turner, Currie, and Alderson agreed to switch Brooke to command the 1st Brigade with Garnet Hughes getting the 4th Brigade. 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. Alderson, subsequently, changed his mind and assigned Garnet to command the 1st Brigade, as he believed Currie could keep Garnet out of trouble. Turner protested, as he was ‘exceedingly anxious’ that Garnet stay in

53 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.
54 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.
55 Booke had no front-line command experience. Turner to Carson, 1 December 1915, 8-5-8b, RG 9 III A1 v43, LAC.
56 Cable Aitken to Hughes, 28 September 1915, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.
57 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.
the 2nd Division, but was unsuccessful. 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 3rd 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.

Turner complained to Aitken about the replacement of a Canadian administrative officer, Major Homer-Dixon, with a British officer. In turn, Aitken lodged a complaint with the British authorities, which paid off, as Homer-Dixon was reappointed in January 1916. 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. 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. 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

58 Hughes was a GSO 2 in the 2nd Division at this time. Carson to Hughes, 29 October 1915, 8-5-8a, RG 9 III A1 v43, LAC.
59 Biography Robert Rennie, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC.
60 Homer-Dixon was the Deputy Assistant-Adjutant and Quartermaster General for the 2nd Division.
61 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.
62 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.
63 Canadian Corps War Diary, 25 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.
were available. The Colonial Secretary passed the protest to Kitchener, in December 1915, with the advice to treat the grievance seriously. 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. 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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64 Perley to Bonar Law, 29 December 1915, 7/6/5, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.
65 Alderson Extract, 1 March 1916, 39325-39333, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.
new weapons, such as the Lewis Gun and Stokes Mortar.\textsuperscript{66} 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\textsuperscript{th} 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.\textsuperscript{67} 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.

\section*{St. Eloi}

From 4 April, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} 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.\textsuperscript{68} 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.

\begin{quote}
\textsuperscript{67} 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.
\textsuperscript{68} Dan Jenkins, "Winning Trench Warfare: Battlefield Intelligence in the Canadian Corps, 1914-1919" (PhD, Carleton University, 1999), 168.
\end{quote}
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. The Germans had seized this height of land in March 1915. 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. 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. Haig was especially concerned with Lieutenant-General Hew Fanshawe, GOC V Corps, and Major-General Aylmer Haldane, GOC 3rd British Division, who would lead the initial attack at St. Eloi. 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.

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69 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.
71 Robertson to Haig, 7 January 1916, 7/6/10, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.
72 Haig to Robertson, 17 February 1916, 7/6/23, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.
The Second Army had initiated planning for an attack at St. Eloi in November in 1915 with mines tunnelled under the German front-line. Concerned that the Germans would discover the mines, the plan called for an attack, as soon as possible after 10 March, when the mines were to be ready. The 3rd British Division was to make the attack and consolidate the position. It would then hand over the sector to Turner’s division on the night of 6/7 April. When Turner learned of the plan, he immediately recommended to Alderson that the 2nd Division make the attack, as he believed a fresh division would more likely be successful. Ker, the 2nd Division’s GSO 1, later suggested the Canadians “would of [sic] made a complete success of it.” Alderson agreed with Turner, but Plumer rejected his request, as he did not want to risk the Germans discovering the mines, while the Canadians carried out the necessary training. There was probably also a reluctance to place his fate in the hands of

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75 Cmts. BOH, Keith, 3 February 1929, CAB 45/130, TNA.
76 Turner Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC.
77 Cmts. BOH, Ker, CAB 45/149, TNA.
3 We Are in Desolate Places

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

The 3rd 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.78 Despite its expertise, the 3rd 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 9th British, as the 76th British Brigade had lost 924 men at the Bluff, and the 8th British Brigade was crippled by 600 cases of trench feet, indicating a formation with severe leadership and morale problems.79 Two of the brigade commanders, including the commander of the 9th 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.80

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 3rd British Division identified the flaw in the plan as “the attack was fitted to the mines and

79 Official History, Draft Vol II Ch X Para 13, RG 24 v6992, LAC.
80 3rd Division Report to V Corps, 7 April 1916, WO 158/96, TNA.
not the mines to the attack."\(^\text{81}\) The 9\(^{th}\) 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 Hooge in 1915 was adamant that craters were shell traps and should not be defended.\(^\text{82}\)

The 3\(^{rd}\) 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."\(^\text{83}\) Heavy losses from artillery fire and exhaustion necessitated battalion reliefs every one to two days. Haldane had to commit first the 8\(^{th}\) British Brigade and then the 76\(^{th}\) 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.\(^\text{84}\) 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.\(^\text{85}\)

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\(^\text{81}\) Cmts. BOH, Harfund, 1 February 1929, CAB 45/130, TNA.
\(^\text{82}\) Haldane to V Corps, 4 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.
\(^\text{83}\) 3rd Division Report to V Corps, S.206, 30 March 1916, WO 158/96, TNA.
\(^\text{84}\) 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.
\(^\text{85}\) St. Eloi Enquiry, WO 158/402, TNA.
The 3rd 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,
trench mortars, and three communication trenches complete to the front lines.\textsuperscript{86} The reality was far different, as only one communication trench existed and it was one metre deep and filled with water. The 27\textsuperscript{th} Battalion found only four of the twelve expected Lewis Guns and these were not fully functional.\textsuperscript{87} The information handed over was inaccurate, incomplete, or entirely absent, because of the state of the ground and the exhausted state of the division.\textsuperscript{88} What is more, the ground had changed so much that Haldane’s GSO 1 twice lost his way in guiding the Canadians into position.\textsuperscript{89} Turner accused the 3\textsuperscript{rd} British Division of making no efforts to consolidate.\textsuperscript{90} 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.\textsuperscript{91} As Leppard states “Incredibly, Turner had received no orders or instructions from 2\textsuperscript{nd} Army, V Corps, or Canadian Corps.”\textsuperscript{92} Unfortunately, Turner implemented the flawed advice of Haldane – the ‘expert’ on crater warfare. Plumer’s principles of defence agreed with Haldane, so Turner

\textsuperscript{86} 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.

\textsuperscript{87} Bradley Report, 18 May 1917, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.

\textsuperscript{88} 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.

\textsuperscript{89} Macintyre Diary Entry, 4 April 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{90} Turner Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC.

\textsuperscript{91} Haldane to V Corps, 4 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.

\textsuperscript{92} Leppard, “Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi,” 38.
was also executing the Army commander’s intent. On 3 April, Haig criticised this policy, and called for units to hold craters, but this was not communicated to Turner. Subsequently, the BEF doctrine for consolidating craters changed to a fundamentally different policy than that recommended by Haldane.

The 2nd 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. 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. There are repeated references to men having to move through water and mud up to their waists and even armpits. 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. 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

93 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.
94 GHQ to 2nd Army, 3 April 1916, RG 9 III C1 v3842, LAC.
95 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).
97 3rd Division Report to V Corps, 7 April 1916, WO 158/96, TNA.
98 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.
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 9th British Brigade, who had occupied the sector for months, were unable to recognise it.\(^{100}\) 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.\(^{101}\) The craters themselves were a formidable obstacle with a width of forty-five to fifty-five metres and a depth of eighteen metres.\(^{102}\) 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.\(^{103}\)

\(^{100}\) Cmts. BOH, Buchanan, 18 February 1929, CAB 45/130, TNA.

\(^{101}\) 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.

\(^{102}\) The Fight for the Craters D.E. Macintyre, 1936?, GAQ 5-67, RG 24 v1825, LAC.

\(^{103}\) 2nd Division GS War Diary, Summary of Operations May 7th –14th, 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4843, LAC.
The 6th Brigade officially took over the line at 4:15 a.m. on 4 April, with the 27th Battalion on the right covering the majority of the salient and the 31st 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. The 2nd Division report characterised the front as little more than a line on the map. The conditions were so bad that carrying parties had to be roped together to prevent them vanishing in shell holes. 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.

105 Report on 2nd Canadian Division’s Operations at St. Eloi, 18 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.
106 C.A. Ker Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC.
Map 6  St. Eloi Craters, 4 and 6 April 1916

Map 3, St. Eloi Craters, 4 and 6 April 1916, page 140
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.\(^{107}\) There was confusion about the number of craters in the battle area.\(^{108}\) In addition, the division ordered the two front-line battalions to swap positions at the last minute, thus negating any preparations they had made.\(^{109}\) The 6\(^{th}\) 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.”\(^{110}\)

Turner, worried about the dire reports from the 6\(^{th}\) 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\(^{th}\) 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.”\(^{111}\) 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.\(^{112}\) Turner was all too accurate in this last assessment.

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

\(^{107}\) Macintyre Diary Entry, 4 April 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC.
\(^{108}\) Notes on a Conversation with Major A. Styles, D.S.O., 18 August 1922, GAQ 5-76, RG 24 v1826, LAC.
\(^{109}\) There was no explanation in the divisional account as to why the Turner ordered this change.
\(^{110}\) Report on 2nd Canadian Division’s Operations at St. Eloi, 18 April 1916, Folder 14 File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4679, LAC.
\(^{111}\) Interview J.M. Fryday and G. Gibson, 27th Bn, RG 41 v11, LAC.
\(^{112}\) Report on 2nd Canadian Division’s Operations at St. Eloi April 3rd to April 16th, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
destroyed any progress the Canadians made in constructing defences. The
shelling was so severe that one company of the 27th had to be relieved after
suffering fifty per cent losses. In reaction, Snider of the 27th 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.\footnote{I. Snider Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, 22 May 1929, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC.}

Ketchen tried touring his line on 5 April, but German shelling pinned him
and his party, so that he was unable to proceed.\footnote{Ketchen to Aitken, 28 July 1916, Folder 42/File 14, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC.} Ketchen was concerned
about the situation, and recommended pulling the line back to the craters, in
expectation of a German counterattack.\footnote{The Actions of St. Eloi Craters, Extracts from Ketchen Diary, GAQ 5-41, RG 24 v1823, LAC.} Turner did not believe, however, it
was feasible to shift the men and resources from the existing plan. The Germans
continued to pound the 27th and 31st 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.\footnote{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.}

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,
\textit{I/214th Reserve Regiment} and \textit{I/216th Reserve Regiment} of the 46th Reserve
Division, attacked at 3:30 a.m.\footnote{Nicholson, \textit{Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919}: 142.} The defenders were caught in a vulnerable
position. A delayed exchange of two companies of the 29th Battalion for two
companies of the 27th Battalion was not progressing well, so the defenders were not set. As a result only isolated detachments defended the central sector of the salient and they were not in contact with the 31st Battalion on their left. The defenders had to rely on hand grenades, as mud jammed most of their machine guns and rifles. 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. The Germans were slowed down by resistance from the 31st 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 6th Brigade was misleading, such that the 2nd 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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118 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.

119 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.

120 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.
credibility with Alderson.\textsuperscript{121}

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.\textsuperscript{122} 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\textsuperscript{nd} Division, but was one that affected the British army of 1916.\textsuperscript{123}

The 27\textsuperscript{th} and 29\textsuperscript{th} Battalions were to retake Craters 2 and 3, while the 28\textsuperscript{th} and 31\textsuperscript{st} 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\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, reinforced with bombers from the 28\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, captured what they thought was Craters 4 and 5, but were actually Craters 6 and 7.\textsuperscript{124} They made the same mistake as the 3\textsuperscript{rd} British Division. The brigade and division accepted this faulty positioning and it became the baseline

\textsuperscript{121} 2nd Division GS War Diary, Messages Received 6 April, Appendix 159, April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4842, LAC.
\textsuperscript{122} 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.
\textsuperscript{124} Crater 7 was the result a previous mine explosion.
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.¹²⁵

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.¹²⁶ 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.¹²⁷ A report from Major Parsons at the front-line of “very heavy casualties and men very much shaken by bombardment,” undoubtedly influenced this decision.¹²⁸ 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

¹²⁶  6th CIB at St Eloi Appendix No. 1, 12 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
¹²⁷  Report on 2nd Canadian Division’s Operations at St. Eloi April 3rd to April 16th, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
¹²⁸  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

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.”

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.

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

129 Leppard, “Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi,” 57, 64.
130 Counterattacks; H. De Pree General Staff, Undated, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.
131 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.
intervene. Snider subsequently paid the price for his decision with his dismissal.

Turner decided and Alderson agreed that the 6th Brigade was exhausted and Rennie’s 4th 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. 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. Alderson, in turn, proposed to the Second Army to widen the attack front even more. Plumer, after briefly considering Turner’s second option, visited 2nd Division’s headquarters on 8 April and rejected all three alternatives, in part believing the Canadians held Craters 4 and 5. While there, Plumer dictated how the battalions in the 4th Brigade were to hold the trenches. 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 2nd Division, and an unwarranted interference into command

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132 MG at St Eloi Report, Lieut. S. Brown to O.C. 22nd Battalion, 7 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
133 Watson Diary Entry, 7 April 1916, MG 30 E69 Roll M-10, Watson Fonds; LAC.
134 Report on 2nd Canadian Division’s Operations at St. Eloi April 3rd to April 16th, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
135 Warning Order from Cdn Corps G.37, 7 April 1916, Folder 42 File 3, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.
136 2nd Cdn Division to 4th Brigade G.571, 8 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4843, LAC.
With the rejection of the alternatives, Turner instructed Rennie to retake Craters 2 and 3. On successive nights, the 4th 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. It was not until the morning of 11 April that engineering work parties discovered the truth that the

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117 Plumer as GOC, Second Army was bypassing the corps, division, and brigade commanders to dictate battalion operations.

118 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.
4th Brigade had captured two of the ubiquitous pre-existing craters, and not Craters 2 and 3.\textsuperscript{139}

Originally, Watson’s 5th Brigade was to replace the 4th 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.\textsuperscript{140}

Alderson now had to explain the situation to Plumer, and Alderson claimed the 2nd Division was solely responsible for the inaccurate information. Alderson chose to ignore any responsibility of the 3rd British Division for its poor information hand-over. Plumer was angry and made his dissatisfaction apparent to Alderson.\textsuperscript{141} No longer trusting the 2nd 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.\textsuperscript{142} 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

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{139} Canadian Corps Operations, 12 April 1916, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{140} ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{141} ibid.}
\footnote{\textsuperscript{142} Lt. S.A Vernon’s Reconnaissance Report, Night 11/12th April, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.}
\end{footnotes}
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 25th Battalion, of the abysmal field conditions made a successful attack ‘an impossibility.’\(^{143}\) 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 2nd 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.\(^{144}\)

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.”\(^{145}\) 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.\(^{146}\)

\(^{143}\) Report by Col. Hilliam 25th Bn., 12 April 1916, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.
\(^{144}\) 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.
\(^{145}\) Canadian Corps Operations, 12 April 1916, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.
\(^{146}\) 2nd Division GS War Diary, 14 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4842, LAC.
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.”

Units were not to withdraw from positions without reference to superior authorities, in reaction to the 27th 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.

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 2nd Division had not known its own positions for ten days kicked off a bitter battle over responsibility. Both Alderson and Harington 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.’

Alderson and Harington’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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147 2nd Cdn Division G.685, 12 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.
149 Alderson to Turner; Harrington to Turner, 16 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.
3 We Are in Desolate Places

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

Figure 8 St. Eloi Aerial Photograph, 16 April 1916

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.”¹⁵¹ How valid is that characterisation? The division suffered 1,372 casualties versus only

¹⁵⁰ Haig was also reacting to the discovery that a senior staff officer in the 3rd 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.

¹⁵¹ Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 72.
483 for the Germans. Over the thirteen days of the battle from 4 to 16 April, the 2nd 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 2nd Division suffered 1,953 casualties and in June, during the Mount Sorrel battle, it suffered almost the same total of 1,949 men. As a percentage of forces engaged, the 2nd Division suffered a loss rate of 8%, which was markedly lower than even the most successful engagements at Amiens at 13% and Vimy 16%.

**Figure 9  Canadian Battle Loss Percentage 1915-1918**

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

If compared to the first major engagements of the 1st and 3rd Canadian and the 5th Australian Divisions, the 2nd 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 1st 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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153 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, April and June 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.
154 The 8% figure was derived by dividing the 1,373 casualties against a nominal strength of the 2nd Division of 17,000 men.
five days the Canadians fought. At Mount Sorrel, the 3rd 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.

The 5th 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. 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. By these measures, the 2nd 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 2nd Division. 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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158 McCay moved to an administrative post in England after Fromelles to a mixed success. See Wray, Sir James Whiteside McCay: A Turbulent Life.
160 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.
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.”

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 6th 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 6th Brigade supposedly recaptured Craters 4 and 5. Macintyre’s 9 April 1916 report to Turner, however, does not support this claim, as it suggests the 6th Brigade had retaken Craters 4 and 5.

Statements of prisoners taken on 6 April clearly indicate the Germans

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162 Campbell, ““A Leap in the Dark” – Intelligence and the Struggle for the St. Eloi Craters: Reassessing the Role of Major-General Richard Turner,” 40.
163 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.
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 6th Brigade counterattacks.164

The most powerful complaint used to assail Turner was the failure to properly interpret aerial photographs taken on 8 April.165 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.166 Second, the corps passed the photographs to the 2nd 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.167 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 4th Brigade. Even

164 Jenkins, "Winning Trench Warfare: Battlefield Intelligence in the Canadian Corps, 1914-1919," 175.
166 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.
167 Campbell, "‘A Leap in the Dark’ – Intelligence and the Struggle for the St. Eloi Craters: Reassessing the Role of Major-General Richard Turner," 38.
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.\textsuperscript{168} 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\textsuperscript{rd} British Division. The

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 2nd 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.”

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. At St. Eloi, the 3rd 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. 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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171 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.
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Somme.\textsuperscript{172} This, also, does not account for the German observation advantage, as Graham and Bidwell phrased it “effective fire was observed fire.”\textsuperscript{173}

There was apparently no shell shortage limiting the German fire. Snider of the 27\textsuperscript{th} 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.\textsuperscript{174} A British artillery officer claimed he had not seen such heavy artillery fire, in a year in the Ypres Salient.\textsuperscript{175}

In contrast to the forty batteries supporting the Germans, the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division had twenty-three and half batteries on call and they were limited by restrictive daily shell allowances.\textsuperscript{176} 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.\textsuperscript{177} 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.\textsuperscript{178} Aitken reported to Borden that the Canadian artillery daily allotment was three and half rounds per gun, while the Germans had an unlimited supply.\textsuperscript{179} The result was the German

\textsuperscript{172} 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\textsuperscript{nd} 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.

\textsuperscript{173} Radley, We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918: 91.

\textsuperscript{174} Leppard, “Richard Turner and the Battle of St. Eloi,” 47.

\textsuperscript{175} Plain Narrative of the St Eloi Defence, Comments Lt Bradley, 17 May 1916, CID-11, RG 9 III D1 v4770, LAC.

\textsuperscript{176} Can. Corps Summary of Operations 1st April 21st April 1916, MG 30 E46 v1, Turner Fonds; LAC.


\textsuperscript{178} Official History, Draft Vol II Ch VII, RG 24 v6992, LAC.

\textsuperscript{179} Cable Aitken to Borden, 17 April 1916, 112840, MG 26 H1 v202, Borden Fonds; LAC.
artillery advantage was insurmountable.

   The German artillery destroyed the defences faster than the Canadians could build them. The 2nd 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.\footnote{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.} 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.\footnote{2nd Division St Eloi Defensive Scheme G.S. 577 4 April 1916, Folder 42 File 3, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.} 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.” Watson also complained that the Germans were able to get more work out of their troops.\footnote{The Fight for the Craters D.E. Macintyre, 1936?, GAQ 5-67, RG 24 v1825, LAC.} 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.\footnote{Report of 5th CIB, 11 April to 18 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.}

   The German artillery’s constant interruption of communications contributed to the difficulty in managing the battle. The 6th Brigade Signal
Officer reported, on taking over the line, only a single line to the 27th Battalion and the division functioned. During the German counterattack, these lines were knocked out. 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. Battalion scouts provided most of the runners, which prevented them from reconnoitring enemy positions, which further contributed to the intelligence failure.

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 3rd 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
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.\textsuperscript{188}

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.\textsuperscript{189} 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.\textsuperscript{190}

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

\textsuperscript{188} Turner was happy to report to his wife after the Somme that the 2\textsuperscript{nd} 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.

\textsuperscript{189} Turner presented alternatives before the battle, on 7 April, and 12 April.

\textsuperscript{190} Interview with General Burstall, HQ 650-52-7 v5 f.133, RG 24 v6990, LAC.
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Ashworth in *Live and Let Live*, also termed ‘consent and evade’ by Professor Gary Sheffield.  
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.” 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.

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.

192 Plain Narrative of the St Eloi Defence, Comments Lt Bradley, 17 May 1916, CID-11, RG 9 III D1 v4770, LAC.
193 Alderson to AMS 2 Army, G.271, 18 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v5075, LAC.
194 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
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.\textsuperscript{195} 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.\textsuperscript{196}

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.\textsuperscript{197} This indicates considerable dissatisfaction with the battalion and its command structure. Snider’s removal was unpopular with his troops but was necessary.\textsuperscript{198} Major G. Daly of the 31\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, who had performed well during the battle, was tasked with rebuilding the battalion.\textsuperscript{199}

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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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.” 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 6th Brigade as other units, but it did not justify Ketchen’s dismissal. 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. 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.”

200 Report to 2nd Army Canadian Corps G.265, 18 April 1916, RG 9 III C1 v3842, LAC.
201 Alderson to Second Army G284, 18 April 1916, WO 158/296, TNA.
202 ibid.
203 Cable Aitken to Hughes, 24 April 1916, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.
Alderson also wrote an adverse report on Turner.²⁰⁴ 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.²⁰⁵ 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 2nd Division in a difficult situation, unlike the 1st or 3rd Divisions.

Plumer agreed and requested Haig dismiss Turner.²⁰⁶

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.²⁰⁷ 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.’²⁰⁸ 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

²⁰⁴ Alderson to Second Army G271, 18 April 1916, WO 158/296, TNA.
²⁰⁵ The Ketchen report is numbered G.284 and the Turner report is numbered G.271. Typically, the reference numbers are in sequential order.
²⁰⁷ Turner to Canadian Corps, 19 April 1916, RG 9 III C1 v3842, LAC.
²⁰⁸ 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.
representations to the British authorities.\textsuperscript{209}

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.\textsuperscript{210} 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.”\textsuperscript{211}

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.\textsuperscript{212} One interesting aspect of this analysis is Haig’s implicit assumption that only a Canadian officer would

\textsuperscript{209} Cable Aitken to Hughes, 20 April 1916, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{210} Aitken to Borden, 15 December 1916 (sic for 1915), v5, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{211} Beckles Willson, \textit{From Quebec to Piccadilly and Other Places: Some Anglo-Canadian Memories} (London: J. Cape, 1929), 213.

\textsuperscript{212} Haig Diary Entry, 21 April 1916, Part 1 No. 96, Part 1: Haig’s Autograph Great War Diary, Haig Papers; National Library of Scotland.
command a Canadian division.  

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. Ketchen contacted his political protector, Robert Rogers, to ask for the 4th Division or the command of the Canadian Training Division at Shorncliffe. He knew of the manoeuvres to displace the incumbent at Shorncliffe.

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.” 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. 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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213 Supporting this assertion was after Major-General Malcolm Mercer, GOC 3rd 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.

214 Ketchen to 2nd Division G.284, 22 April 1916, Folder 42/File 14, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC.

215 Ketchen to Rogers, 24 April 1916, 31815-31817, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

216 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.

217 Turner to Aitken, 24 April 1916, RG 9 III, D1 v4676, LAC.

218 The letter is unsigned but is probably from Sims. Unsigned to Aitken, 25 April 1916, A1765, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.
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 21st 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.” 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 2nd Division CRA, sending a trusted staff officer to England to discuss ‘current events’ that Morrison did not want to put into writing.

Aitken travelled to Haig’s headquarters on 23 April to save Turner – he was unaware of Haig’s early decision to retain Turner. 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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219 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.

220 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.

221 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.
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.\textsuperscript{222}

Aitken’s solution was to appoint Alderson the Inspector-General of Canadian forces in England.\textsuperscript{223} 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.\textsuperscript{224} Haig recommended Alderson accept the offer, and Alderson interpreted it as an order.\textsuperscript{225} 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.\textsuperscript{226} 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.\textsuperscript{227} As a result, Alderson transferred back to the British Army in September 1916 and continued to serve in England, as an Inspector-

\textsuperscript{222} Travers, “The Hidden Army: Structural Problems in the British Officer Corps, 1900-1918,” 533.
\textsuperscript{223} Extract Cable Aitken to Borden, 26 April 1916, 31808, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{224} Haig Diary Entry, 23 April 1916, Part 1 No. 96, Part 1: Haig’s Autograph Great War Diary, Haig Papers; National Library of Scotland.
\textsuperscript{225} 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.
\textsuperscript{226} 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 28 May 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.
\textsuperscript{227} 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.
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Turner learned from Aitken on 27 April that he was safe. Turner, however, was not convinced and was still expressing concern in early May that “action is being delayed too long as regard Alderson.” Turner unfairly blamed Alderson for a lack of support during the battle. 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. Regarding Alderson, Turner claimed, “I am not easily made angry, but I am slow to forget.” He refused to shake Alderson’s hand in the presence of Perley during a later attempted reconciliation. Alderson, on the other hand, remained a gentleman and wrote a note congratulating Turner on receiving his knighthood in 1917. Turner did not acknowledge it.

Alderson provided useful service in preparing the 1st 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

228 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.
229 Cable Aitken to Turner, 27 April 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
230 Turner to Carson, 5 May 1916, 4-5-13b, RG 9 III A1 v12, LAC.
231 Turner Comments on British Official History, St Eloi, DHS 3-17 (vol 4), RG 24 v1739 LAC.
232 For instance, see Turner to Hetty, 16 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.
233 Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.
234 Ibid.
235 Alderson to Turner, 5 June 17, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.6, 19710147-007, Turner Fonds; CWM.
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. Ker said of Turner, “I am more sorry than I can say, to leave the Canadians, and particularly General Turner.” 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 2nd 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. Webber did so well that he became the Canadian Corps BGGS in April 1918.

Turner later claimed he replaced the battalion commanders of the 18th, 19th, 26th, and 27th Battalions, because of St. Eloi. This is somewhat disingenuous, as Alderson was responsible for writing the adverse report on

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236 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 63rd 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.
237 Ker Correspondence File, RG 9 III A1 v167, LAC.
238 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.
239 Biography Norman William Webber, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC.
240 Turner Interview, 14 March 1934, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.
Lieutenant-Colonel J. McAvity of the 26th Battalion on 6 May that resulted in McAvity’s return to Canada.\textsuperscript{241} Lieutenant-Colonel E. Wigle of the 18th Battalion returned to Canada after his wife was diagnosed with cancer, leaving him to care for a young family.\textsuperscript{242} Hughes recalled Lieutenant-Colonel J. McLaren of the 19th Battalion to Canada for instructional duties, but this was probably a cover for his relief.\textsuperscript{243} It is likely Lieutenant-Colonel H.S. Tobin, of the 29th Battalion, was relieved at the same time as McLaren, as Tobin transferred to England and held no important position there.\textsuperscript{244}

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.\textsuperscript{245} Haig explained, as he could not remove Turner, someone else needed to pay the price.\textsuperscript{246} This speaks to Tim Travers’ notion of the ‘almost ritualistic quality’ of dismissals.\textsuperscript{247}

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

\textsuperscript{241} McAvity was subsequently court-martialled in Canada, but the details of the trial are unavailable. McAvity Correspondence Files, 6-Mc-284, RG 9 II A1 v186, LAC.

\textsuperscript{242} Wigle Correspondence File, 6-W-204, RG 9 II A1 v234, LAC.

\textsuperscript{243} McLaren Correspondence Files, 6-Mc-169, RG 9 II A1 v186, LAC.

\textsuperscript{244} 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 17 July 1916, RG 9 II D3 v4848, LAC.

\textsuperscript{245} Haldane called Fanshawe a ‘real sahib’ for this refusal. Cmts. BOH, Haldane, 28 July 1929, CAB 45/130, TNA.

\textsuperscript{246} Timothy Travers, \textit{The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918} (London: Allen & Unwin, 1987), 23.

\textsuperscript{247} Travers, “The Hidden Army: Structural Problems in the British Officer Corps,1900-1918,” 528, 533.
Army’s] particular ethos and widespread reputation for operational efficiency.”

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. 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. 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 2nd 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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248 Simkins, “Herbert Plumer’s Second Army, 1915-1917,” 146.
249 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.
250 Alderson to Second Army G271, 18 April 1916, WO 158/296, TNA.
3 We Are in Desolate Places

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.251 Sam Hughes headed the committee that selected the Ross, and he continued to play a central role in its evolution.252 As a result, Hughes believed in its superiority, and its success at the Bisley rifle matches further reinforced Hughes’ belief.253

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.254 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

252 The GOC, Canadians, Earl Dundonald called the selection process a ‘put up job.’ Dundonald, My Army Life: 204.
254 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 Ill A1 v176, LAC; Turner to Carson, 29 March 1916, 4-5-13b, RG 9 Ill A1 v12, LAC; Report on Test of Ross Rifle, 16 October 1915, Folder 2 File 4, RG 9 Ill C3 v4083, LAC; 2nd Canadian Division, RO 1313, 21 October 1915, RG 9 Ill B3 v3789, LAC.
supported him. This last factor became especially important after St. Eloi.

Sir John French ordered the 1st Division to convert to the SMLE in June 1915, because of the problems at Second Ypres. The 2nd Division crossed to France with the Ross, because the British could not provide sufficient SMLEs without delaying the division’s crossing. Alderson wanted the Ross replaced and he and Hughes engaged in a bitter battle over it. 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. The 2nd Division’s response gave at best an equivocal reaction to the questions, with the company commanders more opposed than the senior ones. There is, however, strong evidence that Turner, after viewing the initial opinions, placed pressure on his commanders to make the results more favourable. 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.

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

255 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 Ill A1 v12, LAC.

256 Carson to Hughes, 31 August 1915, 4-5-13b, RG 9 Ill A1 v12, LAC.


258 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, May 1916, RG 9 Ill D3 v4848, LAC.


260 Gibson to Duguid, 22 October 1932, HQ 683-1-30-1, RG 24 v1502, LAC; Sims to Aitken, 9 May 1916, A1765, MG 27 ll 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.

261 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 Ill D3 v4848, LAC.
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 2nd Division. This increased efficiency would culminate in Turner’s greatest victory as a commander, the Battle of Courcelette, on the Somme. Turner’s actions leading up to Courcelette, the battle, and follow-on engagements are the subject of the next chapter.
‘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

Turner and the 2nd 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. Courcelette, a ‘forgotten victory,’ demonstrated Turner’s maturation as a combat commander, ability to prepare his division for the Somme, and improved battle management. Turner’s development of the division is why the Germans rated the 2nd Division, prior to the Somme, as one of the top eight divisions in the British Army. This chapter will examine the training leading to the battle, the victory, and the two less successful

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1 Turner Diary Entry, 22 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.
2 Robbins, British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18: Defeat into Victory: 25.
3 Campbell, "A Forgotten Victory: Courcelette, 15 September 1916."*  
4 The 1st Division was also rated as one of the top eight divisions. The 3rd 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.
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 21st Battalion, highlights this problem.\(^5\) On 19 or 20 April, Turner discovered Lieutenant-Colonel Hughes had withdrawn the 21st 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.\(^6\) Subsequently, Haig rejected Hughes’ June nomination to command the 10th Brigade, because of Turner’s adverse report.\(^7\) Turner’s volte-face incensed Carson, as earlier; Turner had confirmed Hughes was the best battalion

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\(^6\) 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 2nd 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 2nd Division about the poor performance of the 6th Brigade in its counterattacks on 19 and 20 April. Harington to 2nd Canadian Division, G.305, 20 April 1916, RG 24 v6992, LAC.

\(^7\) Francis Davie Military Secretary to Carson, 8 June 1916, 8-5-8F, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC.
commander in the 4th Brigade. Carson complained Turner had “certainly burned his boats behind him with that statement.”

Carson asked Turner in a veiled threat why he had changed his mind. 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. Hughes received the 10th Brigade in July 1916. 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 4th Division in England. 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 1st Division. What was intriguing was that Alderson did not believe any battalion commander in

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8 Turner rated Hughes second after Lieutenant-Colonel J. Embury of the 28th Battalion in the 6th Brigade for promotion to Brigade GOC. Turner to Carson, 23 March 1916, 8 8-1-70, RG 9 III A1 v31, LAC.
9 Carson to Aitken, 9 June 1916, 8-5-8F, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC.
10 Carson to Turner, 12 June 1916, 8-5-8F, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC.
11 Turner to Carson, 15 June 1916, RG 9 III A1 v154, LAC.
12 Watson, then the 4th 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.
13 2nd Division A&Q War Diary, 17 April 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4848, LAC.
the 2nd Division was suitable for promotion. 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. He took over command of the RCR in England and took them to France, as part of the 3rd Division. He later earned Currie’s ire, with Currie removing him in July 1917, ostensibly because of exhaustion.

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 4th 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 20th Battalion, transferred as well. Turner tried having him replaced in April 1916, because of Roger’s repeated leaves during operations, including during St. Eloi. 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 28th Battalion commanded brigades in the Canadian Corps.

14 Subsequently, four of the battalion commanders in the 2nd Division at that time – Bell, Embury, Hughes, and Tremblay – commanded brigades in the Canadian Corps.
15 Defence, *The Quarterly Militia List of the Dominion of Canada (Corrected to June 30, 1914)*: 11, 413.
16 Biography AH Macdonell, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC.
17 Currie complained about the 5th 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.
18 Turner to Carson, 15 April 1916, 6-R-13, RG 9 III A1 v205, LAC.
promoted and not Rogers.\(^{19}\) Turner tried to complete the task of cleaning out the dead wood in the division, but there was no position in England for Rogers.\(^{20}\)

**Figure 10  2\(^{nd}\) Division Command Changes – September 1915/November 1916**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Officer</th>
<th>Fate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GSO 1</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel H. De Pree</td>
<td>Transferred</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GSO 1</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel C. Ker</td>
<td>Transferred*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4(^{th}) Brigade GOC</td>
<td>Brigadier-General Lord Brooke</td>
<td>Transferred*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5(^{th}) Brigade GOC</td>
<td>Brigadier-General D. Watson</td>
<td>Promoted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel E. Wigle</td>
<td>Compassionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel H. Milligan</td>
<td>Compassionate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel J. McLaren</td>
<td>Removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel C. Rogers</td>
<td>Transferred*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21(^{st}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel W. Hughes</td>
<td>Promoted</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22(^{nd}) Battalion</td>
<td>Colonel F. Gaudet</td>
<td>Removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel T. Tremblay</td>
<td>Injured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel J. Gunn</td>
<td>Transferred*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel G. LeCain</td>
<td>Removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel J. McAvity</td>
<td>Removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel J. Snider</td>
<td>Removed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel J. Embury</td>
<td>Wounded(^{21})</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel H. Tobin</td>
<td>Transferred*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>–</td>
<td>Lieutenant-Colonel J. Tait</td>
<td>Injured(^{22})</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates a case where the transfer was a removal but in a politically expedient fashion.

The 2\(^{nd}\) Division was indirectly involved in the engagement at Mount Sorrel in June 1916 that so battered the 3\(^{rd}\) 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\(^{th}\) Brigade to the 3\(^{rd}\) Division, and

\(^{19}\) Turner to Carson, 21 August 1916, 6-E-45, RG 9 III A1 v142, LAC.
\(^{20}\) Turner had Rogers transferred to England in November 1916.
\(^{22}\) H.R.N. Clynne, *Vancouver’s 29th (Tobin’s Tigers Association, 1964)*, 17.
it replaced the 7th Brigade in line on the night of 5/6 June.\textsuperscript{23} At 2:00 p.m. on 6 June, the Germans fired four mines under the front-line of the 28th Battalion, annihilating the defenders.\textsuperscript{24} 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 31st Battalion failed entirely, but the two front-line battalions, the 28th and 31st, suffered sizeable losses.\textsuperscript{25} Byng, who was more pragmatic than Alderson, decided against retaking the position.\textsuperscript{26} What is sometimes overlooked in the description of this engagement was that the 6th Brigade was under the command of the 3rd 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 24th Battalion spending

\textsuperscript{23} The two battalions of the 6th Brigade, the 28th and 31st Battalions, replaced four battalions of the 7th Brigade.
\textsuperscript{25} 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 Ill 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.
\textsuperscript{26} Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 158-159.
nine days in July undergoing intense instruction. 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. In expectation of heavy officer losses,
each battalion received fourteen supernumerary subalterns in July and
August. 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.

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.

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. An offer
from the Prince of Wales resulted in Byng’s transfer to the prestigious 10th
Royal Hussars, in 1883. He served in India, the Sudan, and in South Africa;

27 R. C. (Robert Collier) Fetherstonhaugh, 1892-1949, The 24th Battalion, C.E.F., Victoria Rifles of
28 2nd Canadian Division, RO 2642, 10 August 1916, RG 9 III B3 v3789, LAC.
29 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.
30 2nd Division GS War Diary, 2 and 8 August 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.
32 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.
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 3rd 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.33

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.34 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.35 Byng played a decisive role in the increasing capability and effectiveness of the Canadian Corps.36

He was successful in navigating the intricacies of a national contingent

34 Cook, At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916: 345.
35 Radley, We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918: 160.
36 For more see, Brennan, "Julian Byng and Leadership in the Canadian Corps."
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.\(^{37}\) 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.\(^{38}\) He also affirmed that he was going to be responsible for recommendations for appointments and promotions.\(^{39}\) 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.\(^{40}\) This decision is of interest because of its consequences and nature. According to David Campbell, the units of the 2\(^{nd}\) 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.\(^{41}\) Raids were controversial as to their utility.\(^{42}\) Raids could be costly, and the losses


\(^{38}\) Carson wrote the Corps commanders repeatedly with demands and requests from Hughes and others. See RG 9 III A1 v109-240

\(^{39}\) Sims to Aitken, 8 June 1916, A1765, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.

\(^{40}\) Raids, GS 1096, 6 August 1916, Folder 43 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.


\(^{42}\) 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."
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. In the case of the 2nd 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. 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. 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,

43 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.
45 Robbins, British Generalship on the Western Front 1914-18: Defeat into Victory: 34.
because of this lack of confidence.46

The division pulled out of the line starting 24 August and moved to training areas to ready for the Somme offensive. The 2nd 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.47

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.48

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.49 Turner also visited the Australian Corps to learn of their experiences on 26 August.50 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

47 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.
48 Notes on Fighting in Somme, 21 August 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
49 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.
50 Turner Diary Entry, 26 August 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.
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. 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.

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 28th Battalion to demonstrate what he expected. 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. 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.

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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51 2nd Canadian Division G.930, 25 August 1916, Folder 46/File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4114, LAC.
55 Mcintyre Hood Interview, Transcript 76/169/1, IWM, 8.
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.\textsuperscript{56} The attack was subordinated to the artillery plan, whose primary objective was to destroy the enemy.\textsuperscript{57} As Bidwell and Graham put it, fire effect was achieved through “quantity not quality of fire.”\textsuperscript{58} 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.\textsuperscript{59} 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

\textsuperscript{56} 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.

\textsuperscript{57} 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.

\textsuperscript{58} Shelford Bidwell and Dominick Graham, Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945 (London ; Boston: Allen and Unwin, 1982), 114.

shows company and battalion bombers as separate from the normal organisation.\textsuperscript{60}

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 Courcelette demonstrated the progress.

**Apotheosis: Courcelette 15 September**

The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division attack was part of a much larger assault, known as the Flers-Courcelette offensive, stretching across a sixteen kilometre front and involving both the Reserve and Fourth Armies.\textsuperscript{61} 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.\textsuperscript{62} Haig was counting in part on a greater concentration of artillery and a secret weapon – tanks.\textsuperscript{63}

\textsuperscript{60} Notes on Fighting in Somme, 21 August 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{63} Travers, The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918: 178-184.
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 3rd Division on the left and the 2nd Division on the right. The selection of the 2nd Division to make the primary attack at Courcelette signalled Byng’s estimation of the 2nd Division. The 2nd Division had the more difficult task and Byng could have just as readily chosen the 3rd Division to make the main thrust. Byng’s decision, therefore, to rely on Turner and the 2nd 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. The Ridge ran gently down slope to the village of Courcelette that in turn overlooked a valley curving around it to the

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64 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.
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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 Courcelette.
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Map 8  Courcelette, 15 September 1916

Map 6 Courcelette, 15 September 1916, Page 170
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. The Refinery was a sugar beet processing facility built of cement and brick that was critical in three respects. The Germans had heavily fortified it, like the village of Courcelette, 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. Water supply was repeatedly referred to in preparation for the battle and in after battle reviews. 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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65 It was also referred to as the Sugar Factory.
66 Canadian Corps War Diary, Summary of Intelligence, 13 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.
67 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.
68 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.
Mouquet Farm, over two kilometres distant.\textsuperscript{69} 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.\textsuperscript{70}

\textbf{Figure 12  Courcelette Sugar Refinery Intelligence Diagram}\textsuperscript{71}

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\textsuperscript{69} Paul Reed, \textit{Courcelette} (London: Leo Cooper, 1998), 130. Paul Reed lived in the village, so was aware of the local stories.

\textsuperscript{70} The nearest water source was probably Miraumont close to four kilometres north of Courcelette.

\textsuperscript{71} Canadian Corps War Diary, Summary of Intelligence, 13 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.
The 45th Reserve Division, the sister division to the 2nd Division’s nemesis at St. Eloi the 46th 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 6th Brigade, the left formation of the 2nd Division, attacked the II/210th Reserve Regiment and the 4th Brigade on the right assaulted the II/211th Reserve Regiment, with the III/211th Reserve defending the Sugar Refinery. Garrisoning Courcelette was the remainder of the 210th Reserve Regiment, plus elements of the 133rd Reserve Regiment sent during the day to reinforce the badly battered 45th 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.

The 2nd 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 Courcelette to Martinpuich. 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 Courcelette and capture it if possible.

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72 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.
73 The Reserve Army, unlike the Fourth Army, had not reached the German Third Position.
74 Reserve Army Preliminary Operations Order, 8 September 1916, RG 9 Ill D3 v5069, LAC.
Turner ordered his brigadiers to submit plans on 10 September with the suggestion that the 6th Brigade attack with two battalions and the 4th Brigade with three battalions because of its greater attack frontage and depth of advance.\footnote{2nd CID Preliminary Orders GS 1166, 8 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.} Turner’s initial plan, submitted on 11 September, was noteworthy in three respects.\footnote{2nd CID Orders GS 1174 11 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.} 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 2nd 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,
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 4th Brigade but not the 6th Brigade, possibly because of the shallowness of the advance.77

In reaction to Turner’s proposed plan, the corps’ final operational order explicitly ordered the 2nd Division to send patrols into Courcelette and that, thirty minutes after reaching the final objective, the protective barrage before Courcelette would lift to allow patrols to enter the village.78 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.79

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


78 Canadian Corps Operational Order No. 46, 13 September 1916, Folder 30/File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4093, LAC.

79 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.
tank representatives to understand the tanks’ actual capabilities, and the
orders highlight this lack of experience. 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.’

The final version of the 2nd 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 Courcelette would lift and three
patrols of one officer and thirty men from the 6th Brigade would probe the
village’s defences. Further, in the final conference at the Army headquarters,
Gough agreed there was to be no organised attack on Courcelette until the
Fourth Army was in position on the right, but he wanted the Canadians to
push into Courcelette if they could do so without assistance. 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.

Nine field artillery brigades supported the division’s attack, with sixty-
four heavy artillery pieces supporting the overall Canadian assault. The
resulting concentration was double that of the 1 July attack and, once the

80 Hammond, “The Theory and Practice of Tank Cooperation with Other Arms on the Western
Front in the First World War,” 59.
81 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.
82 2nd Canadian Division Operation Order No. 78, 14 September 1916, Folder 6/File 3, RG 9 III
D1 v4677, LAC.
83 Notes for Army Conference, 14 September 1916, Folder 43/File 13, RG 9 III C1 v3842, LAC.
84 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.
85 Edmonds, Military Operations: France and Belgium, 1916, 2: 294; Campbell, "A Forgotten
attack depth is factored in, the concentration was five times. 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. The creeping barrage was a response to the German practice of stationing machine guns and snipers in shell holes in the intervals between trenches. 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.

The 6th Brigade on the left attacked with the 28th Battalion and the 27th

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89 Untitled (6th Brigade Report on Courcelette), 9 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
Battalion on the right and the 31st Battalion responsible for mopping up. The 4th Brigade on the right attacked with the 21st Battalion, 20th Battalion, and the 18th Battalion on the right, and the 19th Battalion tasked with mopping up. The attack formation was deep, consisting of five or six waves. 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 18th and 20th Battalions at 3:00 a.m. and again at 4:00 a.m. The 1st Division had captured sections of the German front-line in this sector, and the Germans were determined to retake them. 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. 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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91 Translation of a German Document, 4th Brigade War Diary, September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4880, LAC.

the attack “nearly upset the applecart and it was only the men’s determination and high spirits that saved the situation.”

15 September dawned brightly with a light breeze blowing dust and debris in the face of the Germans. 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. 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. By 6:55 a.m., the 4th Brigade reached the Sugar Refinery and the 21st Battalion skilfully launched an attack from three directions that captured the position, 125 prisoners, and a battalion commander.

An hour after the start of the attack, the 4th Brigade had captured all of its objectives. The 6th Brigade’s 27th 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. Turner’s insistence on inculcating initiative was paying off.

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93 R.E.W. Turner Comments BOH, DHS 3-17 (vol 5), RG 24 v1739, LAC.
94 Cook, At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914-1916: 449.
95 21st Battalion War Diary, 15 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4930, LAC.
97 Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme September 10th to 17th 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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 Courcelette 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.99

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 15th Scottish Division had closed up to the 4th Brigade’s right flank, and at 8:20 the 6th Brigade finally reported all of its objectives gained.100 With this information and the knowledge the Germans were in considerable disarray, Turner made three critical decisions. At 8:35, he ordered the 4th 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 5th Brigade to prepare to capture Courcelette later that day.101 Finally, he refused a request from the 6th Brigade to attack Courcelette. The 31st Battalion had pushed three patrols towards Courcelette and Ketchen was convinced he could capture the village. However, the standing barrage that was supposed to have lifted remained blocking the entry

100 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.
101 2nd Division GS War Diary, 15 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.
into the village. Turner refused Ketchen’s request and this decision will be analysed later.

The 4th 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 4th 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.

In what William Philpott described as “an impressive display of fieldcraft and small-unit leadership” the 5th Brigade seized Courcelette that same day. 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 2nd Division headquarters in the afternoon for assurance that the division would succeed. The corps did not confirm the attack and timing until 1:25 p.m., and the 2nd 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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102 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.
103 Untitled (6th Brigade Report on Courcelette), 9 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
104 Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme September 10th to 17th 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
106 Turner to Hetty, 16 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.
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 25th Battalion attacked on the left, with the 22nd Battalion on the right and the 26th 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. The 26th 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.

Once in position, the 5th 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 25th Battalion was attacked four times on the night of 15/16 September and the 22nd seven times. The 22nd had to face another six counterattacks on the next two nights, as well. Lieutenant-Colonel T. Tremblay of the 22nd Battalion wrote in his diary “if hell is as bad as what I have seen at Courcelette, I would not wish my worst enemy to go there.”

The hard fighting for Courcelette was costly, with the 5th Brigade

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107 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.
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 22nd Battalion. The brigade also captured three artillery pieces, seven machine guns, and seven trench mortars.\textsuperscript{111} Essentially, the brigade had destroyed the 210\textsuperscript{th} Reserve Regiment, which had a loss rate of nearly 70\%, and punished the 133\textsuperscript{rd} Reserve Regiment.\textsuperscript{112} The 211\textsuperscript{st} Reserve Regiment, which faced the 4\textsuperscript{th} Brigade, suffered 2,162 casualties or 72\% of its strength. The German high command had to pull the 45\textsuperscript{th} Reserve Division out of the line because of these losses.\textsuperscript{113}

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.\textsuperscript{114} 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

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item \textsuperscript{111} 5th CIB Operations Report B.M.L. 216, 20 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\item \textsuperscript{112} 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.
\item \textsuperscript{113} Narrative of the Enemy's Side I. Battles of the Somme 1916, War Narrative Section CEF, July 1920, MG 30 E40, Erlebach Fonds; LAC.
\item \textsuperscript{114} 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.
\end{itemize}
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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.\textsuperscript{115}

The 2\textsuperscript{nd} 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.\textsuperscript{116} Turner admitted in a letter home to his wife “It was bayonet work - and some [battalions] took no prisoners.”\textsuperscript{117} Even official reports suggested prisoners were not taken. The 4\textsuperscript{th} Brigade reporting “where the occupants promptly surrendered they were allowed to become prisoners.” In another incident on the front of the 4\textsuperscript{th} 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.\textsuperscript{118} 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\textsuperscript{st} Battalion, recounted later that the battalion ordered no prisoners taken until the final objective was consolidated.\textsuperscript{119}

The main factor was revenge. Paul Hodges in his thesis on atrocities wrote “In soldiers’ diaries and letters by far the most frequently-expressed

\textsuperscript{115} ibid.
\textsuperscript{116} Paul Dominick Hodges, “The British Infantry and Atrocities on the Western Front, 1914-1918” (PhD, Birkbeck College, University of London, 2006), 7.
\textsuperscript{117} Turner to Hetty, 16 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.
\textsuperscript{118} Operations of 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Somme September 10th to 17th 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{119} Attack on the Somme - 15th and 16th September 1916, Lance Cattermole, 92/26/1, IWM.
motivations for perpetrating atrocity were feelings of retaliation and revenge. These powerful feelings seem to have been endemic during the war.¹²⁰ 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.¹²¹ 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.¹²² 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.¹²³ 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.¹²⁴

The Battle of Flers-Courcelette is famous for the first use of tanks in battle. Of the six tanks assigned to the 2nd Division, two were able to contribute to the battle, and they only assisted with the later stages of taking of the Sugar Refinery.¹²⁵ The division later recommended employing tanks for mopping up to free men for other duties, but Turner was cautious about their

¹²¹ 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.
¹²⁴ 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.
¹²⁵ 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

value. Turner also suggested that a sufficient number of tanks be used to exploit success, as he believed the division could have captured Courcelette and Gunpit Trench by 10 a.m.\textsuperscript{126} The tanks encouraged the infantry, discouraged the Germans, attracted German fire, and assisted in the later stages of the capture of the Sugar Refinery.\textsuperscript{127} 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\textsuperscript{nd} 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. Courcelette was won by my infantry.”\textsuperscript{128}

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

\textsuperscript{126} 2nd Canadian Division G.345 19 Sept 1916, Folder 107/File 8, RG 9 III C1 v3867, LAC.
\textsuperscript{128} Turner Diary Entry, 22 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.
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 4th Brigade, until he knew all the objectives were taken and the British were up on the right. The attack of the 4th 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 6th Brigade to capture Courcelette. Both Ketchen and Lieutenant-Colonel A. Bell of the 31st Battalion, who were closest to the situation, believed the village was ripe for seizure. The issue, however, is whether the 31st 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 210th Reserve Regiment, and garrisoned by at least portions of an unengaged battalion. The 31st Battalion would have attacked with limited

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129 Untitled (6th Brigade Report on Courcelette), 9 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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 31st Battalion could have held Courcelette, even if reinforced by units from the 6th Brigade. On balance, therefore, Turner’s decision, while cautious, was correct, especially given the later success of the 5th 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 2nd Division ‘Lessons Learned’ document lamented “Battalion reports seemed to be invariably unreliable.”\textsuperscript{130} This was a problem that was universal and not unique to the 2nd Division.\textsuperscript{131} 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.\textsuperscript{132} Turner could now make decisions based on the

\textsuperscript{130} Lessons from Somme 2nd CID 2.C.D.-G.S.1254, 25 November 1916, Folder 20/File 5, RG 9 III C3 v4089, LAC.
\textsuperscript{131} Prior and Wilson, Command on the Western Front: The Military Career of Sir Henry Rawlinson, 1914-18: 182.
\textsuperscript{132} 2nd Division GS War Diary, 15 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.
actual situation at the front and keep the corps accurately informed. Turner was still looking for improvements and ordered an enhancement in information transmission.¹³³

Turner and his brigadiers were understandably jubilant at the division’s success.¹³⁴ 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.”¹³⁵ Congratulations poured in and included a warm letter from the former BGGS Harington.¹³⁶ Gough reported the 5th 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.”¹³⁷ 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.”¹³⁸ Rennie, writing to Turner well after the war, commented the attitude towards the division and its commanders improved because of the success.¹³⁹

¹³³ 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.
¹³⁴ Ketchen to Carson, 16 September 1916, 6-K-38, RG 9 III A1 v167, LAC.
¹³⁵ Turner Diary Entry, 17 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.
¹³⁶ Harington to Turner, 17 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.6, 19710147-007, Turner Fonds; CWM.
¹³⁷ Campbell, “A Forgotten Victory: Courcelette, 15 September 1916,” 44.
¹³⁸ ibid.
¹³⁹ 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.\textsuperscript{140} The officer situation was particularly dire as it only received 4 officers to replace 177 lost.\textsuperscript{141} 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\textsuperscript{nd} Division.

\textsuperscript{140} These losses differ from those quoted for Courcelette because of the different reporting timeframe.

\textsuperscript{141} 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\textsuperscript{nd} Division for Weeks Ending 15 September to 13 October 1916\textsuperscript{142}

The 6\textsuperscript{th} Brigade returned to the line on 25 September just in time to participate in the Battle of Thiepval Ridge on 26 September. The 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division was to anchor the shoulder of the Reserve Army’s attack to the north. Unlike Courcelette, 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.\textsuperscript{143} 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.\textsuperscript{144} The German interdiction fire was troublesome, with the 31\textsuperscript{st} Battalion suffering twenty-five casualties just moving into line.\textsuperscript{145}

\textsuperscript{142} ibid.
\textsuperscript{143} Operation Order No. 55, Canadian Corps War Diary, Appendix II/18, September 1916 RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.
\textsuperscript{144} Canadian Corps War Diary, 26 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.
\textsuperscript{145} Hewgill Diary Entry, 25 September 1916, MG 30 E16 v1, Hewgill Fonds; LAC.
The 6th Brigade would attack, supported by two tanks, with the 29th Battalion attacking a short distance on the right and the 31st Battalion attacking on a longer advance of 400 metres on the right. The objective was to protect the right flank of the 1st Division, which was responsible for the
main Canadian attack.\footnote{146} 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 31st Battalion, while the 29th captured their objective.\footnote{147} 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 31st 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.\footnote{148}

The 31st Battalion made a second attack at 11:00 p.m., but only took the right half of its objective.\footnote{149} The situation was so confused that the next day, the battalion still did not have a clear idea of what it held.\footnote{150} 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 1st Division and the 2nd Division be closed.\footnote{151} The Canadian artillery, despite repeated shoots, was unable to suppress the German defences, and the 31st Battalion, even reinforced, was too weak to capture the entire objective.

The situation changed, as the success of the British II Corps and the 1st Division
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>157</sup> Canadian Corps War Diary, 28 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4813, LAC.
the left flank of the Fourth Army. The 6th 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.”\(^{158}\) 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.\(^{159}\) Indolence was not one of Turner’s flaws.

The Canadian Corps ordered the 2nd 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!!”\(^{160}\) 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.\(^{161}\) The division was again hurried into an under-prepared assault.

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\(^{158}\) 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.

\(^{159}\) Turner Diary Entry, 28 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

\(^{160}\) Turner Diary Entry, 30 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.

\(^{161}\) 2nd Division GS War Diary, 28 and 29 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.
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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.162 The 2nd Division had the 4th and 5th Brigades in line, with the 5th Brigade responsible for the primary attack to the north, and the 4th Brigade on the right to advance east to keep in touch with the 23rd British Division.163

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162 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.
163 2nd Division Operational Order No. 84, 30 September 1916, Folder 30/File 3, RG 9 III C3 v4093, LAC.
Regina Trench was a much more challenging defensive position than
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.\textsuperscript{164} Without direct observation of the trench, the artillery bombardment was far less accurate and thus less effective than at Courcelette. The \textit{Marine Division}, a higher quality unit than the \textit{45th Reserve Division}, defended Regina Trench.\textsuperscript{165} The \textit{Marine Division}, formed from the \textit{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 \textit{élan}.\textsuperscript{166}

The exertions at Courcelette severely weakened the 5\textsuperscript{th} Brigade, and it entered the line with a trench strength of just 1,717 men.\textsuperscript{167} The 22\textsuperscript{nd} Battalion was so attenuated that it consisted of only three weak companies all of which had to attack.\textsuperscript{168} 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\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, in a carefully reasoned complaint, argued success was ‘highly

\textsuperscript{164} Captain Macintyre’s Report, 2 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{165} Beach, "British Intelligence and the German Army, 1914-1918," 176-177.
\textsuperscript{166} Narrative of the Enemy’s Side I. Battles of the Somme 1916, War Narrative Section CEF, July 1920, MG 30 E40, Erlebach Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{167} 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.
\textsuperscript{168} Report of 22nd (French Canadian) Battalion, 17 October 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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 15th will not be there.\(^{169}\)

Macdonell, the brigade commander, concurred and claimed the brigade’s trench strength was reduced to less than 1,200 men.\(^{170}\)

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.”\(^{171}\) 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.\(^{172}\) The Reserve Army was not so understanding and pressured Byng to make the attack, and so at 1:15 p.m., the 5th Brigade

\(^{169}\) Field Message, Hilliam to 5th Brigade, 12:30 P.M., 30 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\(^{170}\) 5th Brigade, B.M. 357, 30 September 1916, MG 30 E46 v2, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\(^{171}\) 2nd Division GS War Diary, 1 October 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4844, LAC.
\(^{172}\) ibid.
received the unwelcome news that it was to attack as planned.173

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 5th Brigade, but on the uncut wire. Possibly, he realised that no objection grounded on numerical weakness would be sustained, as witnessed by the 14th Battalion, having to attack when it could only muster seventy-five men.174 Aerial photographs, however, were irrefutable. Byng’s willingness to grant Turner additional time is puzzling, as the 2nd 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 2nd Division in the line for the 1 October attack? Four factors probably contributed to Byng’s decision – the previous success of the 2nd Division, the uncertainty of what positions the Germans were holding, intelligence reports suggesting the Germans were faltering, and Gough’s longer-range plans. The 2nd Division had won a signal victory at Courselette, 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 2nd Division and attack on time.

Reports from Haig’s chief intelligence officer, Brigadier-General John

173 Macintyre Diary Entry, 1 October 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC.
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.\(^\text{175}\)

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.”\(^\text{176}\)

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.\(^\text{177}\) 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.”\(^\text{178}\) The aggressive schedule meant Byng had to use the 2\(^{nd}\) Division in the 1 October attack if he were to have sufficient fresh troops to make the later attacks.

\(^{175}\) Beach, "British Intelligence and the German Army, 1914-1918," 178.
\(^{176}\) Turner Diary Entry, 7 October 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.
\(^{177}\) Reserve Army Order, S.G.21/0/51, 28 September 1916, App I/1 Canadian Corps War Diary, October 1916 RG 9 Ill D3 v4813, LAC.
\(^{178}\) Simkins, "Herbert Plumer's Second Army, 1915-1917," 85.
The two brigades attacked on time, and the 4th Brigade, with the easier mission, reached its objectives after hard fighting. The 5th 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 22nd Battalion was especially battered and Macdonell characterised it as destroyed in his report.

The 22nd 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. Only Tremblay’s return and a tightening of discipline returned the battalion to full discipline – three members of the 22nd Battalion were executed from April to July 1917.

These executions illustrate that discipline was one of the major differences between Turner, Currie, and Major-General H. Burstall, Turner’s replacement as GOC 2nd Division. Turner did pay attention to discipline,
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 2nd Division under Turner. In Currie’s 1st Division, during the same period Turner commanded the 2nd Division, seven men were shot versus only one in Turner’s division. Similarly, under Burstall seven men were executed in the 2nd Division.  

The 2nd Division was clearly played out and, after the 6th 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. 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. Turner wrote that it was difficult in preparing recommendations for awards, as all the witnesses died in the battle. 

Surprisingly, the 2nd Division did not produce an operations report for

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183 ibid., 38.
185 ibid., 232.
186 Turner Diary Entry, 30 September 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.
the latter two operations and the one for Courcelette was perfunctory.\footnote{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.}

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 Courcelette 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.\footnote{Lessons from Somme 2nd CID 2.C.D.-G.S.1254, 25 November 1916, Folder 20/File 5, RG 9 III C3 v4089, LAC.}

**Analysis**

The discrepancy in performance between Courcelette 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\textsuperscript{th} 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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grenade.\textsuperscript{189} 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\textsuperscript{nd} 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.\textsuperscript{190} At Courcelette, 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 Courcelette, the 6\textsuperscript{th} Brigade’s operational order was five foolscap pages.\textsuperscript{191} 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’.\textsuperscript{192} It was of scant value, however, for the Canadians on the Somme, as it did not provide any insight

\textsuperscript{189} Evidence of Court of Inquiry Held at Bouzincourt on 11 October 1916, MG 30 E100 v35, Currie Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{190} For a pithy discussion of preparation on the Somme, see Griffith, \textit{Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army’s Art of Attack, 1916-18}: 74-75.
\textsuperscript{191} 6th Brigade Operational Order No. 110, App. 6, 14 September 1916, RG 9 III D3 v4888, LAC.
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into the practical details of attack frontages, troop density, artillery
preparation, and logistics. 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.” 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.”

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 2nd 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.

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 5th Brigade reported, rather
acidly, that on the 29th and 30th its forward positions underwent prolonged

193 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.


shelling by the Canadian heavy artillery.\textsuperscript{197} 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.\textsuperscript{198} 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.\textsuperscript{199}

There were also serious shortcomings in the cooperation between the infantry and the artillery. It appeared the two arms fought two separate battles

\textsuperscript{197} 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.

\textsuperscript{198} It was no accident that the divisional artillery of both the 3\textsuperscript{rd} and 4\textsuperscript{th} Divisions were British formations for a year after the divisions arrived at the front.

that coincided in time and place. 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. As a result, the artillery was far less effective than at Courcelette.

Conclusion

Turner's division performed admirably at Courcelette 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 1st Division stumbled to the extent that Gough ordered a court of inquiry into the

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\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{200} A problem the British encountered on the Somme, as well. Griffith, \textit{Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack, 1916-18}: 66-67.
\item \textsuperscript{201} 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.
\end{itemize}
division’s failure at Regina Trench on 8 October. 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.

\[202\text{ The unexpurgated version of the inquiry included a crossed out statement that one officer had to shoot several men who would not counterattack. Thanks to Aaron Miedema for identifying this version of the report. Unredacted Version, Finding of Court of Inquiry at Bouzincourt, Folder 17/File 4, RG 9 III C3 v4011, LAC.}\]
CHAOS IN ENGLAND: UNWISE MANAGEMENT

For armies can signify but little abroad unless there be counsel and wise management at home.

Cicero

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.” 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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2 Haycock, Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916: 258.
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. 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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3 Definitions of effectiveness and efficiency are the author’s. For a different perspective, see Allan Reed Millett and Williamson Murray, *Military Effectiveness*, vol. 1, Merishon Center Series on International Security and Foreign Policy (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988), 1-27.
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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. 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 1st 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.

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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.5

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 5th Brigade that "Canadian soldiering arrangements in England are in a deplorable state... that the senior officers ... are all working at cross purposes."6

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.7 Effectiveness regarded the poor quality and

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5 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-I-30-5, RG 24 v1503, LAC.
6 Borden to Perley, 17 March 1916, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, LAC.
7 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
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.⁸ 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.⁹ 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 3rd every month.”¹⁰ 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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⁸ Promotions, appointments, commissions, decorations, and awards are hereafter referred to as promotions.

⁹ Twenty-five thousand men were needed to replace losses in the corps and bring the replacement pool in France back to strength.

¹⁰ 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.
shortfall of 6,445 men.\textsuperscript{11}

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.\textsuperscript{12} 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.\textsuperscript{13} 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.’\textsuperscript{14}

Three separate reports clearly identify myriad training inadequacies.\textsuperscript{15} 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-
trained replacements, and “since that time a very small percentage of fully-trained Drafts have been despatched overseas.” One report includes this damning critique “The conception and tone of the Canadian Training Division is on a wrong basis from its foundation.”

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. This added an additional complication to the rush to get replacements to France.

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. 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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16 Notes on Canadian Training Division, Shorncliffe, 6 June 1916, 8-5-10e, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.
18 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.
19 H.N. Anley to Carson, 25 February 1916, RG 9 III B1 v622, LAC.
20 Whigham to Aitken, 25 June 1916, A1765, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.
training.\textsuperscript{21} Again, nothing resulted from this intervention.

The quantity and quality of replacement officers was another problem.\textsuperscript{22} In early 1916, Shorncliffe had only 7\% of its officers immediately available for drafts and another 8\% after completing courses.\textsuperscript{23} 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.\textsuperscript{24} Steele issued an order that all officers were to know their men – it was extraordinary that officers were unaware of their basic responsibilities.\textsuperscript{25} The situation was so dire that Byng established a corps Officer school because the officers coming from England were so incapable.\textsuperscript{26}

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\textsuperscript{st} 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.\textsuperscript{27}

The engineering service was facing severe shortages of trained personnel, while demands escalated. Like the signal service, the engineering service had to

\textsuperscript{21} Williams, Byng of Vimy, General and Governor General: 130.
\textsuperscript{22} 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.
\textsuperscript{23} MacDougall to Carson, 21 January 1916, 8-1-87a, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC.
\textsuperscript{24} 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.
\textsuperscript{25} Steele to MacDougall, 4 Sept 1916, 8-5-10f, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.
\textsuperscript{26} Campbell, "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F.: A Social and Operational History of the 2nd Canadian Division, 1915-1918," 165.
\textsuperscript{27} Canadian Signalling School, 1 December 1918, 113/5, RG 9 III D1 v4718, LAC.
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.”

The War Office suggested many of the sappers “do not appear to have carried out any sapper training at all.”

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. 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. 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

28 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.

29 121/Overseas/2047. (S.D.3), DCIGS to Carson, 27 May 1916, Folder 11, 74/672 Box 3, DHH.


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.”

Steele in response had to emphasise to MacDougall to send only trained men, especially artillery, to France. The harshest complaints came from Morrison, the 2nd 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.

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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32 Currie to Carson, December 1915, 8-7-1, RG 9 II A1 v52, LAC.
33 Steele to MacDougall, 30 December 1915, RG 9 II B1 v622, LAC.
34 Report to GOC Cdn. Training Division, Shorncliffe, 9 December 1915, MG 30 E81 v4, Morrison Fonds; LAC.
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.\(^{35}\) 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.”\(^{36}\)

### 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.\(^{37}\)

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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\(^{35}\) 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.


\(^{37}\) 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.
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 1917.38

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.”39 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.’40 The relations between the British and Canadian service deteriorated to the point

38 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.
the British Deputy Chaplain-General refused to deal with Steacy.\textsuperscript{41}

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.\textsuperscript{42}

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.\textsuperscript{43}

\textbf{Promotions}

An exceedingly sore point with the forces in France was the unshakeable belief that commissions, promotions, appointments, and awards were at the

\textsuperscript{41} “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.

\textsuperscript{42} 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, \textit{A Peculiar Kind of Politics}: 64.

\textsuperscript{43} 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.
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mercy of political influence.\textsuperscript{44} 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.”\textsuperscript{45} As a result, there was the apprehension that the staff, sycophants, and the connected received rewards over more deserving recipients.\textsuperscript{46} This belief is not surprising given the politicised nature of the pre-war Canadian Militia and the ample evidence of political influence affecting promotions.\textsuperscript{47} 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.\textsuperscript{48}

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.\textsuperscript{49} 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

\textsuperscript{44} 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.
\textsuperscript{45} Harrington Letter, 3 August 1918, 10-T-158, RG 9 III A1 v339, LAC.
\textsuperscript{46} This was not a wholly Canadian problem see Holmes, Tommy: The British Soldier on the Western Front, 1914-1918: 587.
\textsuperscript{47} For an example of the problem over commissioning NCOs, see Odlum 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.”
\textsuperscript{48} 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.
\textsuperscript{49} For an account of the difficulties the British had see Chapter 15 of Messenger, Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18: 474.
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ceaseless suspicion and friction.”

Early in the war, Aitken arranged it so Hughes would be the sole arbiter of all promotions and honours not under Alderson’s control. 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. This obvious bias alienated in the officers in France and helped exacerbate the estrangement between Hughes and the corps.

Hughes, contrary to regulations, encouraged officers to contact him directly. Hence, it became common practice to work outside the normal and expected communication channels to get advancement. This extended to when Hughes visited England the various commanders were anxious to pay court to maintain favour.

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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50 Kang, “The British Infantry Officer on the Western Front in the First World War: With Special Reference to the Royal Warwickshire Regiment,” 353.
51 Cable Aitken to Hughes, 20 September 1915, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.
52 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.
53 Urquhart, Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian: 136.
55 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.
56 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.
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.\textsuperscript{57}

The promotion system failed. By late 1916, the authorities had not
forwarded over 2,000 names from Shorncliffe to the War Office for
promulgation.\textsuperscript{58} 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.\textsuperscript{59} 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.\textsuperscript{60}

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

\textsuperscript{57} Perley to GG in Council, 3 January 1917, RG 9 III A1 v90, LAC.
\textsuperscript{58} Report on the Work of Assistant Military Secretary’s Branch since Organisation, 4 May 1917,
MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{59} Appointments, awards, and promotions were not official until published in the \textit{London
Gazette}.
\textsuperscript{60} Gow to Secretary War Office, Min. 10-12-2, 13 March 1917, 10-8-7 v1, RG 9 III A1 v72, LAC.
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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.\(^{61}\) 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.\(^{62}\)

Hughes represented an older tradition of personal management of a government department.\(^{63}\) 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.\(^{64}\) 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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64 In 1915, major departments, such as Justice and Finance had less than 100 employees. Brown, Robert Laird Borden: A Biography, 2: 6.
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.”

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. 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. 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

65 Carson to CTD, Shorncliffe, 23 November 1916, E-4-2 v1A, RG 9 III B1 v694, LAC.
66 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.
67 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).
them as replacements at their rank. Consequently, there were 499 surplus senior officers and 6,000 NCOs in England.\textsuperscript{68}

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.\textsuperscript{69}

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.\textsuperscript{70} 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.\textsuperscript{71}

\textsuperscript{68} 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.

\textsuperscript{69} Staff Captain CTD to DAG, 10 October 1916, RG 9 III B1 v2938, LAC.

\textsuperscript{70} For the health of Steele and MacDougall see Macphail and Canada. Dept. of National Defence. Historical Section., \textit{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, \textit{A Peculiar Kind of Politics}: 72.

\textsuperscript{71} Morton, \textit{A Peculiar Kind of Politics}: 42.
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. 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.

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. 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."

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. 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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72 Alderson to Carson, 4 December 1915, 8-5-10b, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.
73 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.
74 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.
75 Currie to Carson, 21 January 1916, 8-5-10c, RG 9 III A1 v45, LAC.
76 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.
medically unfit.\footnote{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.}

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.\footnote{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.} 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.\footnote{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.} 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.”\footnote{Watson to Carson, 16 February 1916, 6-W-4, RG 9 III A1 v231, LAC.} In March 1916 in response, Hughes first set up an informal council with four members including Carson, Aitken, and Watson, the GOC 4th Division.\footnote{Hughes to Aitken, 31 March 1916, A1764, MG 27 II G1, Beaverbrook Fonds; LAC.} The Council held only two meetings before Aitken undermined it, and Watson,
realising the extent of the disorganisation, decided to focus on his division. 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. Hughes in his grandiose style claimed that the British Adjutant-General wished they could model their system on Hughes’ structure. The Council did not accomplish much in its short existence before it was wound up in November.

Borden had a terrible dilemma. It was obvious that there were serious problems with the overseas forces, and Hughes could not rectify them. Hughes, however, had a powerful constituency in Canada believing his claims of his prowess and accomplishments. 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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82 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.
83 Included in the Council were Carson, Brooke, Meighen, and Hughes’ son-in-law Byron Green as Secretary.
84 Hughes to Borden, 8 September 1916, 35731-35732, MG 26 H1 v69, Borden Fonds; LAC.
85 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.
86 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.
or avoid the damage by being more involved in military matters. Perley was convinced Hughes was a menace and was ‘damaging Canada’s reputation.’\textsuperscript{88} Perley was a survivor and was not one to bow to Hughes’ bullying.\textsuperscript{89}

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.\textsuperscript{90} 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.\textsuperscript{91}

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.\textsuperscript{92} Perley was from a wealthy lumber family from Ottawa, who was first elected from

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{88} Morton, \textit{A Peculiar Kind of Politics}: 66.
\bibitem{89} Cook, \textit{The Madman and the Butcher}: 117.
\bibitem{90} Haycock, \textit{Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916}: 302-306; Morton, \textit{A Peculiar Kind of Politics}: 84-90; Cook, \textit{The Madman and the Butcher}: 176-178.
\bibitem{91} Morton, \textit{A Peculiar Kind of Politics}: 92.
\bibitem{92} Cable White to Borden, 11 November 1916, 39205, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\end{thebibliography}
the Quebec riding of Arteneuil in 1904. Perley was Borden’s closest confidant while the Conservatives were in opposition and when elected, Borden tasked Perley with overhauling the government machinery. Borden admired successful businessmen in an age where business attracted the best and brightest. Borden sent Perley to England in 1914 to evaluate the situation of the Canadian High Commission in England. Perley was an astute politician, an anglophile, a millionaire, and almost wholly ignorant of military matters. 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.”

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

95 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.
98 Borden to Perley, 6 November 1916, v7, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.
Committee in 1915. Morton described Kemp as “bustling, aggressive, and sometimes pompous.”

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. 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.

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. There was still bickering and intriguing in the Australian case,

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100 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.
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.\textsuperscript{103}

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\textsuperscript{th} Division, again.\textsuperscript{104} Jeffrey Grey contrasts the Australian Imperial Force Headquarters (AIF) “whereas the Canadian and New Zealand administrations in London were to be become large and effective with some initiative, the AIF Headquarters in London remained purely an administrative body, with all policy decisions referred to Melbourne.”\textsuperscript{105}

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.\textsuperscript{106} This lack of political influence later caused the Australian Government to send a cabinet minister to England during demobilisation to assert Australian interests.\textsuperscript{107}

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

\textsuperscript{103} 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.

\textsuperscript{104} ibid., 214.

\textsuperscript{105} 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.

\textsuperscript{106} 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.

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policy of developing Canadians to replace British staff officers for all but the most
senior positions.¹⁰⁸

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.¹⁰⁹ Perley was of
the cabinet but not really in the cabinet, given his remote location in England.¹¹⁰

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.¹¹¹ 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

   During World War I*: 113.


¹¹⁰  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.

¹¹¹  In late 1916, when Borden was determining the organisation, no Canadian officer, including
   Currie, had the experience, credibility, or success to be selected GOC.
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.\textsuperscript{112} 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.\textsuperscript{113} 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.\textsuperscript{114}

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.\textsuperscript{115}

Perley now had his organisation, but he needed the front-experienced GOC.

\textsuperscript{112} 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.
\textsuperscript{113} Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 96.
\textsuperscript{114} Perley to Borden, 27 November 1916, v7, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{115} Cable Perley to Borden. Undated, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.
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 3rd 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.¹¹⁶ 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.”¹¹⁷ Both White and Perley thought “Currie most capable for position but Turner would probably be more popular with our following.”¹¹⁸

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

¹¹⁶ GHP Memorandum, File 3, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.
¹¹⁷ Cable Perley to Borden, 22 November 1916, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.
¹¹⁸ ibid.
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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.¹¹⁹

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.”¹²⁰ 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.¹²¹ 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.”¹²²

One aspect of this decision process that some historians have

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¹¹⁹ 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.

¹²⁰ Cable Perley to Borden. Undated, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.

¹²¹ Turner to Perley, 30 November 1916, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

¹²² The note is undoubtedly from Perley. Perley to Turner, 24 November 1916, v7, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.
misrepresented is the notion that Byng was eager to sack Turner. Given the 2\textsuperscript{nd} 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.”

Turner was on his way to England with the unwieldy title of General Officer Commanding Canadian Forces in the British Isles. As one battalion history put it “It may be assumed that, though duty permitted him no alternative, he surrendered command of the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Canadian Division with regret; it is certain that the units of the division regretted his departure profoundly.”

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\textsuperscript{123} For example “Byng, delighted to be rid of an inadequate commander...” Granatstein, \textit{Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace}; 86; Greenhous, \textit{Canada and the Battle of Vimy Ridge}, 9-12 April 1917; 54.
\textsuperscript{124} Turner to Hughes, 26 November 1916, File 5, MG 27 II D23 v14, Hughes Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{125} 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 honourary Doctor of Laws from Bishops.
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 solider but an absolutely honest and fearless man and should go far.” How far Turner went and what he accomplished is the subject of the next chapter.

127 Macintryre Diary Entry, 26 November 1916, MG 30 E241 v1, D.E. Macintyre Fonds; LAC.
General Turner is a great strength and was a wise choice.
Sir George Perley, Minister of OMFC\(^1\)

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.\(^2\) 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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\(^1\) Perley to Borden, 27 January 1917, 13656, MG 26 H1 v33, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\(^2\) 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.
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,
and Quartermaster-General.\(^3\) 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.\(^4\) 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.\(^5\) MacDougall’s appointment was by Order in Council, so Perley assumed it was necessary to recall MacDougall to Canada for Turner to replace him.\(^6\) Canadian authorities recalled MacDougall, where he resumed revising the King’s Regulations and Orders – a task more in keeping with his capabilities.\(^7\)

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.\(^8\) Perley did not however see any role for Steele, and Steele lost his Canadian command but retained the British Southeastern District.\(^9\) Carson was relieved 7 December, and while Perley considered him briefly as chairman of a
Demobilisation Committee, Carson returned to Canada in June 1917.\textsuperscript{10}

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.\textsuperscript{11} 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.\textsuperscript{12} 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.\textsuperscript{13}

Turner had a predilection for selecting officers he knew, and this applied to two of this three key staff officer appointments.\textsuperscript{14} 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\textsuperscript{rd} Brigade and later served in Garnet Hughes’ 1\textsuperscript{st} Brigade as a Brigade-Major. McDonald was wounded at the

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item 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.
\item 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.
\item On active service, the General Staff responsibilities also included operations and intelligence.\textsuperscript{12}
\item 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.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
Somme and lost his left arm.\textsuperscript{15} 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.”\textsuperscript{16}

For his Adjutant-General, Turner selected another familiar face, his chief administrative officer from the 2\textsuperscript{nd} 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\textsuperscript{nd} Division as its chief administrative officer when the division arrived in England.\textsuperscript{17}

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,

\textsuperscript{15} 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.
\textsuperscript{16} Byng to Turner, 17 December 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.6, 19710147-007, Turner Fonds; CWM.
\textsuperscript{17} Defence, \textit{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.
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.”

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.

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. 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. 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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18 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.
19 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
20 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.
21 His Brigade Commander recommended that he not retain his position as a Brigade-Major in a
9 III B1 v806, LAC.
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.”

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22 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.
23 Garnet Hughes to Sam Hughes, 25 March 1917, File 4, MG 27 II D23 v14, Hughes Fonds; LAC.
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.\(^\text{24}\) 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

\(^{24}\) 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.
daylight hours of May, June and July.\textsuperscript{25}

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.\textsuperscript{26} 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.\textsuperscript{27}

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.\textsuperscript{28} 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.

\textsuperscript{25} Cable Perley to Kemp, 3 March 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.
\textsuperscript{26} 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.
\textsuperscript{27} State of Training in Canada of Battalions Arriving in England in April/May 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{28} Report to Kemp, 18 May 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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. 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. 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.

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29 ibid.
30 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, Rail and Forestry Reinforcements Needed, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.
31 Report Captain Ker, Senior Medical Officer, CRT, 1 December 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.
32 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.
6 ‘A Wise Choice’

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.33

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.34 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.35

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.36

33 RO 244, 16 January 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.
34 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.
35 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.
36 Memo Turner to Perley, 16 December 1916, RG 9 III A1 v90, LAC.
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. 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. 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. The authorisation of additional battalions continued to June 1917.

On 28 December, Headquarters announced a new training organisation to improve draft finding and to better maintain the territorial affiliation of units. 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. Previously reserve battalions would supply men to as many as eleven line battalions.

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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37 An understanding that was not always communicated or was not comprehended.
38 A/AG Cdn Militia to HQ, CEF, 19 January 1917, 10-12-11, RG 9 III A1 v90, LAC.
39 For a particularly vitriolic view of the break up, see Leslie M Frost, Fighting Men (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1967), 90.
40 Notes and Comments on Article by Major Pope, DHS 10-75, RG 24 v1762, LAC.
41 RO 95, 28 December 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.
42 For instance, the 3rd Reserve Battalion (Western Ontario) absorbed the 36th, 133rd, half of the 162nd and 180th battalions and reinforced the 1st and 4th Battalions in the field.
43 Reinforcement by Arm, DHH, Folder 48, File 3, 74/672 Box 33, DHH.
Perley to Kemp who agreed that this would be policy from June 1917.44

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.’45 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.46

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.47 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

44 Memorandum on Training Reinforcements in Canada and England 23 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.
45 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.
46 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.
47 BGGS, GHQ Home Forces to HQ Canadians, 12 February 1917, T-12-36 v1, RG 9 III B1 v3108, LAC.
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. 48

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.”49


Figure 18  Training Syllabus50

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tasks</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PT, Field Work, and Marching</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bayonet</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Musketery</td>
<td>153</td>
<td>29%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inspection/Lecture</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-Gas</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bombing</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Night Work</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrenching</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drill</td>
<td>111</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rifle Bomb/Lewis Gun</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>526</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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.51

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.52 By October 1917, Turner had tightened the requirements so that all the Permanent Cadre of the training units were to be

50 Training in Canadian Reserve Battalions, Revised Edition, 1 October 1917, T-25-36 v1, RG 9 III B1 v3111, LAC.
51 McDonald to Landry, 26 May 1917, T-4-36 v4, RG 9 III B1 v3106, LAC.
52 Circular Thacker to Training Units, 19 April 1917, 0-75-33 v1, RG 9 III B1 v2885, LAC.
overseas veterans and any that were not were to be replaced immediately.\footnote{Pope, 22 October 1917, 0-75-33 v1, RG 9 III B1 v2885, LAC.}

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.\footnote{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.}

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.\footnote{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.} 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.\footnote{Courses of Instruction February 1917, R-2-36 Vol 2, RG 9 III B1 v3098, LAC.} 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.\footnote{RO 243, 15 January 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC; RO 370, 1 February 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.} All recruits were required to pass standard War Office tests and have their
qualifications recorded in their pay books when sent to the front.\(^{58}\) This allowed the General Staff to trace any deficiencies and this resulted in improved commitment to results from training officers.\(^{59}\)

**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.\(^ {60}\) In addition, New Zealand understood its manpower resources, so did not over-expand its forces, as much as did Canada and Australia.\(^ {61}\) The Australians relied more on British instructors and courses for much of their training.\(^ {62}\)

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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\(^{58}\) The men were tested on musketry, bombs, bayonet fighting, anti gas, rapid wiring, Lewis Gun, and drill.

\(^{59}\) 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.


despatched drafts to where needed, regardless of regimental distinctions.\(^{63}\)

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.\(^{64}\) At least one British division commander believed the German
training to be ‘harder and sterner’ than British training.\(^{65}\)

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.\(^{66}\) 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 4th Division’s artillery supplying gun sections to
increase battery size.\(^{67}\)

\(^{63}\) Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*: 153; “The Training Reserve,”

\(^{64}\) Alexander Watson, *Enduring the Great War: Combat, Morale and Collapse in the German and

\(^{65}\) Bidwell and Graham, *Fire-Power: British Army Weapons and Theories of War, 1904-1945*:
121.

\(^{66}\) RO 162, 5 January 1917, RG 9 III B3 v3780, LAC.

\(^{67}\) 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.
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. 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.

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. Byng, in February 1917, responded to Turner’s initial

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68 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

69 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.

70 Timothy Travers, "The Offensive and the Problem of Innovation in British Military Thought
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!” The Canadian MGC (CMGC) came into effect in April with the transfer of all officers and men in Machine Gun units to the CMGC.

From early in the war, the Canadian Corps wanted only subalterns from Canada and England. 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. 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

71 Byng to Turner, 27 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.
73 Carson to Hughes, 13 January 1916, 8-1-87a, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC.
74 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.\textsuperscript{75}

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.\textsuperscript{76} However, British policy was typically to have the newly commissioned officer assigned to a different formation, whereas Canadian officers returned to their original unit.\textsuperscript{77} The result was British commanders were known on occasion to recommend NCOs to dispense with them.\textsuperscript{78} Canadian commanders were more likely to recommend a superior candidate knowing they would return, than would a British commander.\textsuperscript{79}

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

\textsuperscript{75} 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.

\textsuperscript{76} 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.

\textsuperscript{77} 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.


\textsuperscript{79} 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.
greater value than a mere subaltern. The Germans rarely commissioned from the ranks preferring to maintain the social exclusivity of the officer class. 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.

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.

Turner was a nationalist and wanted to ensure a steady supply of Canadian staff officers to replace British officers. Turner believed only the most senior staff positions of BGGS and GSO 1 in the corps required British officers. Acting on this belief, Turner almost immediately instituted a program of Staff Learners in

82 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.
84 The most senior British officer in the OMFC was Lieutenant-Colonel Priswall in charge of musketry and a holdover from Carson’s time.
85 Turner to Perley, 27 January 1917, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.
England to develop the supply of Canadian staff officers. 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. 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. 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.

**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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86 Circular, Director Personnel Services, 21-2-34, 13 December 1916, O-29-33 vI, RG 9 III B1 v2881, LAC.
88 Haig to War Office O.B./742, 17 June 1917, 10-8-18, RG 9 III A1 v73, LAC.
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. Unlike in the Second World War, the categorisation system did not make any allowance for the mental or psychological capabilities of the soldier. 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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90 Major Cassels to Deputy Minister, OMFC, 16 July 1917, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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.\(^{92}\)

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.\(^{93}\)

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.\(^{94}\)

An additional step was the official disbanding of ninety-six battalions over

\(^{92}\) Major Cassels to Deputy Minister, OMFC, 16 July 1917, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

\(^{93}\) 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.

\(^{94}\) 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.
A Wise Choice

the course of the year. 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. As there were fewer units to control, these headquarters became
superfluous.

Figure 19 Reduction in Staff December 1916 to September 1917

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Staff Size</th>
<th>Officers</th>
<th>Other Ranks</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 December 1916</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>566</td>
<td>700</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 August 1917</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>486</td>
<td>625</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 September 1917</td>
<td>109</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>545</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

95 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.
96 Report Adjutant-General Branch, 27 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v3, Turner Fonds; LAC.
97 Turner to Perley, 21 September 1917, 10-8-43, RG 9 III A1 v77, LAC.
service noticed the difference, and John Simms, the British Principal Chaplain, commented, “the outlook is much brighter.”

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.

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 role.

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98 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 Ill B3 v3780, LAC.

99 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.
role in encouraging the feuding post-war veterans’ organisations to merge.  

McRae also persuaded the British to grant an exception for custom duties for a saving of another $466,000 a year.  

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.  

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. 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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101 Memorandum of the Quartermaster General’s Branch at the Request of the Minister, 22 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC.
103 QMG Branch Progress Report September 1917, MG 30 E46 v5, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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.\footnote{McRae QMG to Perley, 12 March 1917, 10-8-20, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC.}

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.\footnote{Memorandum of the Quartermaster General’s Branch at the Request of the Minister, 22 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v7, Turner Fonds; LAC.}

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.\footnote{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.}

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
it has left for us to clear up, the desired results cannot be obtained without much patience.  

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. 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. To head this extremely sensitive position, Turner selected another familiar officer, Captain F.F. Montague, his former ADC from the 2nd Division. While holding a relatively junior rank, the AMS was a critical position for changing the perception that political influence dominated promotions. 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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107 McRae QMG to Perley, 12 March 1917, 10-8-20, RG 9 III A1 v74, LAC.
108 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.
110 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.
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.111

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.112
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.113

To resolve disputes over seniority amongst officers of the same rank, Turner
tasked Montague with creating a gradation list. Unlike the Australian Army that

111 Sims to Turner, 31 July 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.
112 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.
113 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.
had created a list at the AIF’s inception, the CEF operated without one.\textsuperscript{114} The challenge was how to determine seniority. Turner persuaded Perley it should be the date officers sailed for England.\textsuperscript{115} 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.\textsuperscript{116}

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.\textsuperscript{117} 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

\textsuperscript{114} Grey, \textit{The Australian Army}: 40; Faraday, "Half the Battle: The Administration and Higher Organisation of the AIF 1914-1918," 27.
\textsuperscript{115} Perley to GG in Council, 3 January 1917, RG 9 III A1 v90, LAC.
\textsuperscript{116} 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.
\textsuperscript{117} Morton, \textit{When Your Number’s Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War}: 77.
most part Conservative party stalwarts.\textsuperscript{118}

The problem of surplus officers emerged early in the Hughes regime with Carson raising it as an issue to Hughes in March 1915.\textsuperscript{119} 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\textsuperscript{th} Battalion was filled with two Lieutenants, two Captains and a Lieutenant-Colonel who was senior to the battalion’s commanding officer.\textsuperscript{120}

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.’\textsuperscript{121}

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.\textsuperscript{122} 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.\textsuperscript{123}

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

\textsuperscript{118} Morton, \textit{A Peculiar Kind of Politics}. 256; Perley to Borden, 2 April 1917, 39248-39251, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{119} Carson to Hughes, 26 March 1915, 8-1-87, RG 9 III A1 v34, LAC.
\textsuperscript{120} Haig to Secretary War Office, 17 May 1916, RG 9 III B1 v2883, LAC.
\textsuperscript{121} Thacker A.G. 8-1-38, 6 January 1917, M-29-36 v3, RG 9 III B1 v3091, LAC.
\textsuperscript{122} 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.
\textsuperscript{123} Deputy Director Staff Duties to HQ OMFC, 27 March 1917, T-68-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3000, LAC.
commander agreed. This program lasted until after the 1917 election. 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.

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. 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. 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. Despite these results, there were still 416 surplus officers as late as November 1917.

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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124 Pope for AG to Secretary, War Office, 5 December 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2883, LAC.
125 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.
126 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.
127 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.
128 Memorandum for the Information of the GOC, 1 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.
129 A.G. 8-1-128 Thacker to Turner Revised, 21 November 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2887, LAC.
commander for the poor treatment of officers from broken up battalions.\textsuperscript{130}

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.\textsuperscript{131}

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.\textsuperscript{132} 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

\textsuperscript{130} Turner to Matthews, 4 April 1917, MG 30 E60 v2, Matthews Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{131} 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.

\textsuperscript{132} 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.” 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.134

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.”135 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.136

133 Turner to Kemp, 4 February 1918, H-6, MG 27 II D9 v144, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
134 F.F. Montague Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 6297 - 5, LAC.
135 Perley to Borden, 2 January 1917, RG 9 III A1 v73, LAC.
136 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 39th 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.137

An early test of the political independence of the OMFC was the selection of Turner’s replacement as commander of the 2nd 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.138

A further issue was the status of the 5th 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.139 Haig asked Robertson in January when he could expect the 5th Division.140 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...

137 AG to HQ Cdn Troops Shorncliffe, A.G. 2.P.211, 27 January 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.
138 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.
139 Robertson to Haig, 28 September 1916, 7/6/68, Robertson Fonds; LHCMA.
140 Haig to CIGS, 24 January 1917, WO 158/22, TNA.
that Canada could only keep four divisions at the front and Robertson grudgingly agreed.\textsuperscript{141}

Given Perley and Kemp’s qualms regarding the 5\textsuperscript{th} Division, why was it still raised?\textsuperscript{142} 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.”\textsuperscript{143} 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.\textsuperscript{144} 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.\textsuperscript{145} All of this indicates the Government procured Sam Hughes’ relative silence by giving his son the 5\textsuperscript{th} 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.\textsuperscript{146}

The British were relentless in their demands for the 5\textsuperscript{th} Division. Turner and

\textsuperscript{141} Perley to Borden, 10 November 1916, 39104, MG26 H1 v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{142} ibid; Perley to Borden, 20 December 1916, 39110, MG26 H1 v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{143} Cable Borden to Perley, 26 January 1917, V8, File 2, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{144} Leckie was the former acting Chief of the General Staff of Hughes’ Acting Sub-Militia Council.
\textsuperscript{145} Perley to Turner, 25 April 1917, 10-L-10, RG 9 Ill A1 v293, LAC.
\textsuperscript{146} 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.
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.\textsuperscript{147} The War Office sent three requests alone in February for the 5\textsuperscript{th}
Division.\textsuperscript{148} Robertson raised the topic again at the Imperial War Cabinet in
March, but Borden evaded the issue.\textsuperscript{149}

In May, Robertson cabled the Governor-General of Canada “It is very
important that this Division should eventually be sent to France.”\textsuperscript{150} 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\textsuperscript{th}
Division for the purpose.”\textsuperscript{151} The 5\textsuperscript{th} Division remained in England for the
remainder of 1917 and became a subject of further controversy in early 1918.

\section*{Assessment}

Were the changes effective? Most of the data in this chapter are derived
from internal OMFC documents.\textsuperscript{152} 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

\textsuperscript{147} Perley to Kemp, 17 January 1917, 39119-39120, MG26 H1 v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{148} Perley to Secretary, War Office, 2 March 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.
\textsuperscript{149} J. L. Granatstein, \textit{Broken Promises: The History of Conscription in Canada} (Toronto: Copp
\textsuperscript{150} Cable Robertson to Governor General, 25 May 1917, 39133, MG26 H1 v74/75, Borden Fonds;
LAC.
\textsuperscript{151} Gow to MG Callwell W.O., 30 May 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.
\textsuperscript{152} Starting in April 1917 each branch including the General Staff, Adjutant-General, AMS, and
Quartermaster-General produced detailed monthly or quarterly reports.
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 1917.153

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 3rd 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 3rd Class shots fell from 26% to 2% by
August.154

The contemporary records show a favourable view of the changes. The
Deputy-Minister paid a visit to the corps in June and found,

153 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.
154 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.
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.\textsuperscript{155}

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.”\textsuperscript{156}

The 25\textsuperscript{th} Battalion’ commander wrote to McDonald to express his appreciation for the quality of recruits the battalion received.\textsuperscript{157} 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\textsuperscript{th} Division commenting the replacements ‘showed a marked improvement in training.’\textsuperscript{158}

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

\begin{footnotes}
\footnotetext[155]{Gow to Perley, 29 June 1917, 10-8-7 v1, RG 9 III A1 v72, LAC.}
\footnotetext[156]{Griesbach to 1st Canadian Division, 2 October 1917, T-4-37 v7, RG 9 III B1 v3107, LAC.}
\footnotetext[157]{McDonald to Lt.Col. Bauld, 15 May 1917, M-29-33 v11, RG 9 III B1 v3092, LAC.}
\footnotetext[158]{State of Training Oct/Nov 1917, G.177/2-10, 8 December 1917, Folder 103/File 10, RG 9 III C1 v3866, LAC.}
\end{footnotes}
discipline, and Esprit de Corps with which the fresh drafts are imbued.159

Byng’s recommendation that Turner receive the Légion d’honneur illustrates Byng’s attitude to Turner.160 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 1917.161 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 1917.162 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.”163

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.”164 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.165 Inspectors of Infantry for different commands also commented on improvements in training

160 Byng to Turner, 17 December 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.6, 19710147-007, Turner Fonds; CWM.
161 Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC.
162 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.
163 Perley to Borden, 27 January 1917, 13656, MG 26 H1 v33, Borden Fonds; LAC.
164 French to Perley, 28 August 1917, 10-8-18, RG 9 III A1 v73, LAC.
165 McDonald to Morrison, 26 July 1917, T-8-36 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3108, LAC.
Historians almost universally acknowledge that the new regime accomplished much in the reformation of the administration and training. 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." 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.

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.’ 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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166 Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of June 1917, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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.\(^{171}\)

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.”\(^{172}\)

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 5th Division be used for replacements if there was a shortage of

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\(^{171}\) McDonald to Morrison, 26 July 1917, T-8-36 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3108, LAC.

trained men.\textsuperscript{173} 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\textsuperscript{st} 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\textsuperscript{st} Battalion having completed their nine weeks of infantry training but not pioneer training and so were classified as untrained.\textsuperscript{174} 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.\textsuperscript{175}

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.\textsuperscript{176}

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

\textsuperscript{173} Byng to Turner, 6 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{174} 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.
\textsuperscript{175} AG to Training Areas, 30 March 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.
\textsuperscript{176} 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.\textsuperscript{177} This meant the battalions from British Columbia and Quebec lacked replacements, so required men from other provinces to maintain strength.\textsuperscript{178} 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.\textsuperscript{179} Turner, working closely with Byng, replaced two Montreal battalions with one each from Ontario and Nova Scotia.\textsuperscript{180} 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.\textsuperscript{181} 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.\textsuperscript{182}

The replacement situation for British Columbia and Quebec after Vimy

\textsuperscript{177} 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, \textit{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.
\textsuperscript{178} 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.
\textsuperscript{179} Turner to Perley, 10 March 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{180} 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.
\textsuperscript{181} Byng to Perley, 18 December 1916, 39214, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{182} 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.
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.”\textsuperscript{183} 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.\textsuperscript{184}

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\textsuperscript{th} Battalion, with the support of the brigade, divisional, and corps commanders, claimed that the 7\textsuperscript{th} Reserve Battalion which supplied the 38\textsuperscript{th} and the PPCLI was sending its best quality men to the PPCLI, because the 7\textsuperscript{th} Reserve was dominated by PPCLI officers. The 7\textsuperscript{th} 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\textsuperscript{th} Battalion.\textsuperscript{185} However, the fact that the 38\textsuperscript{th} complained twice with endorsements from the chain of command suggests there was something to their concerns.

\textsuperscript{183} Turner to Sims, 27 June 1917, File 7, MG 30 E133 v1, McNaughton Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{184} 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.
\textsuperscript{185} 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.
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.\textsuperscript{186} 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.\textsuperscript{187}

**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.”\textsuperscript{188} 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.

\textsuperscript{186} Messenger, *Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18*: 275.
\textsuperscript{188} Perley to Borden, 27 November 1916, v7, File 1, MG 27 II D12 v4-7, Perley Fonds; LAC.
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. 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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189 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. 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. 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. 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

190 Byng to Perley, 18 December 1916, 39214, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.
191 Byng to Turner, 6 May 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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.  

While Turner endeavoured to provide the Canadian Corps with what it needed, he was not a mere ‘cypher.’ 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. He had his staff closely monitor the corps, as illustrated by the query about the excess strength of two battalions.

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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193 Interview with General Guy R. Turner, RG 41 v21, LAC.
195 Lt.Col Harvie to Odlum, 27 August 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.
196 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.
Canadian Representative at GHQ in early 1917.\textsuperscript{197} 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.\textsuperscript{198} 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.\textsuperscript{199} 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.\textsuperscript{200} 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.”\textsuperscript{201}

Finally, there were Turner’s own characteristics. He worked hard in making the changes including holding meetings on New Year’s Day 1917.\textsuperscript{202} Another hallmark was professionalism; one of the critical differences between the old

\textsuperscript{197} 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.

\textsuperscript{198} Cable Perley to Borden, 8 December 1916, 31647-31648, MG 26 H v62, Borden Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{199} Sims to Montague, 25 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{200} Postscript, 18 October 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.

\textsuperscript{201} Turner to Mewburn, 23 December 1918, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

\textsuperscript{202} Ross Diary Entry, 1 January 1917, MG 30 E392 v1, Ross Fonds; LAC.
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. 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.

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. 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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203 Report Adjutant-General Branch, 27 February 1917, MG 30 E46 v3, Turner Fonds; LAC.
204 Montague AMS to AG, 26 July 1917, M-29-33 v11, RG 9 Ill B1 v3092, LAC.
205 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 Ill 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 Ill A1 v232, LAC.
request to call on the Inspector to discuss these issues. The Commander-in-Chief of Home Forces commented that he was pleased Canadian officers now accepted critiques from Inspectors and acted upon them.

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.

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. He closely monitored the regular reports from his staff. An example was his questioning of a Quartermaster-General report

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206 McDonald to Howard, 5 July 1917, T-4-36 v6, RG 9 III B1 v3106, LAC.
207 French to Perley, 28 August 1917, 10-8-18, RG 9 III A1 v73, LAC.
208 McDonald to Morrison, 26 July 1917, T-8-36 v2, RG 9 III B1 v3108, LAC.
209 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.
that, after further investigation and discussions with the War Office, revealed that
the Canadians were being double billed for freight costs for rations.  

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.

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. Those closer to Turner, such as Kemp and Currie,
ever 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.” 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.” This attitude was sure to
foster good will.

210 Hogarth to Turner, 13 December 1917, MG 30 E46 v5, Turner Fonds; LAC.
211 Memo Thacker to Turner, 3 November 1917, R-113-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v2940, LAC.
212 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.
213 Hewgill Diary Entry, 15 January, MG 30 E16 v1, Hewgill Fonds; LAC.
214 McDonald to Sims, 15 January 1917, E-4-24, RG 9 III B1 v2112, LAC.
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.
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.¹

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.”² 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.

¹ Kemp to Borden, 5 March 1919, 55844-55845, MG 26 H v102, Borden Fonds; LAC.
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.3

Currie’s pre-war military career was an unbroken success. He first enlisted in the 5th 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.4 Senior officers of the newly raised 50th Regiment, including the junior Major Garnet Hughes, persuaded the then retired Currie to accept command of the 50th 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.5

Physically, Currie was tall and portly, and lacked a strong presence.6 Shy

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4 Urquhart, Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian: 24.
5 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 2nd Division.
6 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-
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. 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. Currie lacked the man-management skills needed to inspire Canadian soldiers. 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. 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. An important factor in the victories of


8 Isabella Diane Losinger, “Officer-Man Relations in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919” (Masters, Carleton University, 1990), 18.
10 Burstall Comments, 7j, MG 4027 Acc. No 391 Ref 1-2, Urquhart Fonds; McGill.
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.12

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.”13 He soon won over the corps staff, as he was willing to listen and learn from his staff and subordinates.14 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.15 Currie, also, met with a British ADC or liaison officer, who discussed the views of the commander of the

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14 Horn and Harris, Warrior Chiefs, 50-51.
15 Garnet Hughes to Currie, 11 May 1917, File 9, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.
7 Fighting the Authorities

First Army and Haig on Turner and the corps, suggesting manoeuvres by GHQ were already taking place to ensure Currie’s promotion.\(^\text{16}\)

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.\(^\text{17}\) 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.\(^\text{18}\) Haig was surprised and worried about the complications of political influence. He, however, respected Currie.\(^\text{19}\) 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.’\(^\text{20}\)

It is apparent that Currie was well aware that there would be resistance to his elevation.\(^\text{21}\) Urquhart, Currie’s first biographer, made the case that a cabal led by Aitken applied considerable pressure to appoint Turner instead.\(^\text{22}\) This lobbying was without Turner’s support or encouragement.\(^\text{23}\) Turner, because of his seniority and Perley’s pledge could have caused the Government considerable

\(^\text{16}\) 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.

\(^\text{17}\) Sheffield, The Chief: Douglas Haig and the British Army. 221.

\(^\text{18}\) Urquhart, Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian: 160-162.

\(^\text{19}\) ibid., 157; Cook, The Madman and the Butcher: 191.

\(^\text{20}\) Perley to Lord Derby, 15 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.

\(^\text{21}\) 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.”

\(^\text{22}\) Urquhart, Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian: 160.

\(^\text{23}\) 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.
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. 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.

Perley then met with both Turner and Currie on 15 June to determine the channels of communication and boundaries of responsibility. 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. According to the standard narrative, the underlying cause of the resulting conflict was Perley’s granting of additional powers to Turner that

24 Cable Perley to Borden, 9 June 1917, v9 File 1, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.
25 Perley to Lord Derby, 15 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.
26 GHP Memorandum, File 3, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.
27 Perley to Borden, 15 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.
encroached on Currie’s authority within the corps. 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.” 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 1st Division. Borden was most concerned to ensure Garnet Hughes received the command. 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. While Currie did not rule out giving Hughes a division, he thought the PF officer

28 "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.
29 Memorandum, 14 June 1917, T-7, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
30 Cable Borden to Perley 13 June 1917, v9 File 1, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.
31 Currie Diary Entry, 10 June 1917, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC.
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Brigadier-General A.C. Macdonell a better choice. 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.

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. 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. 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 50th's regimental funds to stave off bankruptcy. 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

32 Perley to Borden, 15 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v107, LAC.
34 Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 121.
35 Currie Diary Entries, 13 September; 26 December 1917, MG 30 E100 v43, Currie Fonds; LAC.
his aide Harold Daly to assure Currie that his financial situation was under control.\textsuperscript{37}

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\textsuperscript{th} Brigade, settled it.\textsuperscript{38}

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.\textsuperscript{39} 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.\textsuperscript{40} 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

\textsuperscript{37} This was around the time of Festubert. Harold Daly Comments, MG 4027 Acc. No 391 Ref 1-2, Urquhart Fonds; McGill.
\textsuperscript{39} 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.
\textsuperscript{40} Cook, The Madman and the Butcher: 194.
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.\footnote{It was not until early in 1918 that the organisation of Canadian Divisions differed significantly from British Divisions.} 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.\footnote{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.} 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
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.”\(^{43}\) Turner swiftly replied agreeing and he followed up to report there were no outstanding promotions at the War Office or at GHQ.\(^{44}\) 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.”\(^{45}\) 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\(^{th}\).”\(^{46}\) 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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\(^{43}\) Currie to Turner, 29 July 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.
\(^{44}\) Turner to Currie, 2 August 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.
\(^{45}\) Turner to Currie, 9 August 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.
\(^{46}\) Montague to Turner, 16 August 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.
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 rangle Perley and Turner.47

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.48 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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47 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.
48 Memorandum, 3 September 1917, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.
standard British policy. 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. 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. Currie had to acquiesce.

**Turner and the Abortive Birth of a Canadian Air Force**

One of the paradoxes of Canadian participation in the First World War was why there was no separate Canadian air service at the front. 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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49 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.
50 A GSO 1 was typically a Lieutenant-Colonel but received higher pay and allowance than a line Lieutenant-Colonel.
51 Turner Handwritten Comments on Cdn Corps A-29-1-6, 1 June 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2910, LAC.
52 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.
53 Two squadrons were authorised and were in the process of forming and training at the armistice.
willingness to accept separate Canadian squadrons.\textsuperscript{54} In late 1915, the Army Council suggested the Dominions raise complete squadrons; an offer the Australians accepted.\textsuperscript{55} 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.\textsuperscript{56} 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.\textsuperscript{57} 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.\textsuperscript{58}

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.\textsuperscript{59} Turner launched a campaign to convince the Government to establish a Canadian flying service by writing a strong letter to Perley on 13 July.

\textsuperscript{54} Wise, \textit{Canadian Airmen and the First World War}, v. 1: 49, 74.
\textsuperscript{55} F. M. Cutlack, \textit{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.
\textsuperscript{56} 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.
\textsuperscript{57} These aces were William Bishop with 72 victories, Raymond Collishaw 60, Donald MacLaren 54 and William Barker 50.
\textsuperscript{58} 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, \textit{Fire in the Sky} (Crows Nest: Allen & Unwin, 2010), 179; Cutlack, \textit{The Australian Flying Corps in the Western and Eastern Theatres of War, 1914-1918}; 421.
\textsuperscript{59} Wise, \textit{Canadian Airmen and the First World War}, v. 1: 587.
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.\textsuperscript{60} 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.\textsuperscript{61} 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.\textsuperscript{62} The OMFC could only track officers seconded to the flying services.\textsuperscript{63} 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,

\textsuperscript{60} Turner to Perley, 22 September 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{61} Turner to Perley, 13 July 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{62} A Brigade was normally attached to an Army included observation and scout squadrons, a balloon park, and an aircraft park.

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.
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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.\(^{64}\) 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.\(^ {65}\)

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.\(^{66}\) 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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\(^{65}\) Perley to Borden, 10 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.

\(^{66}\) Currie to Turner, 3 November 1917, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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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.67 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.68 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.69 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.70

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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67 Turner to Kemp, 19 January 1918, 10-9-27 v1, RG 9 III A1 v80, LAC.
68 Bishop to Morrison, 10 April 1918, MG 30 E46 v9, Turner Fonds; LAC.
69 Turner to Kemp, 30 April 1918, C-18, MG 27 II D9 v132, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
70 Particulars of Canadians Seconded to Royal Flying Corps, 5 April 1918, 10-9-27 v1, RG 9 III A1 v80, LAC.
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Turner wanted – just two squadrons.\textsuperscript{71} Despite the promising start, neither squadron reached the front before the armistice.\textsuperscript{72}

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.\textsuperscript{73} The purported reasons for Currie’s dismissal included the Passchendaele high casualties, his ill health, or a poor

\textsuperscript{71} Overseas Militia Council Submissions, 13 July 1918, O-153-3 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC.
\textsuperscript{72} Wise, \textit{Canadian Airmen and the First World War}, v. 1: 579.
\textsuperscript{73} For more on the rumours, see Hyatt, \textit{General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography}; 93; Currie to Perley, 10 December 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC; Cook, \textit{The Madman and the Butcher}; 235.
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.\footnote{Cable Perley to Borden, 7 September 1917, v9 File 3, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.} 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.\footnote{Haig Diary, 18 January 1918 in Bourne, \textit{Douglas Haig: War Diaries and Letters, 1914-1918}, 372.} 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
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.\textsuperscript{76} 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.\textsuperscript{77} 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.”\textsuperscript{78} 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.\textsuperscript{79}

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.’\textsuperscript{80} Currie was probably alluding to Perley and

\textsuperscript{76} Cable Goodard to Preston, 3 December 1917, MG 30 E46 v12, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{77} Currie to Perley, 10 December 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{78} Currie to Loomis, 27 January 1918, MG 30 E100 v1, Currie Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{79} Draft Currie Biography, File 2, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives, 13. See also, Radley, \textit{We Lead, Others Follow : First Canadian Division 1914-1918}: 117.
\textsuperscript{80} Currie to Daly, 10 December 1917, File A/2, MG 27 III F9 v1, Daly Fonds; LAC.
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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. How to deal with conscripts was a matter of great importance. Turner, of because his strong management skills, rejected Thacker’s proposal for a special numbering system for conscripts as he did not want them to be specially distinguished. Turner also issued an order to the area commanders to ensure they treated conscripts with the
‘same goodwill and respect as volunteers.’\textsuperscript{83} 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.”\textsuperscript{84}

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.\textsuperscript{85} 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.\textsuperscript{86}

**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.\textsuperscript{87} Over Haig’s objections, the War Office ordered the disbandment of one battalion per

\textsuperscript{83} AG Circular Letter, 22 January 1918, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{84} McDona\ldots ld to Turner, 30 March 1918, T-4-36 v8, RG 9 III B1 v3107, LAC.
\textsuperscript{85} 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.
\textsuperscript{86} 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.
\textsuperscript{87} 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.
brigade.\textsuperscript{88} 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.\textsuperscript{89} Under this scheme with the 5\textsuperscript{th} 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.\textsuperscript{90} 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.\textsuperscript{91} 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.\textsuperscript{92} 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-

\textsuperscript{88} Messenger, \textit{Call to Arms: The British Army 1914-18}: 275.
\textsuperscript{89} Mallett, “The Interplay between Technology, Tactics and Organisation in the First AIF,” 165.
\textsuperscript{90} Cable Borden to Kemp, 6 February 1918, 73871, MG 26 H1 v139, Borden Fonds; LAC; Morton, \textit{A Peculiar Kind of Politics}: 155.
\textsuperscript{91} Urquhart, \textit{Arthur Currie, the Biography of a Great Canadian}: 198; Hyatt, \textit{General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography}: 100.
\textsuperscript{92} Granatstein, \textit{Canada's Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace}: 120.
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.  

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.” 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 5th Division was disbanded to free sufficient trained men.

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93 Reorganization Memo, 11 January 1918, 10-3-8, RG 9 III A1 v77, LAC.
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. 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.

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.

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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95 CASC MT Replacement Issues, File R-93-33, RG 9 III B1 v2938, LAC.
96 Turner to Currie, 11 February 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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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 5th Division’s Machine Gun Companies as replacements but instead they were used to increase the establishment in France. 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.

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. Turner agreed to the demand when there were sufficient replacements from Canada, and the plan was put into effect 22 August.

Argyll House also struggled to satisfy the increased establishment for engineer officers. The situation was so dire that Turner requested

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98 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.
99 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.
100 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.
101 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.
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.\textsuperscript{102}

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.\textsuperscript{103} 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.\textsuperscript{104}

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.\textsuperscript{105} 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

\textsuperscript{102} AAG to CGS, 20 July 1918, File R-93-33, RG 9 III B1 v2938, LAC.

\textsuperscript{103} 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.

\textsuperscript{104} “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.

\textsuperscript{105} Currie to HQ OMFC, 1 May 1918, R-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
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.”

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. 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 5th 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. In October 1917, the Canadian War Committee was considering breaking up the 5th Division given the replacement shortages and asked for Perley and Turner’s opinion. Based on a detailed analysis, Thacker recommended the 5th Division be broken up; otherwise, there would be no infantry replacements after 1 May 1918. Perley responded to a further cable from Borden ordering the disbandment of the 5th Division.

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106 Turner to Currie, 10 May 1918, R-3, MG 27 II D9 v157, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
107 McDonald reported problems in the provision of training equipment and supplies in almost every month of 1918 in his General Staff reports.
108 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.
109 Cable Borden to Perley, 24 October 1917, 39125A, MG 26 H v74/75, Borden Fonds; LAC.
110 Thacker to Turner, AG 21-1-1 (C), 1 November 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.
Division recommending to keep the organisation but use it for reinforcements.\footnote{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.}

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 5th Division in England while wounded men were returned to the front was a cause of public criticism.\footnote{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., \textit{Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-19. The Medical Services}: 152.} As part of Currie’s plan, the 5th 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 5th 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.\footnote{Green commanded a battalion in the 5th Division.} 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.\footnote{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.} 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 5th
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 3rd 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. Eventually, Hughes accepted an unpaid position in the British Munitions Ministry and Green returned to Canada.

Contrary to the views of some historians, the breakup of the 5th 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.

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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115 Memo Thacker to HQ Cnd Corps, A.G.1. 21-4-23, 27 March 1918, R-124-33, RG 9 III B1 v2941, LAC.
116 Cable Kemp to Borden, 26 February 1918, MG 26 H1 v141, Borden Fonds; LAC.
117 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
118 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; Marteinson, We Stand on Guard: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Army: 182.
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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.\footnote{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.}

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.\footnote{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.} Turner also directed Thacker to provide a list of
officers suitable for senior positions should the corps suffer heavy losses.\footnote{Thacker to HQ, Can Corps, 6 April 1918, RG 9 III B1 v2887, LAC.}

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 2nd 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 21st until May 27th.”\footnote{Nicholson, Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: 380.} 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
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.\textsuperscript{124}

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.\textsuperscript{125}

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

\textsuperscript{123} Dancocks, \textit{Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography}: 137.  
\textsuperscript{124} Turner to Kemp, 6 April 1918, MG 30 E46 v10, Turner Fonds; LAC.  
\textsuperscript{125} For a detailed study of the March offensives, see David T. Zabecki, \textit{The German 1918 Offensives: A Case Study in the Operational Level of War} (London: Routledge, 2006).
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. While in the segregation camp men would receive elementary training and basic discipline, but this additional interruption disrupted training. 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.

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.

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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126 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.
127 Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of April 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.
128 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.
129 Report on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of June 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.
130 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.
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. 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. 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.

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 a inebriate, which Currie denied. Currie’s comment was a characteristically petulant “If my recommendations are not to be

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132 Overseas Militia Council Submissions, 6 August 1918, O-153-3 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC.
133 Cdn HQ Shoreham from O.C. Cdn Engineer Training Depot, 11 September 1917, RG 9 III B1 v3083, LAC.
134 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.
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. 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. 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. 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.

The rate had to be maintained, as it was not certain until close to the Armistice...
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.¹³⁹

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.¹⁴⁰ 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

¹³⁹ Currie to Alfred Miller, Managing Editor London Free Press, 4 October 1918, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.
¹⁴⁰ Summary on the Work of the General Staff Branch During the Month of October 1918, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.
am afraid the old gang is still doing business.” 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.” Currie carped to a former ADC that Turner was spreading these lies. Kemp responded to Currie’s accusations, denying there was any substance to them.

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.

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.” Currie claimed he could provide the name of a British General who stated there was ‘a sustained but veiled attempt’ to undermine him. 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

141 Currie to Daly, 26 October 1918, MG 30 E100 v1, Currie Fonds; LAC.
142 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.
143 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 then 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.
144 Kemp to Currie, 30 November 1918, C-53, MG 27 II D9 v135, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
145 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.
146 Currie to Kemp, 27 February 1919, C-20, MG 27 II D9 v132, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
147 Currie to Kemp, 16 February 1919, C-20, MG 27 II D9 v132, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
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.\footnote{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.}

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.\footnote{Turner to Kemp, 21 March 1919, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.} 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.
Certainly, Sam Hughes was still an inveterate enemy but neither Turner nor Aitken were part of any conspiracy.\textsuperscript{150} Turner’s regular practice of visiting hospitals, something Currie did not often do, was possibly another contributing factor.\textsuperscript{151} 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.\textsuperscript{152}

**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

\textsuperscript{150} Cook, *The Madman and the Butcher*: 272-281.

\textsuperscript{151} 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.

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.¹⁵³

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.¹⁵⁴ In small issues, such as returning or retaining officers in England, Turner made every effort to satisfy Currie.¹⁵⁵ 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.¹⁵⁶ Another example was giving Currie authority to transfer men at the Infantry Depot in

¹⁵⁴ Turner to Currie, 9 October 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.
¹⁵⁵ Currie to Turner, 12 August 1917, File 6, MG 30 E75 v3, Urquhart Fonds; LAC.
¹⁵⁶ 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.
France who had not served overseas between units reinforced by the reserve battalion. 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.”

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. 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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157 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.


159 Cable Mewburn to Borden, 28 April 1918, 75059-75060, MG 26 H1 v141, Borden Fonds; LAC.
Currie’s concerns. 160

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.” 161 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.” 162 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.” 163 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.” 164

Fourth, constants of Currie’s correspondence with Turner were his persistent

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160 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.
161 Stanley, Canada’s Soldiers: The Military History of an Unmilitary People: 312.
163 Turner to Currie, 28 August 1917, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.
164 Turner to Currie, 3 September 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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 5th 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.  

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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165 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.
only to track establishments. He then offered to accept whatever course Currie thought appropriate.\textsuperscript{166}

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.\textsuperscript{167} 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.\textsuperscript{168} 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

\begin{footnotes}
\item[166] Currie to Canadian Section, 17 October 1918; Turner to Currie, 26 October 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\item[167] 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.
\item[168] 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.
\end{footnotes}
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 air force.

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.169 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.170 Therefore, the very different circumstances and

169 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.

170 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
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. 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.” 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.


Sheffield, “Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army, Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army, 1902-22,” 4.

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.” 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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173 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.

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.¹⁷⁵

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.”¹⁷⁶ The British also experienced this conflict as witnessed by the struggles that the MGC at GHQ had with the training arm in England.¹⁷⁷ 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.¹⁷⁸

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

¹⁷⁵ Ten officers per battalion times 48 battalions. G676/2-12, 11 October 1917, 103/6, RG 9 III C1 v3866, LAC.
¹⁷⁶ E. L. M. Burns, General Mud; Memoirs of Two World Wars (Toronto: Clarke, Irwin, 1970), 4. French, “The 51st (Highland) Division During the First World War,” 120.
¹⁷⁷ 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.
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.”\(^\text{179}\) 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.”\(^\text{180}\) 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

\(^{179}\) Turner to Kemp, 12 March 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.

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.”

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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181 Turner to Currie, 21 August 1920, MG 30 E100 v15, Currie Fonds; LAC.
Fighting the Authorities

Coburg libel trial. 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. 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.”

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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182 Turner to Currie, 31 March 1928, File 69, MG 30 E100 v19, Currie Fonds; LAC.
183 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.
It is largely due to his untiring efforts that the Canadian Military Organization in England has reached its present high state of efficiency. 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. 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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1 Press Release, 14 January 1918, P-16, MG 27 II D9 v155, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
2 Cable Kemp to Borden, 1 April 1918, 57572-57574, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.
become the permanent High Commissioner.³ 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.⁴ 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.⁵ 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.⁶

**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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³ Perley was an acting High Commissioner, as the High Commissioner could not sit in the Cabinet.
⁴ The Governor-General on the advice of the Prime Minister appoints Senators. The Senate is the upper house of the Canadian Parliament.
⁵ Perley to Borden, 14 September 1917, v9 File 3, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.
⁶ Biography S.C. Mewburn, Folder 144/File 10, RG 9 III D1 v4734, LAC. Mewburn’s son died at Courcelette serving in the 18th Battalion. Mewburn’s Burial File, 10-M-576, RG 9 III A1 v305, LAC.
in manpower, and pleaded that 50,000 men be compelled to serve.\(^7\) Borden, initially, wanted to give volunteer recruiting another six months.\(^8\) It was readily apparent, however, that this option was unrealistic.\(^9\) With the Government’s term about to expire and without an agreement from the opposition to extend it, an election was mandatory.\(^10\) After Laurier, the Liberal leader, rejected a coalition offer, Borden adroitly undercut him by suborning pro-conscription Liberals into a Union government.\(^11\) 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.\(^12\)

Some historians have questioned why the Government took these drastic and fundamentally undemocratic steps.\(^13\) 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.\(^14\) The two referenda were both narrowly defeated. Of great concern to the Canadian Government was the Australian population base.

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\(^7\) 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.

\(^8\) Cable Borden to Perley, 23 June 1917, RG 9 III A1 v104, LAC.


\(^10\) Granatstein, Broken Promises: The History of Conscription in Canada: 67.

\(^11\) Hillmer and Granatstein, Empire to Umpire: Canada and the World to the 1990s: 62.

\(^12\) Granatstein, Broken Promises: The History of Conscription in Canada: 63; Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 134.

\(^13\) Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 141.

\(^14\) 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.
military voted narrowly against conscription in both referenda, with the front-line forces voting three to one against in the first referendum.\textsuperscript{15}

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 \textit{Canada in Khaki} in support of more men.\textsuperscript{16} 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.\textsuperscript{17} 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.\textsuperscript{18} 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


\textsuperscript{17} “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.” \textit{The King’s Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia} 1917: 430.

\textsuperscript{18} 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.
vote Unionist. At one point, Preston was arrested when he tried to intervene at a polling station. He, subsequently, met Turner to complain about the purported violations, but Turner categorically denied the accusations. Ten years later, Turner continued to complain that Preston caused him ‘much annoyance’ during the election and that he was a ‘very slippery individual.’

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. In another instance, Turner refused to order the transfer of French-speaking soldiers from their existing units, until after the election.

Members of Turner’s staff and others in the OMFC worked diligently for the Government. After the election, Perley highlighted the election contributions of Aitken, Sims, and Donald Hogarth. Turner also received a warm letter of gratitude from W.P. Purney, who was responsible for carrying out the election overseas. 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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19 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.
20 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.
21 Turner to Currie, 31 March 1928, File 69, MG 30 E100 v19, Currie Fonds; LAC.
22 AG1 Pope to DAG, 23 November 1917, RG 9 III B1 v2883, LAC.
23 Turner to Thacker, 17 November 1917, R-97-33 v4, RG 9 III B1 v2939, LAC.
24 Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 141.
25 Perley to Borden, 10 December 1917, v10 File 3, MG 27 II D12 v8-12, Perley Fonds; LAC.
26 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.
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. 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. 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. His mood and dislike of England did not improve in the pessimistic atmosphere in London about the state of the war.

28 Kemp was ill much of December 1917. Cable Kemp to Borden, 8 January 1918, 57514-57515, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.
29 Kemp to Borden, 24 February 1918, MG 27 II D9 v129, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
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.” Kemp 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.

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. 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

31 Cable Kemp to Borden, 4 January 1918, 51130A, MG 26 H1 v96, Borden Fonds; LAC.
32 Kemp to Borden, 24 February 1918, MG 27 II D9 v129, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
33 Cable Mewburn to Borden, 28 April 1918, 75059-75060, MG 26 H1 v141, Borden Fonds; LAC.
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.” 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. 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.

34 Perley to Kemp, 9 August 1917, O-257-33, RG 9 III B1 v2903, LAC.
35 Cable Kemp to Borden, 1 April 1918, 57572-57574, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.
Kemp’s solution to these problems was an OMC to consist of the Minister, Deputy Minister, Turner, and the heads of the branches. 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. 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. 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.’ 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

36 Cable Kemp to Borden, 23 March 1918, 57542, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.
37 Memo Mewburn to Borden, 26 March 1918, 57543, MG 26 H1 v105, Borden Fonds; LAC.
38 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.
39 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.
and England, no senior officer from Turner’s or Currie’s command visited Canada until almost the end of the war. 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. Only seven of the sixty-nine general officers who served in France returned to Canada during the war to take up appointments. 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

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40 McDonald, Turner’s chief staff officer, and Bishop left for Canada in October 1918.
41 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.
The council dealt with a wide variety of topics, including promotions, establishments, compassionate policy, officer exchanges, and cadet uniforms. 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. Turner

43 Overseas Military Council Submissions, 14 May 1918, O-153-33 v2, RG 9 III B1 v2892, LAC; Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 160.
44 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.
45 Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC.
supplied Kemp with a letter to explain the new title and role to the War Office.\footnote{Turner to Kemp, 29 April 1918, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.} 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.\footnote{Kemp to Secretary of State for War, 1 May 1918, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.}

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
nominal. Currie, furthermore, disliked Sims and regarded him as a meddler, a bottleneck, and lacking the power to make decisions. Currie wanted Sims removed.\(^{48}\)

As an interim step to mollify Currie, Kemp agreed that Turner and Currie could communicate directly on purely Canadian matters without passing through Sims.\(^{49}\) On several occasions, Argyll House routed correspondence on Canadian matters through Sims, which outraged Currie.\(^{50}\) After one such incident, Currie attacked Turner claiming, “In a well disciplined Corps, disciplinary action would be taken for such a violation of instructions.”\(^{51}\) 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.\(^{52}\)

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.\(^{53}\) 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

\(^{48}\) 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.  

\(^{49}\) AG Order A.G. 36-1-14, 11 February 1918, C-41-3, RG 9 III B1 v910, LAC.  

\(^{50}\) Currie to HQ, OMFC, 11 March 1918, C-41-3, RG 9 III B1 v910, LAC.  

\(^{51}\) Currie to Kemp, 14 March 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.  

\(^{52}\) Kemp to Currie, 18 March 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.  

\(^{53}\) General Officer Commander, 30 January 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
administration of the 47,000 Canadians outside of the Canadian Corps in France and Belgium. 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 28th Battalion in the 2nd Division, and served as a Brigadier-General in the Canadian Corps and the 5th Division in England, and was serving as a Judge of the Court of King’s Bench in Saskatchewan when selected. 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.

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. 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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54 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.
55 Kemp to Secretary of State for War, 15 June 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
56 Harris, "From Subordinate to Ally," 123.
57 Currie to Minister, OMFC, 25 February 1918, C-41-3, RG 9 III B1 v910, LAC.
recommendations could not ‘always be taken at their face value’ as they at times violated regulations or sound policy. 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). 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.” 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. 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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58 Turner to Kemp, 12 March 1918, C-41a, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
61 Sutherland Brown to Unknown (Currie?), 1 April 1918, M-15-3, RG 9 III B1 v965, LAC.
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.\(^6\) 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.\(^6\) 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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\(^6\) Notes on Speech to House of Commons, 30 January 1917, 1-18, MG 27 II D23 v1, Hughes Fonds; LAC.

\(^6\) Comparative Statement of Staffs Employed, MG 30 E46 v6, Turner Fonds; LAC.
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.\(^{64}\)

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.\(^{65}\) 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.\(^{66}\) 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.\(^{67}\)

The source of these complaints was typically disgruntled officers, who antigovernment 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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\(^{65}\) Officers Employed at OMFC HQ, 11 June 1918, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.

\(^{66}\) Sharman to Turner, 26 April 1918, M-29-36 v1, RG 9 III B1 v3090, LAC.

\(^{67}\) Policy CGS, 17 July 1918, O-83-33, RG 9 III B1 v3101, LAC.
Chapter 7. These attacks especially nettled Turner, who wrote Kemp twice in April 1919 to refute the claims and to disparage Smart.68 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.69

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.70 Turner agreed and presented a memorandum to Kemp contesting the newspaper charges.71 Kemp did make efforts to defend his officers through newspaper articles, but it was difficult to do so from England.72 His complaints did trigger tighter censorship regulations in Canada that Mewburn thought would “cause some consternation with the press.”73

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

68 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.
69 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.
70 McDonald to Turner, 18 June 1918, M-29-36, RG 9 III B1 v3091, LAC.
71 Memorandum to the Hon. The Minister, 18 June 1918, C-73, MG 27 II D9 v136, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
72 Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 170.
73 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.
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.”\textsuperscript{74} 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.\textsuperscript{75} 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.\textsuperscript{76} Currie worried Kemp would learn he possessed the memo, so he forwarded it to Kemp.\textsuperscript{77} Currie was careful to position that he had not initiated the memo, but was prepared to discuss it if requested.\textsuperscript{78}

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

\textsuperscript{74} Statements Made by General Smart, MG 27 II D9 v161, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{75} Historians have not previously identified the author of the memo. For instance see Morton, \textit{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.
\textsuperscript{76} Memo Canadian Overseas Military Organization, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{77} McAlpine to Urquhart, 12 November 1934, File 12, MG 4027 C1, Urquhart Fonds; McGill Archives.
\textsuperscript{78} Currie to Kemp, 16 May 1918, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
write anonymous documents, we would all be enjoying the rest and quietness of the most peaceful days in our lives.” 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.

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. 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. 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. These complaints doubtless persuaded Sifton to take

79 Kemp to Currie, 22 May 1918, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
80 Memorandum Canadian Overseas Military Organization, MG 27 II D9 v134, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
83 Rattray to Currie, 24 April 1918, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.
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.\(^84\)

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.\(^85\) Two cables from Gow and Mewburn reassured Kemp to ignore any reports of the abolition of the OMFC.\(^86\) The memo angered Kemp, and he attempted to find out who wrote it.\(^87\) 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.\(^88\) 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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\(^85\) 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.

\(^86\) 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.

\(^87\) 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.

\(^88\) 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.
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. 89 Hughes paid close attention to Hogarth, and issued a number of instructions related to promotions and appointments for him. 90 Hogarth was also a Conservative political operative, and Perley praised him for his contribution to the 1917 election campaign. 91 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. 92 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. 93 When he returned he was in a ‘somewhat petulant’ frame of mind. 94 In October 1918, Kemp travelled to Canada to deal with political matters, and Gow attempted to

89 Douglas McDonald Hogarth Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4424 - 13, LAC.
91 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.
92 Turner to Currie, 1 October 1917, MG 30 E100 v2, Currie Fonds; LAC.
93 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.
94 Morton, A Peculiar Kind of Politics: 176.
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. 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.” 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. 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.”

The situation was so rancorous that Gow resigned on 25 October because of Turner’s “unfair, ungenerous, and unwarranted conduct.” Despite Turner’s stated regret at the incident, Gow claimed he only shook Turner’s hand when he

95 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.
96 Gow to Kemp, 26 October 1918, G-2, MG 27 II D9 v143, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
97 Turner to Currie, 9 October 1918, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.
98 Cable Turner to Kemp, 4 November 1918, G-2, MG 27 II D9 v143, Kemp Fonds; LAC.
99 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.
left because of the presence of a junior officer.\textsuperscript{100} This clash influenced Borden’s view of Turner, and contributed to the impression that he was difficult.\textsuperscript{101} 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.”\textsuperscript{102}

**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.\textsuperscript{103} 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.\textsuperscript{104} Shortages in sea transport and the limited rail capacity from Canada’s only two ice-free ports of

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{100} 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.


\textsuperscript{102} Resignation of Gow, 24 January 1939, Box 2 Folder 8, 74/672, Directorate of History and Heritage.

\textsuperscript{103} Disturbances in Canadian Camps and Areas 1918-1919, GAQ 10-39F, RG 24 v1841, DHH.

\textsuperscript{104} The 345,000 total consisted of 130,000 men in England, 152,000 more in France and Belgium, 38,000 dependants, and 25,000 ex-Imperial troops. Demobilisation Factors, Folder 41, 74/672 Box 8, DHH.
\end{footnotesize}
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.\textsuperscript{105}

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.\textsuperscript{106} 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.\textsuperscript{107} 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.\textsuperscript{108} 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-

\textsuperscript{105} 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.
\textsuperscript{107} 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.
service men stationed in England and this engendered discontent. In addition, the Canadians would know that the earlier riots of British troops at Calais, Dover, and Folkestone had resulted in accelerating demobilisation. 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. 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. 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. The weak discipline and poor command in the segregation camps exacerbated the situation. Turner and his staff

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109 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.

110 Comments on Morton’s "Kicking and Complaining,” 14 May 1980, Julian Putkowski, Misc 61 Item 900, IWM.


113 Memorandum of Conference Held on Saturday June 21st, 1919, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.
were lamentably poor at communicating why there were delays, resulting in
rumours, fears, and frustrations spiralling out of control into rioting.\footnote{Disturbances in Canadian Camps and Areas 1918-1919, GAQ 10-39F, RG 24 v1841, DHH.]

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.\footnote{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.} 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.\footnote{Special Order of the Day, 20 June 1919, MG 30 E46 v8, Turner Fonds; LAC.} 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.\footnote{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.}

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.\footnote{Kemp to Turner, 9 April 1918, MG 27 II D9 v162, Kemp Fonds; LAC.} 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
clearly tired, and it showed in their performance.\textsuperscript{119}

\section*{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

\textsuperscript{119} Kemp reported Thacker as “now rather broken down.” Kemp to Mewburn, 23 July 1919, 10-T-280, RG 9 III A1 v341, LAC.
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.\(^{120}\) 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.

\(^{120}\) 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.\(^{121}\) Ironically, Turner would later serve on the Pension Commission for many years with success.\(^ {122}\)

 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.\(^ {123}\) Turner’s father had died in 1917 and so Turner was the sole owner of the family firm.\(^ {124}\) 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.\(^ {125}\) He was officially demobilised in November.\(^ {126}\) 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.\(^ {127}\)

 Turner returned to Quebec City to run his family business, but he did not

\(^{121}\) Borden to White, 9 December 1918, 55554, MG 26 H v102, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\(^{123}\) Turner to Mewburn, 29 May 1919, MG 30 E46 v11, Turner Fonds; LAC.
\(^{125}\) Kemp to Borden, 31 July 1919, 51433, MG 26 H1 v96, Borden Fonds; LAC.
\(^{126}\) Turner War Record, G.A.Q. 4-40, RG 24 v1815, LAC.
\(^{127}\) 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

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.128 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 15th
Battalion, the unveiling of a memorial to the 28th Battalion in Regina in 1926, and
the Ypres commemorative dinner in 1930.129 He attended the unveiling of the
Canadian memorial at St. Julien in 1933 and the Vimy Pilgrimage of 1936.130 He
represented the Duke of Connaught at the funeral of his former minister Sir
George Perley in 1938.131 He also wrote forewords to the regimental histories of
the 14th and 15th Battalions.132

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

128 Turner to Gimblett, 27 March 1920, File 72, 2001/10, Duguid Fonds; DHH.
129 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.
130 Photographs, MG 30 E236 v4, Villiers Fonds; LAC; D. E. Macintyre, Canada at Vimy (Toronto:
131 “Sir George Perley Funeral,” Montreal Gazette, 8 January 1938.
132 Fetherstonhaugh, The Royal Montreal Regiment: 14th Battalion, C.E.F. 1914-1925; Beattie,
48th Highlanders of Canada, 1891-1928.
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.  

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. 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. 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. During the war, the GWVA met with a special Parliamentary committee and the Prime Minister.

These groups had varied membership standards and different political objectives. Some organisations, such as the GWVA, were restricted to only

135 Great War Veterans Association Minute Book, 12 April 1917, MG 28 I298 v1, LAC.
137 Great War Veterans Association Minute Book, June 1917; 26 March 1918, MG 28 I298 v1, LAC.
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. 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.

In 1919, a demand for an immediate $2,000 gratuity for all veterans widened the rift between veterans’ organisations. 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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140 ibid., 65.
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.\(^{141}\)

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.\(^{142}\) 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.\(^{143}\) 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

\(^{141}\) 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.

\(^{142}\) 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.

\(^{143}\) Melanie Wiber, "The Royal Canadian Legion: A New Perspective on Voluntary Associations" (Masters, University of Alberta, 1981), 43-44.
representative to the advisory committee except Canada.144

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.145

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.146

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.”147

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144 British Empire Service League, MG 28 I298 v74, LAC.
146 Great War Veterans Association Minute Book, 5 July 1921, MG 28 I298 v1, LAC; Bowering, Service: The Story of the Royal Canadian Legion: 10.
147 R.B. Maxwell to Turner, Undated, MG 28 I298 v73, LAC.
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.\textsuperscript{148} Haig’s trip was a triumph.\textsuperscript{149} 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.\textsuperscript{150} 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.\textsuperscript{151} In addition, his evident popularity with the rank and file, especially the veterans who served with the 2\textsuperscript{nd} Division, was advantageous. Currie did not have the repute he was to have later in the decade with the men after the success.

\textsuperscript{148} James Hale, \textit{Branching Out: The Story of the Royal Canadian Legion} (Ottawa: Royal Canadian Legion, 1995), 12.
\textsuperscript{149} 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,” \textit{Canadian Military History} 5, no. 1 (1996).
\textsuperscript{150} Morton and Wright, \textit{Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930}: 197.
\textsuperscript{151} Jack Jarvie and Diana Swift, \textit{The Royal Canadian Legion, 1926-1986} (Toronto, Ont., Canada: Discovery Books, 1985), 27.
of the 1928 libel trial. According to Tim Cook, Currie’s “attitude towards veterans was at time ungenerous, bordering on callous.”¹⁵² 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.¹⁵³ 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

¹⁵³ Great War Veterans Association Minute Book, 30 June 1925, MG 28 I298 v1, LAC.
the word “Canadian” included in the name.”\textsuperscript{154} 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.\textsuperscript{155}

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.”\textsuperscript{156}

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.\textsuperscript{157}

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

\textsuperscript{154} Report of Proceedings of the National Unity Conference and Draft Constitution, File 44, MG 28 I298 v43, LAC.
\textsuperscript{155} “Ontario Veterans to Meet,” \textit{Montreal Gazette}, 15 April 1926.
\textsuperscript{156} Griesbach to Currie, 21 December 1925, File 4, MG 30 E100 v27, Currie Fonds; LAC.
\textsuperscript{157} The ANV is still a separate organisation from the Royal Canadian Legion.
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. 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 13th Canadian Scottish Light Cavalry, 13th Brigade CFA, and the Royal Rifle Regiment of Canada. He also served on the Canadian Pension Commission retiring in 1941.

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. 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.”

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158 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.
159 Richard Turner Service Jacket, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9842 - 47, LAC.
160 “Turner Retires from Pension Commission.”
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

Turner was an atypical Canadian general of the first half of the 20th 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. 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

2 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

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. 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. 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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3 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.
4 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

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 Courcelette, 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
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.”

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 Courcelette 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.

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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6 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."
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.7 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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7 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

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.\(^8\) 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.”\(^9\) 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.\(^10\) Currie is the contrast, as he faced the same circumstances as Turner and is generally regarded as an effective developer of subordinates.\(^11\) 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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\(^8\) Beyond an almost indecipherable script, Alderson had a circuitous writing style.


\(^10\) 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.

### Figure 22  Promotion Comparison – Turner/Currie

#### Turner

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Appointments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G. B. Hughes§</td>
<td>3(^{rd}) Brigade Staff</td>
<td>1(^{st}) Brigade, 5(^{th}) Division†</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. O. W. Loomis*</td>
<td>13(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) Brigade, 7(^{th}) Brigade, 11(^{th}) Brigade, 3(^{rd}) Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. F. L. Embury</td>
<td>28(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>R. G. E. Leckie</td>
<td>16(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. G. F. M. Lord Brooke§</td>
<td>4(^{th}) Brigade</td>
<td>12(^{th}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Watson</td>
<td>5(^{th}) Brigade</td>
<td>4(^{th}) Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. M. Ross</td>
<td>29(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>5(^{th}) Brigade, 10(^{th}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T. L. Tremblay</td>
<td>22(^{nd}) Battalion</td>
<td>5(^{th}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. H. Bell</td>
<td>31(^{st}) Battalion</td>
<td>6(^{th}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A. Ross</td>
<td>28(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>6(^{th}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>W. St. P. Hughes§</td>
<td>21(^{st}) Battalion</td>
<td>10(^{th}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

§ Political appointee  
* Shared appointee  
† Did not reach front

#### Currie

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Origin</th>
<th>Appointments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>G. E. McCuaig</td>
<td>13(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>1(^{st}) Brigade, 4(^{th}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. J. Lipsett</td>
<td>8(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) Brigade, 3(^{rd}) Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. O. W. Loomis*</td>
<td>13(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>2(^{nd}) Brigade, 7(^{th}) Brigade, 11(^{th}) Brigade, 3(^{rd}) Division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. S. Tuxford</td>
<td>5(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>3(^{rd}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. M. Dyer</td>
<td>5(^{th}) Battalion</td>
<td>7(^{th}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. W. Hill</td>
<td>1(^{st}) Battalion</td>
<td>9(^{th}) Brigade</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

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.  

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 Courcelette. 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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13 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.
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.¹⁴ 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.¹⁵ 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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¹⁵ 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.
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.”

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.” 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. 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 2nd 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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16 Turner to Hetty, 15 May 1915, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.
17 Travers, The Killing Ground: The British Army, the Western Front, and the Emergence of Modern Warfare, 1900-1918: 13.
Conclusion

military, Turner sacrificed his aspirations for obedience.\(^{19}\) 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.\(^{20}\) 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.\(^{21}\) 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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\(^{19}\) 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.

\(^{20}\) 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.

\(^{21}\) Turner to Hetty, 30 September 1916, DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.17, 19710246-011, CWM.
added “This is awfully conceited on my part in writing it, so please keep it very much to yourself.”

Even his obituary remarked on his modesty.

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. Contributing to this reputation was his habit of visiting the front line, which always endeared senior officers to the troops. 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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23 “Turner Obituary.”
24 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.
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.  

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. 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.

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 Courcelette demonstrated sound judgement in

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26 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.
28 Alderson to Second Army G271, 18 April 1916, WO 158/296, TNA.
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.\textsuperscript{29} 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.\textsuperscript{30}

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


\textsuperscript{30} Turner Diary Entry, 15-17 November 1916, 19710147-001/ DOCS MANU 58A 1 9.1, Turner Fonds; CWM.
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. 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. 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. 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.

31 Turner to Carson, 3 October 1915, Folder 42 File 1, RG 9 III C3 v4098, LAC.
32 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.
33 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

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 3rd 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 Courcelette 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.34 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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Conclusion

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.\textsuperscript{35} 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.\textsuperscript{36} 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,

\textsuperscript{35} Carson to Aitken, 9 June 1916, 8-5-8F, RG 9 III A1 v44, LAC.
\textsuperscript{36} Turner to Hastings, 13 April 1918, Folder 41/File 1, RG 9 III D1 v4688, LAC.
including 26 September and 8 October, without the compensation of a signal victory, such as Courcelette. 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. As Napoleon stated “The ability to comprehend the political dimension of war is also implicit and unchanging.” 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. 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
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.”\(^{41}\) 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

\(^{41}\) Riley, *Napoleon as a General*: 5.
Conclusion

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 1 Awards

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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