

My pilot and I have had some very thrilling experiences just lately. We bombed the German troops from a very low height and had the pleasure of shooting hundreds of rounds into dense masses of them with my machine gun. They simply scattered and tumbled in all directions. Needless to say we got it pretty hot and when we got back to the aerodrome found that our machine was pretty well shot up.

-Lieutenant James David Moses of Oshweken

Not in vain did our young men die in a strange land; not in vain are our Indian bones mingled with the soil of a foreign land for the first time since the world began; not in vain did the Indian fathers and mothers see their son march away to face what to them were understandable dangers; the unseen tears of Indian mothers in many isolated Indian reserves have watered the seeds from which may spring those desires and efforts and aspirations which will enable us to reach sooner the stage when we will take our place side by side with the white people.

-Edward Ahenakew, 1920



Figure 1 Canadian Forestry Corps

Station 1

"It is better for a man to be killed in battle than to die of old age or sickness."

-The Blackfoot Nation

Special mention must be made of the Ojibwa bands located in the vicinity of Fort William, which sent more than one hundred men overseas from a total adult male population of two hundred and eighty-two. Upon the introduction of the Military Service Act it was found that there were but two Indians of the first-class left at home on the Nipigon reserve, and but one on the Fort William reserve.... The Indian recruits from this district for the most part enlisted with the 52nd, popularly known as the Bull Moose Battalion. Their commanding officer, the late Colonel Hay, who was killed, stated upon frequent occasions that the Indians were among his very best soldiers. Their gallantry is testified by the fact that the name of every Indian in this unit appeared in the casualty list. The fine appearance of these Indian soldiers was specially commented upon by the press in the various cities through which the battalion passed on its way to the front. One of the Indian members of the 52nd, Private Rod Cameron, won premier honours in a shooting competition among the best marksmen of twelve battalions.

-Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, 1915

If I am spared to return home to dear old Canada, the land of the free, I will bring you souvenirs of some kind. The country in which we are in is all in ruins. I am Sorry I am not allowed to tell where we are if I did the censor would get after me. I will ask you again to write to my wife. It will cheer her a lot to know. I wish to be remembered to all who know me. Write soon and let me know what is going on in Canada and especially in Cobourg.

-JOHNSON PAUDASH of Hiawatha Reserve, December 3, 1915

For four short years our sons fought in European trenches beside their sons, our blood mingled with theirs, as for four hundred years in a different way our bloods had mixed. Four thousand of our Native brothers and now grandfathers saw the European homeland through the sights of rifles and the roar of cannon. Hundreds are buried in that soil, away from the lands of their birth. These Native warriors accounted well for themselves, and the Allied cause. ... They were courageous, intelligent and proud carriers of the shield.

-World War I-1914-1918

Our famous sniper no doubt understood better than most of us the cost of life and the price of death. Henry Norwest carried out his terrible duty superbly because he believed his special skill gave him no choice but to fulfil his indispensable mission. Our 50th [Battalion] sniper went about his work with passionate dedication and showed complete detachment from everything while he was in the line. ... Yet when we had the rare opportunity to see our comrade at close quarters, we found him pleasant and kindly, quite naturally one of us, and always an inspiration.

-Wheeler, 1917

The war proved that the fighting spirit of my tribe was not squelched through reservation life. When duty called, we were there, and when we were called forth to fight for the cause of civilization, our people showed all the bravery of our warriors of old.

- Mike Mountain Horse, First World War veteran

"I tell you it is thrilling. I am having all sorts of thrills and bubbles inside me"

-(Sophie Hoerner, Letter to Mollie, May 12, 1915, p.1).

Got one hundred and ten patients last night. They are all so wonderful, so patient and sweet to each other. Their one hope is that they may not be wounded till after dark as they can't be picked up till after dark and it is terrible to lie wounded on the battle-field all day. Some of the wounds are so dreadful that one's most vivid imagination couldn't even faintly picture them. I am well and so far have not been overworked. There are eighty of us. The outdoor life agrees with me. I am burned to a cinder. My nose is like a tomato.

-(Sophie Hoerner, Postcard, June 7, 1915)

"I wish I was allowed to write all I see and hear. Now the worst is this awful gas. It's terrible to see. It's impossible to supply the demand for respirators and to-day I heard that the Germans were sending burning pitch on our men"

-(Sophie Hoerner, Letter to Mollie, June 4, 1915, p. 1).



Figure 2 Sophie Hoerner



Figure 3 Military nurse Grace MacPherson Livingston was a volunteer Red Cross ambulance driver

"We have been dreadfully busy, seven hundred patients. As I sit here in my little hut, ambulance after ambulance bringing in the wounded, it's too terrible to watch and hear, and it goes on all night, too. Convoys coming all the time"

(Sophie Hoerner, Letter to Mollie, July 4, 1915, p. 1).

"We had another air raid. This time the bombs were dropping all about us. Everyone was more or less terrified and indeed one can not soon forget the horrible whizzing noise of those bombs.... After this raid fatigue parties were sent to dig dug-outs for the sisters which were to be bomb proof"

- (Gamble diary, entry starting January 7, 1916).

Station 2

"As I have unsolicited applications from over one hundred coloured men wishing to enlist, and none of the regiments being formed will take them, if I secure the names of a thousand men, white and coloured, willing to enlist in a regiment to consist of white and coloured men, will you accept them as a new Nova Scotia regiment?"

It is felt that coloured men should be allowed to go, but the regiments being formed do not want them."

Captain J.F. Tupper
Westville, Nova Scotia
to Sir Sam Hughes

NOTHING IS TO BE GAINED BY BLINKING FACTS, THE CIVILIZED NEGRO IS VAIN AND IMITATIVE; IN CANADA HE IS NOT IMPELLED TO ENLIST BY A HIGH SENSE OF DUTY; IN THE TRENCHES HE IS NOT LIKELY TO MAKE A GOOD FIGHTER; AND THE AVERAGE WHITE MAN WILL NOT ASSOCIATE WITH HIM ON TERMS OF EQUALITY," FURTHER, "IN FRANCE, IN THE FIRING LINE, THERE IS NO PLACE FOR A BLACK BATTALION, C.E.F., IT WOULD BE EYED ASKANCE; IT WOULD CROWD OUT A WHITE BATTALION; AND IT WOULD BE DIFFICULT TO RE-INFORCE." "NO WHITE OFFICER WOULD ACCEPT ON ALL BLACK PLATOON."

Major-General W.G. Gwatkin
Memorandum from General Headquarters, Ottawa, April 1916

No. 2 Construction Battalion FOR COLORED MEN OF CANADA

Men required for all kinds of
Construction Work

This Battalion will go OVERSEAS as soon as
recruited up to strength

Apply Nearest Recruiting Office

"When the First World War came along, I quit school and enlisted," he said.

"I landed in an outfit that was trained as infantry and could also handle most construction jobs. We landed in Liverpool after a crossing that took 21 days. We went first to Seaforth, then to Folkestone and soon crossed to Boulogne and went right up to the front. I was later wounded at Vimy Ridge."

Seymour Tyler, 1975



Figure 4 Two Canadian soldiers doing their laundry during the First World War.

Station 3

I am just in receipt of a telegram from Mr. Malcolm E.J. Reid, of Vancouver, which is badly transmitted, but which indicates that an application has been made to him for the admission to Canada of coloured men from the United States to join a construction battalion. Mr. Reid asks whether the Department will authorize the admission of coloured recruits for a construction battalion.

I think this should be turned down; judging by what I have seen and heard there is no great difficulty in securing recruits for forestry and construction battalions, and I think it would be unwise to allow a lot of coloured men to get a foothold in Canada, even under guise of enlistment in such a battalion.

Superintendent of Immigration



Figure 5 No. 2 Battalion 1916

"If we soon have the opportunity to show all of our allies what a French-Canadian regiment can do in a bayonet charge, we are ready and we are only waiting for the order to advance. Then every country will know our worth [translation]."

-Georges-Ulric Francoeur, Journal de guerre, 20 December 1915.

"We are on our way to France, our hearts full of fighting spirit, with the firm resolve to conquer or die. Duty calls us, and we must obey ... May God protect France [translation]!"

-Captain Francoeur, Dairy Entry, 13 September 1915.

"We are on our way to France, our hearts full of fighting spirit, with the firm resolve to conquer or die. Duty calls us, and we must obey ... May God protect France [translation]!"

-Captain Francoeur, Dairy Entry, 13 September 1915.

"The people hardly understand how we happen to speak French and wear khaki. Very many of the French inhabitants were ignorant of our political existence as a race apart in Canada ... We have opened their eyes and their hearts."

-Georges Vanier, letter to his mother, 14 September 1915.

"I know people back in Canada ... who will spit with contempt when they think of us, and will repeat ... that we have no reason to risk our lives for France and England. However, if those countries had been left to fend for themselves, what would have happened?"

--Arthur J. Lapointe, 1917

Station 4

I am confident that the French Canadians will defend all their trenches with fierce vigour and will hold on at any price, even the price of death. Let us not forget that we represent an entire race and that many things—the very honour of French Canada—depend upon the manner in which we conduct ourselves. Our ancestors bequeathed to us a brave and glorious past that we must respect and equal. Let us uphold our beautiful old traditions.

-Thomas-Louis Tremblay, 1915



Figure 6 In the trenches. 22nd Infantry Battalion, July 1916.

"We are about to attack a village called Courcelette. We will take that village, and once we have taken it, we will hold it to the last man. This is our first big attack. It must succeed, for the honour of all the French Canadians whom we represent in France [translation]."

-Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas-Louis Tremblay, Journal de guerre, 15 September 1916.

Since the outbreak of the War-four long, unendurable days ago-I have been on pins and needles. Will they take me?-that's the question. It is maddening to think of those thirty thousand "chosen ones" (the volunteers in the first CEF) marching away to Glory and Adventure... Thank Heaven! All fears are over now. I have PASSED.... Crowds of spectators watch our daily drills. This unusual solitude has gone to our heads, quite a bit. We strut around, for the most part, as if the destiny of the Empire hung on our every step. - Ridiculous, of course; but there is something grand about it.

-Private Frank Walker, August 8-10, 1914

"When the war broke out, I run away from the home I was in... I run away and joined the army, and gave my age as 18. I was between 14 and 15...(but) I just looked tough, you know, like a regular farm boy. I joined the army and went in as a sniper. The average young fella was running away, you know. Things are different now. You see I was only getting fiver dollars a year and my keep (at the farm home). When I joined the army I was getting more -\$1.10 a day."

-Burt Woods, Memoir, 19178



Figure 7 Recruitment poster for the 207th Battalion of Ottawa-Carleton.

"While I was probably as patriotic as most young men of that time, I was getting restless. I wasn't at all happy in the confinement of working in a bank, and I jumped at the opportunity to get free of some of the restraints that I had been under as a young person growing up and at the opportunity to see something else of the world?"

-Robert Swan" In: Daphne Read. The Great War and Canadian Society: An Oral History, 1978

Station 5



The Call to Arms: Enlisting to save their King.

Source: A. A. Chesterfield Fonds, Queen's University Archives

A few days later Bill voiced the opinion of the majority of the soldiers when he said, "Oh, this bloomin' war will be over in three months." Not alone was this Bill's opinion, or that of the men only, but the opinion of the people of Canada, the opinion of the people of the whole British Empire.

It was this over-confidence which brought only thirty-three thousand Canadian men to the mobilization camp at Valcartier, in answer to the first call to arms, instead of the one hundred thousand there should have been.

-Private Harold R. Peat, Memoir, 1917