

Moving Mountains:  
The No. 2 Construction Battalion and African Canadian Experience  
During the First World War

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Honours Thesis  
Submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for History 4499  
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April 2012  
Mount Saint Vincent University

## Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my deepest gratitude to Dr. David Campbell who inspired the beginning of this project and whose guidance, encouragement, and insight on the content and editing of this thesis have not only made the finished product a success but also made the experience incredible.

I would also like to convey my appreciation for Dr. Henry Bishop, curator of the Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia. Our many meetings and his outstanding wealth of knowledge regarding the No. 2 Construction Battalion played a considerable part in the early stages of writing. Having provided Reverend Captain William Andrew White's diary, a key primary source for this thesis, the Black Cultural Center has been instrumental in supplying some of the most compelling and original evidence for my research.

I also acknowledge the History Department of Mount Saint Vincent University, which has played a key role in the development of my passion for the study of history. The enthusiasm shown for this project as well as the encouragement and wisdom provided by members of the faculty, including Dr. Frances Early, Dr. Janet Guildford, Dr. Corey Slumkoski, Professor Jonathan Roberts, Dr. Adriana Benzaquén, Dr. Roni Gechtman, Dr. Reginald Stuart and Dr. Kenneth Dewar has been phenomenal.

Thanks must also be given to my family and friends for being my "cheerleaders" and for being patient with the amount of time taken from my personal life to complete this project.

Finally, as writers often need someone with whom to bounce ideas off, I affectionately thank Zachary Eden for always being there to share his views, and to tirelessly listen to my chatter on my own thoughts and discoveries. This thesis would not have been completed had he not been there to stop me from defenestrating my computer when the need seemed overwhelming.

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## Introduction

African Canadians have a long history of responding to the call of duty when required, and when they served, they patriotically fought among European Canadians.<sup>1</sup> During the War of 1812, African Canadians fought in non-segregated units such as the 104<sup>th</sup> Regiment of Foot and the Glengarry Light Infantry.<sup>2</sup> They also volunteered to defend the government during the Upper Canada Rebellion from 1837 to 1839.<sup>3</sup> However, when the First World War erupted in August 1914, African Canadians were no longer widely welcomed in the fight. They flocked to recruiting centers just as European Canadians did, but most were met with disapproval. Their exclusion was not part of an official policy maintained by the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), though it was still very clear that African Canadians were not welcome.

While some African Canadians were accepted into units such as the 112<sup>th</sup> Battalion, most were consistently denied enrolment in the CEF. When the war began, there was no shortage of Canadian men willing to enlist in the CEF. Therefore, according to historian James Walker, “recruiting officers could afford to be selective, and one of the selection criteria was the ‘race’ of the applicant.”<sup>4</sup> By 1917, however, the willing population of European Canadian volunteers in Canada had been depleted and the debate regarding conscription intensified.<sup>5</sup> Soon, the CEF acquiesced to African Canadians’ demands that a coloured unit be created and authorized the formation of the Number 2 Construction Battalion (No. 2 CB), before conscription was ordered, in July of 1916 to help meet the labour requirements of the overseas war effort. The unit left

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<sup>1</sup> The term “European Canadian” describes Canadian citizens of European origin or descent through birth or ancestry.

<sup>2</sup> Calvin W. Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction, 1916-1920* (Halifax: The Society for the Preservation of Black Culture in Nova Scotia, 1986), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 3.

<sup>4</sup> James W. St. G. Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force,” *Canadian Historical Review* 70, No. 1 (1989), 3.

<sup>5</sup> David Campbell, “The First 100,000 Came Easily: Recruiting the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War,” *Revue Internationale d’Histoire Militaire* No. 86 (2006), 65.

Halifax, Nova Scotia, via the *SS Southland* on 25 March 1917 and arrived in Liverpool, England, on 7 April 1917. The unit then proceeded to France to work with the Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC) at La Joux in the Jura Mountains. There, the members cut timber, transported lumber, dug trenches, laid barbed wire, and built huts in support of Allied military operations on Europe's Western Front. After the Armistice was signed on 11 November 1918, No. 2 CB was demobilized, having been formed only for the duration of the conflict.

The No. 2 CB is considered by historians and military officials to be "Canada's first and only Black Battalion," as almost all of its members were African Canadian.<sup>6</sup> The term is misleading, as it implies that the battalion was made up entirely of African Canadians. In reality, the No. 2 CB was commanded by European Canadian officers. Only the chaplain, Reverend Captain William Andrew White, was African Canadian. Moreover, although most of the Non-commissioned Officers (NCOs) were African Canadian, two of them were European Canadian.<sup>7</sup> The battalion was not entirely comprised of African Canadian soldiers as its nickname suggests, but it does signify a turning point in Canadian military history, as few African Canadians were enlisted in the CEF before the formation of the battalion.

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<sup>6</sup> The term, "Black Battalion," is used loosely by historians when writing about the battalion. For instance, Calvin Ruck calls it "the first and only Black Battalion in Canadian military history" in *Canada's Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction, 1916-1920* (Halifax: The Society for the Protection and Preservation of Black Culture in Nova Scotia, 1986), 21. In *The Nova Scotia Black Experience Through the Centuries* (Halifax: Nimbus Publishing, 2007), Bridglal Pachai also refers to the battalion as "the only segregated black battalion in the history of the Canadian Military" (p.166). In *Canada and Its People of African Descent* (Pierrefonds, Quebec: Bilongo Publishers, 1977), Leo W. Bertley also refers to the battalion as "an all-Black contingent of the Canadian Expedition Force during World War I" (p.75), and even Alfreda Withrow claims that it was "the first and only Black Canadian Battalion" in *Nova Scotia's Ethnic Roots* (Tantallon, Nova Scotia: Glen Margaret Publishing, 2002), 106.

<sup>7</sup> Sean Flynn Foyn, "The Underside of Glory: AfriCanadian Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1917" (Ottawa: University of Ottawa, 1999), 117. According to the unit's war diary, "The Officers, [of the No. 2 CB] with the exception of the Chaplain, who has the distinction of being the only Coloured Officer in the British Army, are all White. Except the C.S.M. [Company Sergeant Major] and the Q.M.S., [Quartermaster Sergeant] all other ranks are colored." Library and Archives Canada (LAC), RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 2. See John G. Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice: A Black Unit in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1917-19," in *Ethnic Armies: Polyethnic Armed Forces from the Time of the Habsburgs to the Age of the Superpowers*, ed. N.F. Dreisziger (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1990) for evidence of other "coloured" officers.

According to the Department of Militia and Defence, racial considerations were not among the official criteria for enlistment in the CEF. Nevertheless, Acting Adjutant General, Brigadier General W.E. Hodgins, stated: “the final approval of any man, regardless of color or other distinction, must of course rest with the officer commanding the particular unit which the man in question is desirous of joining”.<sup>8</sup> This paved the way for recruiters and commanding officers to reject African Canadians based on their own racial prejudices. Thus, before the formation of the No. 2 CB, African Canadian soldiers were turned away from recruiting centers in droves after being told: “this is a white man’s war,” or that “we do not want a checker board army.”<sup>9</sup> The letters submitted by African Canadians to voice their frustration and to inquire why they were being turned down reveal that unofficial exclusionary policies held by recruiters were barring them from service. There might not have been an official exclusionary policy, but recruiting officers clearly believed that African Canadians should not serve in the CEF.

For some, this belief was based on the notion that certain races were better suited for military service than others. This rationale was prominent among some in Britain and France who, during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had identified what they believed to be particular “warrior qualities” that marked those who demonstrated them as belonging to “martial races” within their respective populations.<sup>10</sup> These warrior qualities included “natural attributes” such as the ability to live in harsh climates, to carry heavy loads across great distances, and a greater than normal resistance to pain, to name a few.<sup>11</sup> Although the term was typically applied to some groups of Africans and Asians, historian Heather Streets argues that the definition of

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<sup>8</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ297-1-21, Acting Adjutant General W.E. Hodgins to T.L. Stewart, Esq. M.P., 16 October, 1915.

<sup>9</sup> These statements were reported in interviews with George Fells and Robert Shepard. See: Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 12, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Heather Streets, *Martial Races: The Military, Race and Masculinity in British Imperial Culture, 1857-1914* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 1.

<sup>11</sup> Joe Lunn, “‘Les Races Guerrières’: Racial Perceptions in the French Military about West African Soldiers during the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 34, no. 4 (1999), 521.

martial races was not fixed and was often changed to reflect the views held by those who employed the theory.<sup>12</sup> Due to this fluidity, the theory was not applied to African Canadians, who were deemed unfit for military service because of beliefs that they were lazy, unmotivated, or unable to maintain the level of discipline that was required of a soldier. As was the case for many African Americans, the idea that some races were biologically predisposed to be better soldiers than others meant that when African Canadians were invited to serve, they were assigned to physical labour and other menial duties.<sup>13</sup> The only African American formations to see combat in France were the 92<sup>nd</sup> and the 93<sup>rd</sup> Divisions.<sup>14</sup>

The formation of the No. 2 CB resulted from racism as well as a desperate need for recruits and the decision that a labour battalion would be an adequate place for African Canadian soldiers. The fact that the battalion was authorized in July 1916 in the midst of a recruiting crisis, shortly after Prime Minister Robert Borden had promised that Canada would provide 500,000 volunteers for active service overseas, demonstrates that those in charge of the CEF were determined to reach the promised number of recruits. Since the supply of willing volunteers had essentially dried up at this point, recruiters could no longer afford to be selective in their recruiting process. For that reason, they began to turn to African Canadians whom they had originally identified as second-class citizens who would not make adequate soldiers. This change did not, however, lead to the enrolment of African Canadians in combat units. The No. 2 CB was formed because there was a desperate need for labour overseas and commanders of the CEF believed that African Canadians could be placed in a segregated unit that would perform labour duties such as cutting and hauling lumber. The prevailing belief that African Canadians would

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<sup>12</sup> Streets, *Martial Races*, 4.

<sup>13</sup> Chad Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy: African American Soldiers in the World War I Era* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 2.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*

not be adequate soldiers did not disappear with the recruiting crisis. The widespread notion that African Canadians should not fight alongside European Canadians still existed and was reinforced further by the formation of the No. 2 CB when commanding officers were informed that there was authorization for “any of the coloured men in Canada, now serving in units of the CEF to transfer to the No. 2 Construction Battalion, should they so wish.”<sup>15</sup>

While some African Canadians regarded the formation of the No. 2 CB positively, others identified the racism that remained beneath the surface, hidden in the motives for the creation of the battalion. Upon the formation of the No. 2 CB, rumors spread throughout African Canadian communities claiming that the soldiers would only be used to dig trenches in France.<sup>16</sup> The fact that this rumor circulated in African Canadian communities reflects African Canadians’ desire to fight alongside European Canadians as well as their belief that it was not as glorious to support the war effort overseas by performing manual labour. African Canadians acknowledged in this manner their awareness of racism in Canadian society during the war; it was not uncommon at this time for European Canadians to segregate African Canadians and to force them to perform undesirable work. On the other hand, sources show that the majority of African Canadians welcomed and celebrated the formation of the No. 2 CB. It was reported by Mabel Saunders that “considerable joy and happiness” erupted in African Canadian communities upon the announcement of the formation of the unit. Saunders further remarked that the formation of a battalion for African Canadians was the recognition they were seeking from European Canadians that “they were men the same as everybody else.”<sup>17</sup> For others, it was the chance they had been longing for to disprove prevalent stereotypes and to augment their social status.

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<sup>15</sup> Walker, “Race and Recruitment,” 15.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Taped interview with Mabel Saunders, East Preston, N.S., 14 July 1984 in Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 27.

Unfortunately, the members of the No. 2 CB are the forgotten soldiers of the First World War. They have been overshadowed by the service of European Canadians in combatant units. Due to its obscurity, little exists with regard to the No. 2 CB's service and, thus, the service of most African Canadian men. By studying the No. 2 CB, one can gain an appreciation of its contribution to the war effort as well as the racist treatment received by its members. In many ways, the battalion was unique, as no other Canadian battalion had enlisted such a large number of African Canadian soldiers. In other ways, the members of the No. 2 CB were very similar to many African Americans who also fought racism and prejudices, and were limited to unskilled labour work during the war.<sup>18</sup>

Various groups of people have been referred to in different ways by historians to describe their nationality, race, or ethnic heritage. Although it is difficult to write a history about a specific group of people without using some kind of term to describe them, it is more challenging to choose a term that does not have any negative or stereotypical connotations. For this reason, the use of terms based on physical appearance will be avoided in this thesis, as will any term that might incorrectly suggest a specific opinion regarding the people described. Such terms will only be used when quoting or referencing these words as they were employed in the past. Instead, the term "African Canadian" will be employed to describe the ethnicity of the soldiers studied in this thesis that were commonly referred to as "Black" and "Coloured" soldiers. I was tempted to employ "AfriCanadians," a term coined by Dorothy Shadd Shreve in her work, *The AfriCanadian Church: A Stabilizer*, which was re-introduced by Sean Flynn Foy in his Master's thesis, "The Underside of Glory: AfriCanadian Enlistment in the Canadian

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<sup>18</sup> Williams, *Torchbearers of Democracy*, 2. For more information regarding the struggles of African Americans against racism in The First World War, see: Adriane Danette Lentz-Smith, *Freedom Struggles: African Americans and World War I* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

Expeditionary Force, 1914-1917.”<sup>19</sup> However, this term connotes a casual tone that does not seem to be professional enough to be used in formal writing. Moreover, I see no reason to merge the two terms “African” and “Canadian” by dropping the “can” in “African”, as it tends to diminish the significance of the continent from which this specific group of people originates. The term “African Canadian” in this thesis refers to Canadian citizens who could trace their ancestry to people who originally lived in Africa (non-colonists), especially those whose ancestors likely arrived in Canada via the institution of slavery or as Black Loyalists, Refugees, or Maroons. The term “European Canadian” will be employed to describe Canadian citizens who are of European birth or ancestry.

This thesis will help clarify the history of racism in the CEF by exploring the enlistment issues, training, and overseas experience of the men who served in the No. 2 CB. A number of sources focus on the struggle to enlist because of the racism experienced by African Canadians; but they say little about the experience of African Canadians when they served overseas. Among the most significant studies of the No. 2 CB is Calvin Ruck’s book which provides a brief overview of the battalion. It is essentially a commemorative work, thus its most valuable section includes summaries and quotes from interviews Ruck performed with members of the battalion before they died. The most extensive scholarly study is Sean Flynn Foyn’s Master’s thesis, which focuses mainly on the recruitment of African Canadians in the No. 2 CB and the key personalities involved with the formation of the unit. Neither of these important works explore the unit’s overseas experience in appreciable detail. James W. St. G Walker’s work examines how racism affected the enlistment of visible minorities in the CEF as a whole, including the enlistment of African Canadians. Finally, John G. Armstrong’s essay provides a brief analysis of

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<sup>19</sup> Dorothy Shadd Shreve, *The Africanadrian Church: A Stabilizer* (Jordan Station: Paideia Press, 1983), 10 and Sean Flynn Foyn, “The Underside of Glory”, iii. In his notes on the term AfriCanadian, Foyn describes the process he used to coin the word “AfriCanadian” without realizing that he was not the first to employ it.

resistance to the enlistment of African Canadians, and the subsequent overseas service of the No. 2 CB.<sup>20</sup> However, neither Walker nor Armstrong analyze the degree to which racist attitudes changed over the duration of the war, particularly with respect to contrasting service conditions in Canada and France. Primary sources for this study include the content of No. 2 CB's official war diary, the routine orders of No. 5 District, Canadian Forestry Corps, Jura Group, and the soldiers' service records. These documents were not employed as extensively in earlier studies of the No. 2 CB. In addition, this thesis analyzes Reverend Captain William Andrew White's personal war diary, a source that was not utilized previously in scholarship regarding No. 2 CB.

To understand the experience of African Canadians in the First World War, this study focuses on the No. 2 CB because the majority of African Canadians who served in the war were members of this specific battalion. Chapter One presents the circumstances under which the No. 2 CB was formed, including barriers to enlistment faced by African Canadians and the means by which they resisted these barriers. To demonstrate the importance of the battalion for African Canadians, Chapter Two thesis analyses articles that appeared in the *Atlantic Advocate*, a journal aimed at an African Canadian readership. Chapter Two also explores how African Canadians were treated during their training in Canada and overseas. Finally, to show how their overseas experience differed from their time in Canada, Chapter Three analyzes records that detail the remainder of their service in England and France, especially their work with the CFC. This chapter also addresses working conditions, leisure activities, and discipline within the unit.

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<sup>20</sup> Calvin W. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction, 1916-1920* (Halifax: Society for the Protection of Black Culture in Nova Scotia, 1986); Sean Flynn Foyn, "The Underside of Glory: AfriCanadian Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1917," Master's Thesis. Ontario: University of Ottawa, 1999); James W. St. G. Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force" in *Canadian Historical Review*, 70, 1 (1989), 1-26; John G. Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice: A Black Unit in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1917-1919," in N.F. Dreisziger, ed., *Ethnic Armies: Polyethnic Armed Forces from the Time of the Habsburgs to the Age of the Superpowers* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1990), 178-197.

This thesis will show how racism in the CEF changed due to the No. 2 CB. Racism influenced the formation of the No. 2 CB and African Canadian members of the unit encountered racism on a daily basis. Despite having disproved beliefs regarding their motives for enlisting as well as their ability to maintain the standard of discipline, racism prevailed in the CEF among some European Canadians. In spite of this, African Canadians were usually treated as equals in France, and the majority of European Canadians seem to have had no issue with them. The service of African Canadians in the CEF seems to have changed the outlook of some European Canadian officers towards them; the barely concealed pride within the pages of the unit's war diary regarding their discipline shows that the soldiers made a positive impression on officers in the No. 2 CB. African Canadians' struggle to enlist, their treatment during training, and their work overseas demonstrate not only how racism limited their opportunities throughout the war but also how the increasingly integrated experience in France began to erode racial prejudices.

It is my sincere hope that this thesis will provide historians and the public with the desire to pursue the story of the No. 2 CB and to investigate the legacy of a battalion that is part of Canada's forgotten history. Calvin Ruck argued correctly that the No. 2 CB is Canada's best kept military secret. It is unclear whether this was the result of the battalion being overshadowed by units that served in combat roles, or if it is a result of an acknowledgement and subsequent concealment of Canada's racism during the First World War. Nevertheless, the prevalent image of a soldier from the First World War is of a European Canadian soldier. The absence of African Canadian soldiers is rarely noticed. As my research and other scholarship regarding African Canadian service in the CEF become part of the growing body of academic work regarding the First World War, the participation of African Canadians in this conflict will no longer be invisible, and their valiant service for Canada will finally gain the recognition it deserves.

## Chapter One: Issues With Enlistment

Writer Albert Caraco stated: “La réalité du racisme est qu’il est une invention des Européens et que ce sont ces mêmes Européens qui l’ont mis sous forme de système” [The reality of racism is that it is a European invention; and that those very Europeans systematized it].<sup>21</sup> It is certainly true that systematized racism is a European invention, the roots of which can be traced to the international slave trade, when African slaves came to be defined as chattel: property that could be bought and sold for economic gain. From this concept came the notion that slaves were not supposed to be freed or educated, and that they were not equal to their owners. British North Americans had a history of demonstrating discrimination towards people of African descent before and after slavery was abolished within the British Empire in 1833.<sup>22</sup>

Some Canadians tend to believe that they live in a country in which racism has no place; however, they are misinformed. The notion that Canada has always been a safe haven for African Canadians and free of racism is a myth. James W. St. G. Walker has identified this myth as the “North Star Myth,” which was fostered by the existence of the Underground Railroad and is used by Canadians to differentiate themselves from Americans.<sup>23</sup> In reality, attitudes regarding people of African descent in Canada were influenced by notions shaped by late-nineteenth-century social Darwinism, and older ideas held by Europeans and persons of European descent that they were superior to others.<sup>24</sup> The fact that slavery existed in British North America meant

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<sup>21</sup> Albert Caraco, quoted in Babacar Camara, *Marxist Theory, Black/African Specificities, and Racism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2008), 99.

<sup>22</sup> The experience of Black Loyalists in Nova Scotia, for instance, shows how many British North Americans refused to accept them.

<sup>23</sup> James W. St. G. Walker, *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience* (Ottawa: Canadian Historical Association, 1985), 6.

<sup>24</sup> Social Darwinism refers to ideas regarding scientific racism which held that some human races were biologically superior to others. Some adherents of social Darwinist thought believed that human civilization progressed through the struggle of races, and that those races with superior qualities would dominate those that had inferior qualities. In doing so, the superior races would lead to the development of a “higher” state of civilization. Such ideas animated much of the racism that existed during the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the 20<sup>th</sup> century. For more information

that African Canadians were associated with slavery. This reality influenced the European Canadian majority to see the African Canadian minority as members of a subordinate caste in society. Combined with the social Darwinism of the late nineteenth century, social stratification based on race prevailed into the twentieth century. Moreover, the racist language used in the First World War as well as ideas about where different people were situated in the social structure hindered the likelihood of success for African Canadians. In effect, a systematic racist structure of institutions and ideas oppressed African Canadians long after the abolition of slavery and long after the First World War.

The objectives and the nature of the slave trade could not allow for enslaved men to actually consider themselves men. A system of oppressive language and actions was used by slave owners to ensure that their manhood was not threatened by a slave if he were to embrace his own strength and subsequently revolt against his master. Even after the abolition of slavery in British North America the old system of oppression remained as a way of maintaining the threatened social order and held African Canadians in a position of semi-slavery in which it was almost impossible for them to advance their political and social status.<sup>25</sup> Thus, African Canadians were forced into a continuous struggle to prove that they were “civilized” people. Slavery was abolished in the British Empire by the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833 but its system of oppressive stereotypes, language, and treatment was still prevalent during the First World War as demonstrated by the strong opposition towards the enlistment of African Canadians expressed by officers such as Major General Willoughby Gwatkin and Lieutenant Colonel George Fowler.

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regarding the involvement and influence of Darwinism on racism, see: Frances Early, “Whiteness and Political Purpose in *The Noose*, an Antilynching Play by Tracy Mygatt,” *Women’s History Review* 11, No. 1 (2002), 37; George M. Frederickson, *The Black Image in the White Mind: The Debate on Afro-American Character and Destiny, 1817-1914* (New York: Harper & Row, 1971).

<sup>25</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, “Equality and Education: Of Mr. Booker T. Washington and Others,” in *Afro-American History: Primary Sources*, ed. Thomas R. Frazier (Chicago: Dorsey Press, 1988), 206.

The system of oppression maintained by language used in the First World War permitted the freedom of African Canadians at a price. Though they were not physically enslaved as their ancestors were before them, African Canadians were governed by the dominant European Canadian caste which controlled the level and quality of education they received as well as the jobs for which they were hired.<sup>26</sup> It determined the areas of town in which African Canadians were permitted to reside. It also controlled which businesses were available to them as well as which areas of certain establishments they were able to access. Furthermore, schools were segregated throughout Canada. Where the option for segregated schools was not available, African Canadian children were often forced to attend class at a different time or to sit in a different area of the classroom than European Canadian children.<sup>27</sup> Moreover, African Canadians were only hired for unattractive, low-paying jobs, and they were often barred from businesses and facilities such as restaurants, swimming pools, skating rinks, theatres, hotels, and pubs.<sup>28</sup> As a result of ostracism based on European Canadian racism, African Canadians were trapped in a system of permanent lower-class status. They were oppressed by a society controlled by European Canadians, they were unable to augment their social status through education and employment, and they continued to be treated as inferiors through segregation.

Notions of inequality based on race were evident in the way people spoke to one another, and are visible in the way they treated each other before and during the First World War. Language, especially, was used to express one's disapproval of a person whom societal notions

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<sup>26</sup> For an overview of how European Canadians received better education than visible minorities, see: Scott Davies and Neil Guppy, "Race and Canadian Education," *Racism and Social Inequality in Canada: Concepts, Controversies, and Strategies of Resistance*, ed. Vic Satzewich (Toronto: Thompson Educational Publishing, 1998), 131-155. For more information on the status of African Canadians, see Constance Barkhouse, *Colour-Coded: A Legal History of Racism in Canada, 1900-1950* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999). Further narratives on the history of African Canadians can be found in: Ken Alexander and Avis Glaze, *Towards Freedom: The African-Canadian Experience* (Toronto: Umbrella Press, 1996) and Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History* 2nd Ed. (Kingston: McGill, 1997).

<sup>27</sup> Walker, *Racial Discrimination in Canada*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Walker, *Racial Discrimination in Canada*, 16.

portrayed as unequal. Historically, racist language consigned African people to an inferior stratum of society. French author Joseph Arthur de Gobineau, writer of the *Essai sur l'inégalité des Races Humaines* in 1853, argued that Africans were naturally animalistic. Regarding persons of African descent, Gobineau declared, "His intellect will always move within a very narrow circle. His mental faculties are dull or even nonexistent...he is equally careless of his own life and that of others: he kills willingly, for the sake of killing..."<sup>29</sup> Almost 40 years later, in 1891, Sir Adams Archibald, the former Lieutenant Governor of Nova Scotia stated: "A negro with plenty to eat and to drink, with clothing and shelter, has little care for anything else. He has no ambition. To him labor is only a last resort... Negroes like an idle and lazy life, and have no aim or ambition for anything beyond mere animal existence."<sup>30</sup> Archibald's statement reveals prevailing attitudes toward persons of African descent, and expressed similar ideas to those of Gobineau: that people of African origin have a low capacity to function as "useful" and "productive" citizens. The language employed by both men highlights a number of assumptions underlying the racist denigration of African Canadians in the pre-war period.

#### African Canadians Are Excluded From Service

When the First World War erupted in August 1914, the general opinion throughout Canada was that as part of the British Commonwealth, it was obligated to assist the Empire in the war effort.<sup>31</sup> Regarding Canada's obligation, Prime Minister Sir Wilfrid Laurier declared in 1910: "when Britain is at war, Canada is at war. There is no distinction."<sup>32</sup> The duty to join the CEF and to support the war effort was clearly felt by the 30,621 Canadian men who flocked to

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<sup>29</sup> Quoted in Camara, *Marxist Theory*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> Quoted in James W. St. G Walker, "Myth, History and Revisionism: The Black Loyalists Revisited," *Acadiensis*. Vol. 29, no. 1 (Autumn, 1999), 102.

<sup>31</sup> Colonel A. Fortescue Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919: General Series Vol. 1, From the outbreak of war to the formation of the Canadian Corps, August 1914-September 1915* (Ottawa: Minister of National Defence, 1938), 6.

<sup>32</sup> Laurier, quoted in Campbell, "The First 100,000 Came Easily," 64. Also quoted in Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), 130.

recruiting centers and became part of the First Contingent in 1914. The early months of the war saw no lack of men seeking enrolment; the supply of volunteers continually exceeded the demand.<sup>33</sup> While it was assumed that service in the CEF would be voluntary, and that preference would be given to men with previous military experience, there was no official policy that restricted the recruitment of visible minorities.<sup>34</sup> Yet the large number of volunteers meant that recruiters were able to be particular with their selection process. That being said, during 1914, African Canadian men were refused enlistment repeatedly because of the color of their skin and racist assumptions similar to those articulated by Gobineau and Archibald. It was expected in Canada that the war was going to be fought between “white” men, meaning that the act of killing other members of the “white race” should be reserved for European Canadians.<sup>35</sup>

Just as the reason for ostracizing African Canadians from white society was racist, so was the reason for turning away visible minorities from the CEF. Many military officials claimed that white troops would refuse to serve with them, and therefore they would not enlist them if it meant losing European Canadian volunteers. While some individuals were able to join battalions whose commanding officers (COs) were tolerant of visible minorities, most were turned away with an excuse, or the claim that the First World War was a “white man’s war,” thus excluding African Canadian men from the basic rights of Canadian citizens. Regarding African Canadians who wished to serve, Major General W.G. Gwatkin, the Chief of the General Staff, stated on 13 April 1916: “The civilized negro is vain and imitative; in Canada he is not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty; in the trenches he is not likely to make a good fighter;

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<sup>33</sup> Robert Craig Brown and Donald Loveridge, “Unrequited Faith: Recruiting the CEF 1914-1918,” *Revue Internationale d’Histoire Militaire*. No. 51, Ottawa, 1982, 56. Campbell, “The First 100,000 Came Easily,” 73.

<sup>34</sup> F.W. Perry, *The Commonwealth Armies: Manpower and Organisation in Two World Wars* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1988), 127. Though a common lack of previous military experience could have been a factor, the number of rejections based on race cannot be ignored. European Canadians were enlisted despite having no previous experience. African Canadians were merely rejected because of the notion that, due to the very nature of their race, they were not biologically suited to be satisfactory soldiers.

<sup>35</sup> Serge Bernier, *Canadian Military Heritage*, Vol. 3, 1827-2000 (Montreal: Art Global, 2000), 134.

and the average white man will not associate with him on terms of equality.”<sup>36</sup> One wonders what Gwatkin would have thought regarding Gobineau’s statement that African descendants “killed willingly, for the sake of killing.” If he agreed, his statement suggests that he likely would have argued that a killer would not make a good soldier. Gwatkin’s objections reflect long-standing racist views regarding the abilities of African Canadians: that they had no ambition or work ethic and that they were inferior to European Canadians because of it. However, Gwatkin’s assumptions on the motivations shared by African Canadians regarding military service would be proved incorrect.

From the beginning of the war, African Canadians were barred from the CEF so they turned to writing petitions to the government and commanders of the CEF regarding their intent to enlist. On 14 October 1915, Alexander Bramah, of Cape Breton, wrote: “I’ll go to do my bit for the flag that I was born under...I’ll go out there without any wages.”<sup>37</sup> On 14 January 1916, Joseph Butler, of Alberta, wrote: “I have seven years military experience... with a little schooling in new methods would make an efficient officer. [*sic*]”<sup>38</sup> On 4 February 1916, Henry Francis, of Ontario, wrote: “...if you can please...let me know if I can join, I will be deeply in love with you.”<sup>39</sup> According to Gordon Charles, “Black people refused to accept the attitude that it was a white man’s war. As loyal citizens we wanted to serve our country. It was our duty, our responsibility.”<sup>40</sup> This is a far different statement than Gwatkin’s argument in which he claimed rather matter-of-factly that African Canadians were “not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty.”<sup>41</sup> Evidently, his statement was fueled by racism and in no way reflected the aims of

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<sup>36</sup> Walker, *Racial Discrimination in Canada*, 5.

<sup>37</sup> Foyn, “The Underside of Glory,” 103.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>40</sup> Calvin Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion: No. 2 Construction, 1916-1920* (Halifax: The Society for the Protection and Preservation of Black Culture in Nova Scotia, 1986), 63.

<sup>41</sup> James W. St. G. Walker, *Racial Discrimination in Canada: The Black Experience*, 5.

African Canadians who were seeking enlistment. On the contrary, they were driven by similar motives as European Canadians. They were determined to serve in the CEF and, in addition, they were driven by their resolve to augment their social status. The numerous pleas made by African Canadians for the CEF to allow their enlistment prove that European Canadians were racist in their stubborn insistence that African Canadians had no desire to enlist and would not make effective and disciplined soldiers during the First World War.

African Canadians were more than willing to “do their part” for the country; but their interest was also driven by a political purpose. In the *Canadian Observer*, J.R. Whitney argued that, “the Great War presented African Canadians with an opportunity to prove that they were dedicated citizens capable of upholding the British Empire in its time of need.”<sup>42</sup> Clearly, African Canadians were aware of the prevailing strength of racism in their society. Yet they were driven by loyalty to serve their country and to prove their manhood, for military service was considered an important rite of passage for young men in this period.<sup>43</sup> In the *Atlantic Advocate*, military service was revered and celebrated. In May 1915, an article was printed to announce that twelve African Canadian men from Digby had “loyally joined the colours with the 112 Battalion.”<sup>44</sup> The article was followed by a patriotic poem written by a Jamaican man, entitled “A Song for Our Men.” The poem spoke of the triumph and honour awaiting those who served in England for the Empire, and demanded that other Jamaicans come “over to England and take your place, do your duty whatever it be, show your pride in our island race, prove your courage and loyalty.”<sup>45</sup> Although the social advancement of African Canadians was an important factor in

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<sup>42</sup> Sarah-Jane Mathieu, *North of the Color Line: Migration and Black Resistance in Canada, 1870-1955* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 100.

<sup>43</sup> For a discussion on the link between manliness and military service, see Mark Moss, *Manliness and Militarism: Educating Young Boys in Ontario for War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

<sup>44</sup> Public Archives of Nova Scotia (PANS), “Military” *Atlantic Advocate*, 1, No. 1 (May 1915): 14.

<sup>45</sup> PANS, Microfilm 3207, “A Song for Our Men,” *Atlantic Advocate* 1, No. 1 (May 1915): 15.

their motives to serve, most were primarily driven by the same patriotic desire to serve their county that animated European Canadian volunteers. They were influenced by pro-war propaganda, as well as a society that valued wartime military service as an important rite of passage into manhood.

The general trend among recruiting officers of refusing African Canadians for no reason other than racism is demonstrated by the numerous letters sent to Sam Hughes, the Minister of Militia and Defence. For instance, Arthur Alexander wrote:

Dear Sir: The Colored people of Canada want to know why they are not allowed to enlist in the Canadian Militia. I am informed that several who have applied for enlistment in the Canadian expeditionary forces have been refused for no other apparent reason than their color, as they were physically and mentally fit. Thanking you in advance for any information that you can & will give me in regards to this matter I remain yours respectfully, for King & Country [*sic.*]<sup>46</sup>

On 7 September 1915, George Morton wrote to Hughes and claimed: “a number of Colored men in this city (Hamilton), who have offered for enlistment and service, have been turned down and refused, solely on the grounds of color or complexional distinction, this being the reason given on the rejection or refusal card issued by the recruiting officer.”<sup>47</sup> Other members of the No. 2 CB recalled after the war that at some recruiting stations they were informed that they would be called when they were needed, while in others, they were told that the war was “a white man’s war” and that “we do not want a checker board army.”<sup>48</sup> Lieutenant Walter Hamilton Bruce, the commanding officer of the 173<sup>rd</sup> Battalion (Canadian Highlanders),<sup>49</sup> stated: “Sorry we cannot see our way to accept [African Canadians] as these men would not look good in Kilts.”<sup>50</sup>

Moreover, the CO of Toronto’s 95<sup>th</sup> Battalion wrote: “thank goodness this batt. is over strength

<sup>46</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, file H.Q. 297-1-21, Alexander to Hughes, 6 Nov. 1914.

<sup>47</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21, George Morton to Hughes, 7 September, 1915.

<sup>48</sup> Interview with Mr. George Fells, Yarmouth, N.S., 9 September, 1989, in Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 12. Interview with Robert (Bob) Shepard, date and location unknown, in Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 58.

<sup>49</sup> Such parenthetical designations were common elements of the nomenclature of CEF units.

<sup>50</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 4387, File 34-7-141, Officer Commanding 173<sup>rd</sup> to AAG, 4 April 1916, quoted in Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 106.

and does not therefore need a ‘colored’ platoon, nor even a colored drum-major! [sic]”<sup>51</sup> Finally, regarding the enlistment of a platoon of African Canadians, Lieutenant Colonel George Franklin McFarland, commanding officer of the 147<sup>th</sup> (Grey) Battalion stated: “I would object very strongly to accepting the Platoon mentioned for the reason that the prejudice against the negross in this country is extremely bitter. [sic]”<sup>52</sup> Almost all officers commanding recruitment zones argued that “the introduction of a coloured platoon into our battalion would undoubtedly cause serious friction and discontent... [and] would be detrimental to recruiting throughout the country.”<sup>53</sup> The responses to letters sent to petition and demand answers regarding racist recruitment policies typically held the same, short explanation: there were no regulations or restrictions to prohibit or discriminate against the enlistment of African Canadians; however, the final approval of any man was subject to the commanding officer of each unit.<sup>54</sup>

Although there was no official exclusionary policy held by the CEF, many of Sam Hughes’ advisors expressed their concerns regarding the enlistment of African Canadians. On 13 November 1914, Major General W. Gwatkin wrote, “Would Canadian Negroes make good fighting men? I do not think so.”<sup>55</sup> Then, on 11 March 1916, Brigadier General E.A. Cruikshank, wrote: “It would not be advisable to enlist Negroes or other coloured men in a white battalion.”<sup>56</sup> Later, Gwatkin made a similar statement regarding the idea that a segregated battalion could be created. He stated: “In France, in the firing line, there is no place for a Black battalion. It would be eyed askance, it would crowd out a white battalion, and it would be difficult to reinforce.”<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, one CO complained that it was not “fair” to expect European Canadian soldiers “to

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., Commanding Officer 95<sup>th</sup> to AAG, 3 April 1917, quoted in Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 106.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., Commanding officer 147<sup>th</sup> to AAG, 4 April 1916, quoted in Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 106.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., “Organization of Coloured Platoons,” 3 April 1916, quoted in Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 106.

<sup>54</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21, Acting Adjutant General W.E. Hodgins to T.J. Stewart, 16 October 1915. And, LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21, Letter to Arthur Alexander, 20 Nov, 1914.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., Memo, 13 November, 1914.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., Brigadier General E.A. Cruikshank to Secretary Militia Council, 11 March, 1916.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., Major General Gwatkin, Memorandum on the enlistment of Negroes in the CEF, 1 April 1916.

mingle with negroes.” His sentiment was reinforced by officials who claimed: “it is not thought desirable, either in the interests of such men themselves or of the Canadian Forces, that COs should be forced to take them.”<sup>58</sup> Nevertheless, Hughes and his staff insisted: “There are no regulations or restrictions which prohibit or discriminate against the enlistment and enrollment of Coloured men who possess the necessary qualifications.”<sup>59</sup> A month later, Hughes reportedly issued orders that African Canadians were to be enlisted in any battalion.<sup>60</sup> Statements like these and the actions of recruiters who ignored the order to enlist African Canadians demonstrate that notions of inequality based on European Canadian racism were still affecting their treatment.

Regardless of the lack of an exclusionary policy, it was proven acceptable to reject African Canadians due to their race. Lieutenant Colonel (Lieut. Col.) George W. Fowler the CO of the 104<sup>th</sup> Battalion, submitted his request for the immediate discharge of seventeen African Canadians who had enlisted in Saint John and had been sent to Camp Sussex for service with his unit. He wrote: “These men were negroes, and I rejected them on the grounds that it would be against the interest of the Battalion to have them; also the interest of good discipline.”<sup>61</sup> He provided further justification for his request by stating that “some of these negroes arrived here very much the worse for liquor, and some of them very insolent and were not proper men to become members of the Battalion.”<sup>62</sup> Unfortunately, nothing could be done to stop Fowler from requesting the release of the African Canadian soldiers. As CO, Fowler had every right, according to CEF policy, to reject any volunteer whom he considered unfit for duty. Thus, he deemed the African Canadians assigned to his battalion as unfit due to their race. Although he

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<sup>58</sup> Quoted in Walker, “Race and Recruitment in World War I, 8.

<sup>59</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21, Acting Adjutant General W.E. Hodgins to T.J. Stewart, ESQ. M.P. 16 October 1915.

<sup>60</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21, Sir Sam Hughes to John T. Richards, 25 November 1915.

<sup>61</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-2-21, Lieut. Col. George W. Fowler to AAG 6<sup>th</sup> Div. HQ 25 November 1915.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid.

was careful to provide additional justification based on the men's behaviour, their racial identity seemed to be Fowler's primary consideration. Sam Hughes insisted that there was no official exclusionary policy and refused to interfere with the decisions being made by various COs throughout Canada, despite the abundant evidence that racism was impeding the ability of African Canadians to enlist.

Advocacy for African Canadian Service on the Home Front

Notwithstanding the prevalent opinion among officers that African Canadian men should not be permitted to serve in the CEF, there were European Canadian supporters of African Canadian enlistment who fought for their right to enlist. For instance, a recruiter in Vancouver claimed: "Coloured candidates are becoming insistent," but was told that "white men will not serve in the same ranks with negroes or coloured persons."<sup>63</sup> Later, Captain J.F. Tupper, of Westville, N.S. wrote to Hughes and stated: "As I have unsolicited applications from over one hundred Colored 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 colored willing to enlist in a regiment to consist of white and colored men, will you accept them as a new Nova Scotia regiment? It is felt that the Colored men should be allowed to go, but the regiments being formed do not want them."<sup>64</sup>

In St John, New Brunswick Lieut. Col. Beverly R. Armstrong wrote to the Secretary of the Militia Council after twenty African Canadians had passed the medical examination required for enlistment. Armstrong expressed his reluctance to enlist the men in a white unit, and asked whether a segregated battalion for African Canadian men was being formed in Canada. In response, the Acting Adjutant General claimed that there was no unit being formed and that there

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<sup>63</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File H.Q. 297-1-21, Henshaw to Ogilvie, 7 December 1915, Ogilvie to Hodgins, 9 December 1915. Quoted in Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War I," 6.

<sup>64</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File H.Q. 297-1-21, J.F. Tupper to Sir Sam Hughes.

was no policy in place that would restrict the enlistment of qualified African Canadian men.<sup>65</sup>

Afterwards, Sam Hughes declared “that the colour line would not be drawn in the CEF” and that “he did not wish to ‘lend [himself] to the fad of giving them a regiment to themselves any more than I intend to have a regiment of one-eyed men or men with yellow moustaches or red hair.’”<sup>66</sup>

Then, on 10 April 1915, John T. Richards wrote to the governor-general, arguing that it was “certainly highly insulting to the Colored people here... to not be allowed to serve their King simply because their faces are dark.”<sup>67</sup>

Along with the numerous letters written by African Canadians who had been denied enlistment due to European Canadian racial prejudice, were letters from African Canadian community leaders who intended to speak for the members of their community. As a Marine Shipping Agent in St. John, John T. Richards was one of these leaders. According to scholar Sean Foyn, Richards had “over twenty years’ experience outfitting vessels and as an operator of seamen’s lodgings” and was “comfortable and direct in his role of advisor and intermediary.”<sup>68</sup> Richards submitted several letters to the Governor General addressing the refusal of African Canadian attempts to enlist. He also wrote the following inquiry to Sam Hughes regarding the men rejected by Lieut. Col. George Fowler:

On behalf of St. John’s Colored residents I desire to return thanks to you for remarks made in regards to Coloured Men enlisting in Canada’s fighting lines...Some of them tried to enlist but were turned down. I sent them back again with the threat that I would call for a showdown if they did not get a chance, after a while 20 were accepted, sworn in, etc., ordered to be ready to join the 104<sup>th</sup> Sussex, 15 Nov. They reported, went forward at noon with about 50 Whites.

On arrival they met the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commanding Officer who told them he knew nothing of their coming, and to get right away from there as he would not have

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<sup>65</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21. Armstrong to Secretary of Militia Council, 18 November 1915. A/ADJ.GEN. to Armstrong, 19 November 1915.

<sup>66</sup> *St. John Standard*, 20 November, 1915. Quoted from Foyn, “The Underside of Glory,” 47.

<sup>67</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21. John T. Richards to Governor-General Duke of Connaught, 10 April 1915.

<sup>68</sup> Foyn, “The Underside of Glory,” 44.

them at all, in fact insulted them. He told them that a Coloured Battalion was being formed in Ontario and to go there. They arrived back in the city at 9:30, the same night Nov. 15/15. Reported to the recruiting office Mill St., they were told to come around in the morning. They went from there to other Recruiting Officers, but nothing has been done for them.

...[I]t is a downright shame and an insult to the Race, the way our people have been used in regards to wanting to enlist...[sic]<sup>69</sup>

On 25 November 1915, Hughes wrote in response to Richards' demands that he intervene in the situation regarding the seventeen enlisted men who had been rejected by Fowler to advise him of his ordering commanding officers to enlist African Canadians and to assure Richards that the incident at Camp Sussex would be investigated.<sup>70</sup> Despite Sam Hughes' insistence that African Canadians were not to be rejected on the grounds of race, petitions such as the ones quoted above remained unacknowledged by commanding officers who did not want African Canadian men to serve among European Canadian soldiers. The unofficial barriers faced by African Canadians seeking enlistment in the CEF continued.

In the same period that Richards was fighting for the recruitment policies in the CEF to be changed, he also was able to recruit more than 600 men "to serve aboard the vessels carrying horses to England." Among the crews were several African Canadians "who offered enlistment in England, 'and were accepted.'"<sup>71</sup> Unfortunately, overall, little was done by Canadian Militia Headquarters and other military officials to help African Canadians enlist in non-segregated units, despite the fact that, like Richards, many saw the exclusionary policies held by commanding officers as an "insult to the race" and were "directly opposed" to segregation.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, file HQ 297-1-21, Richard to Hughes, 21 November 1915. For the complete text of the letter in which Richards presents his numerous concerns in detail, see Appendix E.

<sup>70</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21, Hughes to Richards, 25 November 1915. Note that Lieut. Col. Fowler sent his infamous request for the dismissal of seventeen African Canadians: LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File H.Q. 297-2-21, Lieut. Col. George W. Fowler to AAG 6<sup>th</sup> Div. HQ, 25 November 1915.

<sup>71</sup> Foyn, "The Underside of Glory," 44.

<sup>72</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21, John T. Richards to Sir Sam Hughes, M.P., 21 November 1915.

On 4 October 1915, Richards' letter was acknowledged to by Militia Secretary, S.A. Stanton, who stated that the Governor General had "come across a good number of Coloured men" when inspecting CEF units and that "there can be no question of their not being allowed to serve their King."<sup>73</sup> However, Hughes' assurance that no African Canadian should be refused on the grounds of race was clearly not obeyed by all officers, since it led to the initial enlistment of the aforementioned men, but was not able to prevent their rejection from the 104<sup>th</sup> Battalion. The letters written by African Canadians were eloquent and respectful, thus, invalidating widespread notions regarding their motives for serving in the CEF. However, their requests to change recruitment policies seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Sam Hughes might not have supported the COs' tendency to exclude African Canadian recruits, but he did not do anything specific to interfere with a CO's right to refuse anyone whom he deemed "unfit" for duty.

The military responded to the persistent requests made by African Canadians to dissolve the colour line, and Sam Hughes' insistence that there would never be one, by reinforcing it further. For instance, Brigadier General Ernest Alexander Cruikshank suggested that a "Half-Breed Battalion" be recruited in Alberta.<sup>74</sup> As one of the African Canadian community leaders attempting to help volunteers, J.R.B Whitney, editor of the *Canadian Observer*, had gathered forty volunteers in 1916, in the hopes that a platoon of African Canadians could be formed and accepted into an existing battalion. Unfortunately, he was advised that no commanding officer would be willing to enlist coloured men and was told by the Adjutant of the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders that "we have, being a kilted regiment, always drawn the line at taking coloured men."<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>73</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21, Richards to Duke of Connaught, 4 October 1915; Ibid., Military Secretary to Richards, 11 October 1915.

<sup>74</sup> Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War One," 6.

<sup>75</sup> Quoted in Walker, "Race and Recruitment in World War One," 10.

While many commanding officers made obvious demonstrations of their own racism when they rejected African Canadians from their units, others were less clear about their own opinion regarding African Canadians. Instead, they made it appear that their own racism was not to blame for their refusal of African Canadians by arguing that European Canadian recruitment would be discouraged by the enlistment of African Canadians. For instance, Lieutenant Colonel W.H. Allen of the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion complained that the recruitment of European Canadian volunteers had been discouraged after sixteen African Canadians had been enlisted in the battalion, that several European Canadians had already threatened to leave the battalion, and that he did not want to enlist African Canadians if it meant that he would lose a “better class of recruits.” According to him, “Neither my men nor myself, would care to sleep alongside them, especially in warm weather.”<sup>76</sup> Instead of advocating for the increased enlistment of African Canadians into non-segregated units, as Hughes suggested, most personnel were adamant that the African Canadians serve in separate platoons. While some African Canadians were accepted into a few battalions that were non-exclusive on the basis of racism, it is clear that the CEF was predominantly comprised of officers who were influenced by racist stereotypes.

#### The Formation of the No. 2 Construction Battalion

Although the use of African Canadians in combat units was still questioned, there was a growing acceptance of the possibility of the formation of a distinct “coloured” unit in the CEF. The CEF required a myriad of support units and services in addition to combat units in order to facilitate the war effort. Some support roles, and the language used to describe those roles became subjects of debate between officers in the CEF due to racist perceptions. For instance, some roles and terms were perceived to be better suited for African Canadians than European

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<sup>76</sup> LAC, RG 24 Vol. 1206, File HQ 297-1-21. OC 106<sup>th</sup> OSB to DAA and QMG 6<sup>th</sup> Div. HQ, 14 Dec. 1915. Quoted in Foyn, “The Underside of Glory,” 42.

Canadian troops. One of the most prominent examples of how notions of race inequality affected African Canadians and their involvement in the CEF comes from their treatment at recruiting offices and the issues that surrounded the creation of No. 2 CB.

When the No. 1 Labour Battalion was authorized on 4 April 1916 to meet the requirements for overseas support services, it was reported that many people did not favour the “Labour” designation.<sup>77</sup> Colonel Blair Ripley argued that, “the word ‘Construction’ is much more attractive than the word ‘Labour’ with the type of men with which [he] would try to make up the Battalion.”<sup>78</sup> Moreover, Col. Ripley argued that he “could recruit to full strength and get a better class of men in less time than would be the case were the Battalion known as No. 1 Labour Battalion.”<sup>79</sup> Ripley’s request to change the name of his unit was approved. Though the exact date of the name change is not clear, the War Office was informed of the change from No. 1 Labour Battalion to No. 1 Construction Battalion on 19 April.<sup>80</sup>

Though Sam Hughes hesitated to create a segregated unit, the need for additional troops during 1916 was too great, and the CEF was facing a recruiting crisis. The added reluctance of officers to enlist African Canadians in non-segregated units meant that there was a ready and willing supply of volunteers that were not being enlisted. Thus, the formation of the No. 2 CB permitted the enlistment of African Canadian volunteers; but it also placated officers who continued to believe that African Canadians were unfit for combat duty as it was formed to complete labour duties.

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<sup>77</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1833, File GAQ 8-34A, “Labour Battalions,” sheet 1.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.

<sup>80</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1833, File GAQ 8-34A, “Labour Battalions,” sheet 2.

The issue of the battalion's name was raised once again by Col. Ripley when permission was granted to recruit for No. 2 CB on 5 July 1916.<sup>81</sup> On 7 July 1916, he wrote that the news of the formation of a construction battalion for African-Canadian soldiers "has already caused some demonstration from men in number one Construction Battalion [*sic*]" and:

[There] will be difficulty holding men now on strength and serious damper will be placed on recruiting. If not official please wire so can be contradicted here. If official recommend wisdom changing name and having understanding as to difference in class work to be done by each Battalion [*sic*]."<sup>82</sup>

Ripley's objections were supported by various officers, including the Acting Adjutant General, who claimed that there were additional protests that supported the idea to disassociate the two battalions by changing the name of the No. 1 CB. He argued: "there is no doubt that the objection is based on solid ground and cannot be brushed aside with a bromide or even a pungent epigram. I have spoken with A.G. and he would favor, and I urge, a change if you will. Why not make the coloured gentlemen "Labour Battalion or Ripley a Ry. [Railway] Construction. [*sic*]"<sup>83</sup> Col. Ripley followed by forwarding a list of the names and occupations of his recruits to show the skill of his members.<sup>84</sup> In response, the Assistant Adjutant General wrote to Col. Ripley on 19 July 1916, stating: "Although the name of the Unit had been changed from 'Labour' to 'Construction' there had been no intention of altering in any way the status of the Unit the War Office had asked for," and that "If Col. Ripley would come to [Headquarters] it might be possible to make better use of these skilled men than for pick and shovel work."<sup>85</sup>

<sup>81</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 21.

<sup>82</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1833, File GAQ 8-34A, "Labour Battalions," sheet 2.

<sup>83</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1833, File GAQ 8-34A, "Labour Battalions," sheet 3.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*, Most of the men recruited for No. 1 CB had previous military experience.

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*

When the formation and recruitment of the No. 2 CB began, its name continued to be subject to debates among military officials, specifically Colonel Ripley, who complained once again about the similarity of the name of his battalion and the newly organized No. 2 CB. According to Ripley, “he had gathered together a unit of highly specialized members,” and “his men were indignant at having it thought that they were doing the same duties as the coloured members of the new unit, as the designation of said Bn. [Battalion] would imply. [*sic*]”<sup>86</sup> Once again, Headquarters rejected Ripley’s request to change the name of the No. 1 CB, and argued that no matter their race, “all were British subjects, fighting for the same cause; that blacks and whites of the Empire were fighting side by side on active service without friction.” It was suggested that Col. Ripley “inspire his men in No. 1 CB with the correct views on the subject.”<sup>87</sup> Nevertheless, Ripley remained adamant that no association be perceived between the members of No. 1 CB with the members of the No. 2 CB. Eventually, Ripley was able to change the No. 1 CB’s name in February 1917 to 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops when the unit arrived in France.<sup>88</sup> Once a unit arrived in England, it was placed under the administration of the Ministry of Overseas Military Forces of Canada, which likely approved the name change. Though the battalion worked primarily on railroads, like the No. 2 CB, it also performed construction duties, such as laying pipes for water and building bridges.<sup>89</sup>

Shortly after the No. 2 CB was organized, Lieutenant Colonel Daniel Sutherland was appointed Commanding Officer of the unit after having served with the 193<sup>rd</sup> (Nova Scotia Highlanders) Battalion for six months. He was a prominent railway contractor in River John, Nova Scotia, before enlisting; thus, he had the experience needed to command a battalion that

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<sup>86</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1833, File GAQ 8-34A, “Labour Battalions,” sheet 4.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5011, Reel T-10860, “War Diary – 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, Canadian Railway Troops, 26 October 1916 to 30 December 1918.”

was formed to perform railway maintenance and other construction work. Sutherland wrote to Militia and Defence Headquarters shortly after the No. 2 CB had begun recruiting to protest the name of No. 2 CB, arguing that his “coloured gentlemen had been recruited to perform railway construction work” and “in order to remove the suspicion that exists in certain quarters that coloured men will only be used as trench diggers, I beg to ask that the Battalion be known, henceforth, as No. 2 Railway Construction Battalion.”<sup>90</sup> Sutherland’s concerns were much different than Col. Ripley’s, however. Ripley and his “highly specialized” recruits were concerned that the name of the coloured unit would wrongly imply that the members of his unit “were doing the same duties as the coloured members of the new unit.”<sup>91</sup> In response to Sutherland’s request, Headquarters claimed, again, that “there is no intention of changing the status of [the] Unit whilst in Canada from a labour or Construction Battalion.” However, Headquarters added in its response that “if, on arrival in England, it is required or thought fit to make it a Railway construction Battalion, it can be done over there, but, as long as it is in Canada, it must remain a construction Battalion as authorized. [*sic*]”<sup>92</sup> This explanation of the policy on changing the designation of a unit shows how Ripley was able to change the name of his unit once they had arrived in France despite his request having been repeatedly refused by Headquarters. Evidently Colonel Ripley was adamant that the racism present among members of his battalion and the general public was strong enough to affect his ability to attract or maintain his desired recruits.

In these instances, long-standing notions regarding inequality between people of African and European descent were clearly affecting the attitudes of European Canadian soldiers and officers. Col. Ripley’s argument that the formation of a “coloured” construction battalion would

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1822, File GAQ8-34A, “Labour Battalions,” sheet 4.

hinder the recruitment of European Canadian soldiers for No. 1 CB reflects the unwillingness of European Canadian soldiers to serve or to be associated with African Canadians. It also demonstrates the attitudes among the general public: had there not been any objection towards European Canadians performing the same work as African Canadians, Ripley likely would not have been concerned with the similarity of the unit's names and the implication that they performed the same work. Moreover, the response to his statements demonstrates that the notion of caste and social structure still influenced ideas regarding which tasks were better suited for certain people. These notions undoubtedly contributed to the limitations placed on many African Canadians during the First World War, as they were often limited to labour intensive work, and they also were not armed due to the belief that they would not be good soldiers.

#### Attitudes Among African Canadians Regarding Enlistment

More determined than the racist European Canadians attempting to suppress them, and contrary to the racist stereotypes that claimed they were “not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty,” African Canadians joined European Canadians in the flock towards recruiting centers when the First World War Began in August, 1914.<sup>93</sup> Like their European Canadian counterparts, African Canadians were most certainly compelled to enlist by a sense of duty to “do their bit for the Country.”<sup>94</sup> Similar to African Americans upon the United States' entry to the struggle in 1917, many African Canadians were willing patriots, intent on joining the struggle against German militarism. Others, specifically the leaders of African American and Canadian communities, believed that African Canadian participation in the war would allow them to seek the end of racial discrimination.<sup>95</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, for instance, was part of the group of African

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<sup>93</sup> Walker, *Racial Discrimination in Canada*, 5.

<sup>94</sup> “The Departure of Our Contingent,” *Atlantic Advocate*, vol. 1(10), 1.

<sup>95</sup> Mark Ellis, “W.E.B. Du Bois and the Formation of Black Opinion in World War 1: A Commentary on ‘the Damnable Dilemma,’” *The Journal of American History* 81, 4 (March 1995): 1585.

Americans who believed that the First World War was the chance they were looking for to prove their equality and to be accorded full civil rights.<sup>96</sup> The notion that African Canadians' participation in the war would improve their status was expressed in the *Atlantic Advocate* which stated:

If there are good things coming to you after the war, you may be assured that they will be meted out to you only in proportion to what service you have rendered when those services were needed most. You have as much within your power to shape the future of your race by acting in the present as to retard it by being indifferent to what is to come.

Never will we come into our own by a mushroom-growth or change of things; but having the spirit to do-as assuredly we have-we can use that as our foundation in reaching the dizzy heights about us.<sup>97</sup>

On the other hand, some were cynical and argued that they would gain nothing from the war, but would be a "breastwork or a shield for the white race."<sup>98</sup>

Despite receiving racist treatment that initially restricted their ability to enlist, some African Canadians were willing to continue to fight for their right to serve in the CEF. For example, of the seventeen African Canadians dismissed by Lieut. Col. G.W. Fowler from the 104<sup>th</sup> Battalion, eight enlisted in the No. 2 CB: Harold Bushfan, Roy Hayes, James Holmes, Herbert Nicholas, Percy Richards, John Blizzard, Arthur Tyler, and Fred Dixon.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, shortly after Harold Bushfan enlisted with the No. 2 CB, he was followed by three members of his extended family: Philip Andrew Bushfan Jr., Robert James Bushfan, and Ernest Garfield Bushfan.<sup>100</sup> The fact that these eight men, having first been rejected in a blatant demonstration of racism, continued on to enlist, and were supported by the enlistment of other family members is

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<sup>96</sup> Du Bois' opinion changed following the end of the war as he began to reject the notion that the war would serve to advance the economic and political interests of African Americans. Jennifer Keene, "W.E.B. Du Bois and the Wounded World: Seeking Meaning in the First World War for African-Americans" *Peace and Change* 26, 2 (April 2001), 135.

<sup>97</sup> "Join No. 2." *The Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1 (7), 8.

<sup>98</sup> Ellis, "The Formation of Black Opinion," 1585.

<sup>99</sup> Foyn, "The Underside of Glory," 121-22.

<sup>100</sup> Foyn, "The Underside of Glory," 123.

significant. These men and their relatives were adamant that they were going to serve their country despite the prevalent racist forces demanding their exclusion.

As some members of the No. 2 CB were also involved in the production of the *Atlantic Advocate*, it should come as no surprise that the newspaper served as a voice of the soldiers of the No. 2 CB and those who supported them. Company Sergeant-Major (CSM) Wilfred DeCosta, had a particular influence on the articles published in the newspaper, as he was its founding editor.<sup>101</sup> Due to his influence, DeCosta was able to publish a number of articles that promoted patriotism among African Canadian men in order to increase recruitment for the No. 2 CB. For instance, six months after H.S. Bunbury's patriotic poem, "A Song for our Men," was published in the *Atlantic Advocate*, DeCosta's own article, "Duty," appeared in the newspaper as well. In his article, DeCosta appealed to African Canadians' sense of responsibility in order to encourage men to enlist. He claimed:

the patriotism which shouts itself horse [sic] at a music hall when no war is at hand and slinks away, when duty calls to share in the sacrifice, that is not the patriotism we want. Perhaps no virtue has gone through more vicissitudes in the minds of men than has duty. In ancient days the crest-jewel was duty, in modern days, a badge at which many glance disdainfully.<sup>102</sup>

DeCosta's language exudes his strength as a leader, which is evident when he states, "that is not the patriotism we want," and shows that he is a leader in the military who is involved in the search for skilled and disciplined recruits. DeCosta also argued in his article that the men who had volunteered to serve overseas have already begun to learn valuable lessons that could not be

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<sup>101</sup> Foyn, "The Underside of Glory," 119. Other members of the No. 2 CB that had ties to the *Atlantic Advocate* include William and George Tolliver; they and their family's businesses were advertised in the newspaper. This demonstrates that the *Advocate* was successful in publishing news, articles, and advertisements for the benefit of the African Canadian communities of Nova Scotia.

<sup>102</sup> Wilfred A. De Costa, "Duty," *The Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1 (7), 2.

learned during peace time including “discipline, duty before pleasure, obedience, patience under suffering, and courage,” all of which were valued virtues in men.<sup>103</sup>

Along with the sense of duty and patriotism among African Canadians, was a strong sense that serving one’s country would strengthen their identity as men and that such “manliness” would be respected by others, especially European Canadians, who were automatically considered men with “manly” virtues after they reached a certain age. Manhood, as the cultural and ideological process through which society identifies individuals, is composed of a variety of ideals regarding specific characteristics based on appearance and daily practices.<sup>104</sup> When an individual is placed into a specific classification by society, whether it is “woman” or “man,” this placement is followed by a collection of societal expectations that, if unmet, can result in misjudgement, mistreatment, harassment, or abuse. Manhood, specifically, links male anatomy to a male identity and to characteristics and expectations idealized by society, including strength, authority, and power.<sup>105</sup> Manhood was repeatedly referenced in the recruitment effort during the First World War, both in posters that demanded that “coloured men” serve, as well as by African Canadian leaders. For instance, at a recruiting concert for the No. 2 CB in January 1917, Reverend Captain William A. White asked the audience “is it fair or manly on the part of the young men to remain here drawing big wages and living in luxury and allowing other Canadian boys to suffer and die in the trenches without making a move to go to their assistance?”<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Ibid.

<sup>104</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race Relations in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 7.

<sup>105</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 8.

<sup>106</sup> “With the Coloured Soldiers – Continued,” *Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1 (7), 13.

The importance of manhood is evidenced by the appeals to the manhood of European Canadians in recruitment posters at the beginning of the war, followed by similar appeals to the manhood of African Canadian men. Numerous articles and posters appeared in the *Atlantic Advocate* when the creation of the No. 2 CB was formally announced, including the following appeal to African Canadians' sense of duty, patriotism, and manhood:

Within a few weeks henceforth No. 2 Construction battalion, which is the expression of the Dominion's colored manhood, and their pride, will be embarking for the theatre of war...

As the time is near at hand, and as the battalion is not quite up to full strength, we again appeal to the spirit of patriotism, never dead in the breast of colored men, to place it in line with that of others who have done so...

Join the No. 2; THERE IS A REASON. [sic]<sup>107</sup>

Recruitment posters that appeared in the *Atlantic Advocate* made similar appeals to the loyalty, pride, manhood, and the sense of duty among African Canadians to serve in the war; one boldly announced: "COLORED MEN! Your KING and COUNTRY Need YOU!" [sic]<sup>108</sup> To continue this trend, following the large, bold, eye-catching text quoted above was a slightly smaller, more articulate appeal to the men's sense of obligation to serve: "NOW is the time to show your Patriotism; Loyalty. Will you heed the call and do your share?"<sup>109</sup> Finally, these rousing demands for African Canadians to contribute to the war effort were summarized by an ironic request for African Canadian service, which was used to further invoke the notion that it was a man's duty to serve:

Your Brothers of the Colonies have rallied to the Flag and are distinguishing themselves at the Front. Here also is your opportunity to be identified in the Greatest War of History, where the Fate of the Nations who stand for Liberty is at stake. Your fortunes are equally at stake as those of your white brethren.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "Join No. 2," *The Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1(7), 8.

<sup>108</sup> Recruitment Poster, *The Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1(7), 18.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

This section of the poster is filled with statements that contradict the original position of most recruiters and commanding officers regarding the enlistment of coloured men. Before the formation of the No. 2 CB, African Canadians were placed in a socially inferior caste separate from European Canadians. Sam Hughes insisted that there would be no colour line, but most recruiters ignored that statement by not allowing African Canadians in their units. African Canadians were told initially that the war was a white man's war; that this was no place for them. This poster plays on previous statements by recruiters that African Canadians would be called on when they were needed by declaring that NOW was the time for them to join. This demonstrates the desperation among recruiters to meet the demands of the war because of the growing crisis in recruiting in 1916. The CEF was now forced to seek the help and support of men who were widely considered to be second-class citizens by European Canadians.

Along with the strong sense of manhood, duty, and patriotism which influenced the men who so determinedly fought the barriers to enlistment imposed on African Canadians was the goal of furthering the position of African Canadians in society. The *Atlantic Advocate* often contained articles that addressed the social advancement of African Canadians. For instance, in an article regarding intellectual progress, the author spoke about the growing number of magazines and newspapers edited and managed by and for African Canadians. These publications were committed to the interests of the community, as well as "to the cause of general intelligence, improvement and higher education."<sup>111</sup> The author also assured readers that these magazines were part of "a determined effort to maintain their position in the onward movement of the human race toward unification,"<sup>112</sup> In the April 1915 issue, it was argued that:

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<sup>111</sup> PANS, Microfilm 3207, "Intellectual Progress", *The Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1,(7), 11.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.

“in these days of aggression it [behooves] us, as a people, to map out some definite plan for our advancement and march onward, never despairing, always with our eyes fixed on the goal.”<sup>113</sup>

Attitudes Among African Canadians Regarding the Formation of the No. 2 CB

The formation of the No. 2 CB was recognized as a significant opportunity for African Canadians to prove their ability to serve in the CEF with the same measure of valour and loyalty as European Canadians. More importantly, however, was the fact that the No. 2 CB provided an opportunity for African Canadians to contribute to the social advancement of their race. The *Atlantic Advocate* continually expressed the high hopes for the battalion felt by the African Canadian community as well as the pride they exhibited in having their own battalion through which their race would be represented. In speaking to African Canadian men, it was argued that, “if there are good things coming to you after the war, you may be assured that they will be meted out to you only in proportion to what service you have rendered when those services are needed most,” and that “you have as much within your power to shape the future of your race by acting in the present as to retard it by being indifferent to what is to come.”<sup>114</sup> Many African Canadians were loyal to their country; but they were also hopeful that their service – no matter what form it took – would alleviate their subordinate position in society.

Unfortunately, the racism exhibited by recruiting officers discouraged many African Canadian men and overshadowed the important opportunities provided by the formation of the No. 2 CB. For many would-be African Canadian recruits, their initial rejection was enough to completely deter them from enlisting later. Gordon Wilson recalled that his brother went to the recruiting center in Halifax as soon as the outbreak of the war was announced, where he was

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<sup>113</sup> PANS, Microfilm 3207, *The Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1(10).

<sup>114</sup> PANS, Microfilm 3207, “Join the No. 2,” *The Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1(7), 8.

told: “Mister, this is a white man’s war, when we want you, we will let you know.”<sup>115</sup> According to Wilson, his brother was so disappointed with the rejection that he never re-attempted to enlist in the CEF, even after the formation of the No. 2 CB was announced. Regarding the battalion’s inability to recruit as many volunteers as had been hoped, Recruiting Officer Captain A.J. Gayfer argued that “due to the rough manner in which they have been previously turned down, the recruiting of coloured men [has been] very difficult especially as they are perhaps super sensitive.”<sup>116</sup>

For others, the initial rejection of enlistment in the CEF before the No. 2 CB was formed did not prove sufficient to deter them from enlisting. We have seen that some of the men rejected from the 104<sup>th</sup> Battalion went on to enlist in the No. 2 CB. For instance, despite his previous experience of the racist practices of the CEF in the early months of the war, Percy Richards joined the No. 2 CB on 10 August 1916. He recalled that he had gone to the recruiting center in Sussex several times with some friends. He was also told that the war was “a white man’s war” and had even been questioned on his motives for joining the army.<sup>117</sup> For men like Richards, the evidence shows that there were many motives for pursuing their right to enlist and to fight in the CEF. One can speculate that Richards was a proud Canadian with a desire to fight for his country. The position of the *Atlantic Advocate* leads one to believe that the determination to push the barriers that had been put in place to restrict and to oppress African Canadians and the hope of greater postwar opportunities were also a strong motives to “join up” among recruits.

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<sup>115</sup> Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 62.

<sup>116</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 4599, 10MD 20-10-52, Capt. Gayfer to Col. Gray, 22 November 1916. Quoted in Armstrong, “The Unwelcome Sacrifice,” 186.

<sup>117</sup> Ruck, *The Black Battalion*, 66.

Institutionalized racism was deeply ingrained in Canadian society during the First World War. It affected the quality of education and jobs that African Canadians received as well as their ability to entertain certain rights, such as the right to enter certain shops, sit in certain areas of buildings or transportation, and the right to serve in the military. Nevertheless, African Canadians dutifully advocated for their right to serve in the CEF and won that fight partly due to their persistence and partly due to the urgent demand for volunteers during the recruitment crisis. For some, the initial disappointment and humiliation at being rejected from the CEF was not remedied by the desperate plea for African Canadians to enlist. But others fought for their right to serve and were pleased when the formation of the No. 2 CB was officially announced. They patriotically served the CEF despite the disappointment many felt because of their having been placed in a labour unit.

## **Chapter Two: The Formation and Training of the No. 2 CB**

Some of the most important work a battalion can do is that which facilitates the training of its members before they embark on actual missions and deployments. Training teaches all ranks what is expected of them, as soldiers in general, as well as what kind of work they will be expected to complete while on deployment. This chapter will contribute to the understanding of how African Canadians were treated in Canada and overseas while they experienced their formal training and how location, as well as the people residing in those locations, influenced the treatment received by African Canadian members of the No. 2 CB. It will also show how conscription affected the training of African Canadians who were drafted after the No. 2 CB arrived overseas. As demonstrated in Chapter One, African Canadians often experienced the consequences of institutionalized racism that were so deeply ingrained in Canadian society. Racism affected the quality of their treatment in their everyday lives, as well as their ability to enlist in the CEF. Though the formation of the No. 2 CB marked a move towards acceptance regarding the service of African Canadians, this chapter will show that attitudes did not immediately change with the formation of the African Canadian battalion. The members of the battalion still experienced the effects of racism in Canadian society despite their newfound ability to represent the “coloured persons of Canada” in the CEF.

Once the No. 2 CB was authorized, it was formed amidst racial tensions among Canadians, including officers and members of the CEF. As shown in Chapter One, most commanding officers (COs) believed that African Canadians should not be allowed to serve in the military. Despite such concerns, the CEF authorized the formation of the No. 2 CB “to represent the colored citizens of Canada, who were demanding that their race should be

represented in the CEF.”<sup>118</sup> It is important to note, however, that the battalion was authorized in July 1916; in the midst of a recruiting crisis, shortly after Prime Minister Robert Borden had promised to provide 500,000 volunteers for overseas service.<sup>119</sup> To obtain the promised number of volunteers and the necessary reinforcements, the CEF relaxed the standard for recruitment, including the unofficial racial standard. As Robert Sheppard, a soldier with the No. 2 CB stated: “when things got so hot over in France, they decided to accept Blacks.”<sup>120</sup>

Captain M. Stuart Hunt claimed that the construction battalion was authorized because “an infantry battalion was not deemed advisable as the population was not sufficient to send necessary reinforcements.”<sup>121</sup> In 1914, Canada’s population was only 7,879,000. From that population, 619,636 people served in the CEF during the war: 424,589 served overseas and 59,544 soldiers died.<sup>122</sup> At the time, Canada’s African Canadian population was between 16,000 and 18,000.<sup>123</sup> According to Hunt, nearly 700 African Canadians volunteered for service and half of those volunteers were from Nova Scotia.<sup>124</sup> If the estimates for the population of African Canadians are accurate, the demographics did not realistically support the maintenance of a front line infantry battalion. Based on these statistics, an African Canadian front-line infantry battalion would not have been sustainable between 1917 and 1918. Besides, the No. 2 CB, like many units formed after July 1916, never attained the necessary number of recruits. There may have been racist motives for the formation of the construction battalion instead of a segregated infantry battalion. However, demography, logistics, and the manpower-intensive nature of the war itself, were decisive influences in denying African Canadians their own front-line infantry battalion.

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<sup>118</sup> M.S. Hunt, *Nova Scotia’s Part in the Great War*, (Halifax: the Nova Scotia Veteran Publishing CO., 1920), 148.

<sup>119</sup> Campbell, “The First 100,000 Came Easily,” 71 and Walker, “Race and Recruitment,” 8.

<sup>120</sup> Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 58.

<sup>121</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia’s Part in the Great War*, 148.

<sup>122</sup> Campbell, “The First 100,000 Came Easily,” 62.

<sup>123</sup> For statistics based on census years 1911 and 1921, see: Winks, *The Blacks in Canada*, 486-487.

<sup>124</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia’s Part in the Great War*, 148.

Overall, the formation of the No. 2 CB provided a unique opportunity for African Canadians who voiced their aspirations to serve their country. Concurrently, the No. 2 CB provided officers who were reluctant to allow the enlistment of African Canadians with an alternative. Instead of enforcing the right of African Canadians to enlist in a combat battalion, the CEF could direct them to join a non-combat unit in which they were welcome.

Due to the extreme demand for manpower in the front lines, there was a growing need for units devoted mainly to labour and logistical duties so that combat battalions could focus on fighting.<sup>125</sup> Thus, the large number of African Canadian men demanding that they be enlisted likely became the answer to the prayers of the CEF. If racist stereotypes deemed African Canadians to be eminently suited for manual labour in civilian life, then perhaps the best form of military service for them would be in a labour unit. It is noteworthy that the language used by many officers in the CEF reflected the belief that African Canadians would not make adequate combat soldiers. Therefore, it was decided that the African Canadians who expressed their desire to enlist could serve in a much needed construction battalion. Moreover, after the eventual implementation of conscription, the majority of African Canadian conscripts were trained for combat but placed in small segregated labour units (aside from the No. 2 CB) in Europe, despite the desperate need for reinforcements on the front lines. For instance, Henry Isaac Phills, who was conscripted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Depot Battalion, Nova Scotia District, recalled that his unit (which was not segregated until it arrived overseas) was trained for combat duty but assigned to labour duties until the armistice was signed.<sup>126</sup> Recall that patriotism at the time led both African and

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<sup>125</sup> Infantry battalions were always required to perform a certain amount of labour, especially while stationed in reserve trench positions. But the formation of specialized labour units for tasks farther behind the lines permitted recruiters in Canada to direct men to those units of the CEF in which it was believed they would render the most effective service.

<sup>126</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 57. The unit in which Phills served after he arrived overseas is not known. The Depot Battalions were established for the purpose of organizing conscripts and functioned as holding units in which

European Canadian men to enlist to fight for their country. Thus, serving in supporting units rather than combat units was not the ideal. However, the CEF needed labourers, and at the time, most European Canadians believed that there was no one better suited to perform such undesirable tasks than African Canadians, who clearly did not have the power to argue for their right to serve in combat units. While racism cannot be conclusively identified as the prime motive for denying African Canadians their own front-line infantry battalion, it certainly played a part in keeping African Canadian recruits from serving as reinforcements for existing fighting units.

According to Charles Nathan Smith, who enlisted on 4 September 1916: “No. 2 Battalion was formed due to discrimination and prejudices. The policy of the army, official or otherwise, was not to accept Black volunteers into the regular units.”<sup>127</sup> As discussed, when African Canadians first approached recruiting officers, they were told that “this is a white man’s war,” and were viewed as men who were not likely to make good fighters.<sup>128</sup> Col. Ripley’s argument that he had collected “a fine class of recruits” whose work should not be compared to the work of “coloured gentlemen”, when he demanded that the name of his battalion be changed, also reflects the belief that African Canadians were best suited for labour duties. When the Canadian government passed the 1917 Military Service Act which mandated conscription, it resolved to place African Canadian conscripts in segregated units after the British War Office in London reminded Borden that “these niggers do well in a Forestry Corps and other Labour units. [*sic*]”<sup>129</sup> It is for that reason that the formation of the No. 2 CB served as a way to placate members of the

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these men served before becoming reinforcements for units in France and Belgium. See Armstrong, “The Unwelcome Sacrifice,” 193.

<sup>127</sup> Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 56.

<sup>128</sup> Walker, *Racial Discrimination in Canada*, 5.

<sup>129</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1469, File HQ 600-10-35. Major Private Secretary Bristol to Major W.R. Creighton, 26 August 1918.

African Canadian community who were advocating for the enlistment of African Canadians in the CEF, as well as a way for the CEF to have laborious tasks completed that other battalions were either too busy or too proud to complete. Moreover, the No. 2 CB, whose primary duty was to perform labour duties in support of the war effort, was authorized because of racial tensions and institutionalized racism in Canada. As it was common practice to segregate African Canadians in civilian life, it was logical, within such a context, that racism would lead to the creation of a segregated African Canadian unit.

#### Training and Work Performed in Canada

The No. 2 CB was based in Pictou, Nova Scotia, since its formation in July 1916 and was quartered in the Bob Brown building at the Market Wharf on Water Street, which had previously served as the barracks for members of the 106<sup>th</sup> Battalion.<sup>130</sup> On 9 September 1916, the Commanding Officer of No. 2 CB, Lieutenant Colonel (Lieut. Col.) Daniel Sutherland, relocated the battalion to Truro with the hope that moving the unit to a larger African Canadian community would help the recruiting effort.<sup>131</sup> In addition, there was more housing available in Truro for the soldiers.<sup>132</sup> Only 100 men were left behind to recruit in the Pictou area.<sup>133</sup> The move was accomplished smoothly, albeit with some difficulty from a landlord who refused to provide his facilities for the use of an African Canadian battalion. The battalion eventually moved into the Cummings Building in Truro.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Ruck, *The Black Battalion*, 23.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>132</sup> Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice," 184.

<sup>133</sup> Ruck, *The Black Battalion*, 24.

<sup>134</sup> Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice," 184.

By January 1917 two companies of the No. 2 CB resided in the Fair Building in Windsor, Ontario, and another two were stationed in Nova Scotia; one in Springhill, and the other in Truro for recruiting reasons.<sup>135</sup> These companies likely would have received their training in their respective towns. The battalion was raised in order to help carry out the following duties: deck labour, work in the forests to provide lumber for the front lines, hutting (making temporary shelter for soldiers), railway construction, and general labour work.<sup>136</sup> Most of these duties were similar to the work that some of the African Canadian members had performed as civilians; therefore, the members were not likely to have required additional training in these tasks. According to the unit's war diary, "this unit having been authorized for Construction purposes, most of the Officers having wide experience in contracting and engineering, qualified to supervise any kind of construction [*sic*]."<sup>137</sup> The names, occupations, enrolment dates and home towns of the officers were as follows:

- Major Daniel Hugh Sutherland – River John, NS. – Railway Contractor – Enlisted in 193<sup>rd</sup> Battalion 21 April 1917. Promoted to Lieut. Col and appointed to the position of Commanding Officer of the No. 2 CB on 5 July 1916.
- Captain Kenneth Allen Morrison – Ottawa, ON. – Contractor and Merchant – Enrolled 15 July 1916.
- Captain Roderick Livingston – Dartmouth, NS. – Civil Engineer – Enrolled as a Lieut. 25 September 1916.
- Captain James Stuart Grant – Ottawa, ON. – Contractor and Accountant – Enrolled as a Lieut. 2 May 1916.
- Captain David Anderson – Springhill, NS. – Storekeeper – Enrolled 10 February 1916.
- Captain Dan Murray – Tatamagouche, NS. – Physician – Enrolled 27 February 1917.
- Captain William Andrew White – Truro, NS. – Clergyman – Enlisted 1 February 1917.
- Lieutenant Samuel Clifford Hood – Yarmouth, NS. – Accountant – Enlisted in 85<sup>th</sup> Overseas Service Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders) 20 October 1915. Enrolled in No. 2 CB on 8 December, 1917.
- Lieutenant Russell Roderick Rutherford MacLean – Moncton, NB. – Forrester – Enrolled 1 August 1916.

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<sup>135</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1833, File GAQ 8-34A, "Labour Battalions," sheet 4.

<sup>136</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1833, File GAQ 8-34A, "Labour Battalions," sheet 7.

<sup>137</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015 file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured) Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 2.

Lieutenant James Bertram Hayes – Halifax, NS. – Civil Engineer – Enrolled 12  
September 1916.

Lieutenant Ernest Noel Fyles – Ottawa, ON. – Engineering and Contracting – Enrolled  
10 October 1916.<sup>138</sup>

The No. 2 CB's NCOs had a wide range of occupations listed on their attestation papers; many listed their occupation as "laborer," while others were, cooks, carpenters, mechanics, surveyors, and gardeners, to name a few.<sup>139</sup> Their occupations were not directly related to the work they performed overseas, though they represent the prominence of labour in the men's civilian occupations. This demonstrates that the men of No. 2 CB, like most African Canadians at the time, were forced to work in less "skilled" jobs than many European Canadians.

At the time of the unit's formation, there was no set training requirement since most battalions were only assembled in one area for a short length of time until they possessed the required strength before proceeding overseas. However, the battalion required some training in order to function properly as a unit in work, drill, and deportment. When the formation of the No. 1 and the No. 2 Construction Battalions was initially discussed, it was stated that the battalion would need to "move about fairly handily but no intricate drill of any sort [would be] expected."<sup>140</sup> It was also stated that the physical fitness standards "were the same as for Infantry Battalions with the exception that standards of vision as required for drivers of the Canadian Artillery and Canadian Engineers were considered as sufficient."<sup>141</sup> There is no indication that these standards did not apply to the No. 2 CB when it was formed in July 1916, and for that reason, it is likely that the members of the No. 2 CB likely received the same training as the members of the No. 1 CB, as well as other members of the CEF. There may not have been any advanced drill movements taught, but as there are several existing photographs of the No. 2 CB

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<sup>138</sup> Ibid., and LAC Attestation Papers.

<sup>139</sup> Foyne, "The Underside of Glory," 118.

<sup>140</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1833 File GAQ 8-34A, "Labour Battalions," sheet 2.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

in drill formations, it is likely that the battalion was taught basic drill exercises along with proper military etiquette such as care for the uniform as well as how to approach and address their superiors. Moreover, as it was stated that the physical standards would be the same as infantry battalions, it is likely that the bulk of the unit's training was physical training that would prepare the members for the physical demands of working with lumber, lifting railroad tracks, and digging trenches. Gordon Charles enlisted in the No. 2 CB in September of 1916 and stated that "the battalion received infantry training, the same as the combat troops."<sup>142</sup> This information suggests that aside from the less formal drill and medical requirements, members of the No. 2 CB received the same training as all other soldiers, regardless of the unit to which they had been assigned. This minimal training in drill, discipline, and deportment was likely used as a measure to prepare troops as much as possible before going overseas, but it also served as a method of keeping soldiers busy while they waited for deployment.

We know that when conscription began in 1918, recruits received their training at Camp Aldershot in Nova Scotia before proceeding overseas. This was likely part of the newly formed basic training program which lasted 14 weeks.<sup>143</sup> The standardized training program would have ensured that soldiers had some training for their overseas service, but it also meant that they had something to do while waiting to be deployed. This would have certainly been necessary at this point in the war, as the recruiting crisis led to battalions remaining in Canada for longer periods of time while they waited to reach full strength before embarking for overseas. According to Henry Isaac Phills, who was conscripted into the 1<sup>st</sup> Depot Battalion, Nova Scotia Regiment, soldiers were not segregated based on skin colour in Aldershot. He said "we trained, ate, and

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<sup>142</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 62.

<sup>143</sup> Serge Bernier, *Canadian Military Heritage*, Vol. 3, 1827-2000, (Montreal: Art Global, 2000), 101. According to Bernier, the program was not created until the steady source of recruits began to "dry up." This makes sense, as the No. 2 CB remained in Canada to recruit from July 1916 to March 1917 and needed to be retrained.

lived together. We sailed for overseas together as Canadian Soldiers.”<sup>144</sup> Although he did not become a member of No. 2 CB, he did describe how he had been trained for combat duty with European Canadian conscripts. However, when he arrived overseas, his unit was segregated and assigned to labour work such as fatigue duties (cleaning, digging, draining, and other unpleasant work that was usually assigned as a form of punishment) and loading duties.<sup>145</sup>

According to Alexander Benjamin Elms, who enlisted in the No. 2 CB in November 1916, being a member of the CEF was not ideal at first: “It was okay overseas, but here in Canada, it was miserable, no good, the corporals and sergeants gave you no chance at all.”<sup>146</sup> If the corporals and sergeants to whom he was referring had been members of No. 2 CB, their attitudes towards the men likely would not have changed when they arrived overseas. These NCOs were probably African Canadian soldiers responsible for training Elms and other members in his unit, as there were only two European Canadians NCOs in the No. 2 CB. Moreover, the duties of officers remain in the overall administration and supervision of the battalion and its companies. It is therefore unlikely that members of the No. 2 CB would have been trained directly by their European Canadian officers. There is no clear indication that prejudice played a part in the treatment of Elms. However, it does suggest that No. 2 CB received training similar to that of other units because strictness in training is a common theme within military discourse.<sup>147</sup>

While in Canada, the majority of work performed by the members of the No. 2 CB was related to recruiting. The men participated in a number of concerts and parades in order to attract additional African Canadian volunteers. An article in the *Atlantic Advocate* from January 1917

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<sup>144</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 57.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid.

<sup>146</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 59.

<sup>147</sup> Strictness in military training acclimatizes recruits to the demands of military discipline. It reinforces the authority of leaders and it “hardens” soldiers physically and mentally in preparation for the likelihood that they will be faced with life or death situations. Discipline maintains order within a group and imparts the cohesion that is necessary to complete objectives under fire and to preserve the lives of the men.

reported that the members of the No. 2 CB's band gave a patriotic concert at the First Presbyterian Church Hall only six weeks after the band was formed. Reverend Captain William White made a recruiting speech after the concert during which, "he spoke in the strongest and plainest terms in regard to the urgent need of more men and still more men."<sup>148</sup> The band played in Truro on 1 January to celebrate the arrival of Lady Aberdeen, a philanthropist and the wife of former Governor General Lord Aberdeen, who stated that she was "pleased to see these loyal representatives of Canada, and [that] she trusted that the coloured citizens of the rest of the Dominion would respond to the call in the same splendid way as had those of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick, so that [the] unit could shortly leave."<sup>149</sup>

There were also reports that the members stationed in Windsor, Ontario, participated in similar recruiting concerts as well as religious services. They received monetary donations from the government to help fund recruiting as well as socks and handkerchiefs from the Women's Christian Temperance Union. The battalion also received a donation of 225 song books from a local music store.<sup>150</sup> Concerts served as a recruitment method by creating a sense of pride among the African Canadian communities regarding the No. 2 CB and by demonstrating the pride that members of the battalion itself had in the unit. Since part of the problem in recruiting members for the battalion was due to the belief that performing labour duties was not as honorable or glorious as fighting in the front lines, it was important to demonstrate that the No. 2 CB, like any other battalion, was "doing its part" in the war.

In addition to patriotic recruiting concerts at which the No. 2 CB's band performed, the Battalion worked to raise money for their recruiting fund through their concerts and by organizing dances while in Truro, Nova Scotia. For instance, the *Atlantic Advocate* reported that,

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<sup>148</sup> PANS, Microfilm 3207, "With the Coloured Soldiers – Continued," *Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1 (7), 13.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>150</sup> Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice," 185.

under Dr. C.C. Ligoure, the unit's medical doctor at the time, the battalion was able to raise more than one thousand dollars for the recruiting fund. The *Atlantic Advocate* and *The Truro Daily News's* repeated praise for the battalion's recruitment efforts demonstrate that the unit's primary task while stationed in Canada was to recruit the required number of soldiers before going overseas. For instance, it was reported that Company Sergeant Major G.T. Alberga travelled to Montreal in January 1917 to open a recruiting office.<sup>151</sup> There was also a mobile recruiting station set up in a Canadian Pacific Railway sleeping car. The mobile recruiting station allowed recruiters and the band to tour the Annapolis Valley and South Shore area of Nova Scotia in order to rally support for the No. 2 CB and to gain volunteers. There were also recruiting committees formed to support the No. 2 CB such as the Ladies' Patriotic League.<sup>152</sup>

Incidentally, No. 2 CB is known as the only unit formed for the duration of the war to engage in war-work before proceeding for service overseas.<sup>153</sup> Lieut. Col. Sutherland received an urgent request for a shipment of steel rails for France.<sup>154</sup> Thus, two detachments of 125 members each, from the No. 2 CB, commanded by Captain (Capt.) Kenneth A. Morrison worked from January to the beginning of March 1917 in Moncton, Nappadogan, and Edmunston, New Brunswick.<sup>155</sup> There, the men lifted railway tracks from along the National Transcontinental Railway which were later shipped overseas.<sup>156</sup> While the men worked in Edmunston, there was an outbreak of pneumonia among the soldiers which required nurses and medicine to be sent from Halifax to treat the soldiers. Unfortunately, the outbreak led to the No. 2 CB's first

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<sup>151</sup> PANS, Microfilm 3207, "Chatham" *The Atlantic Advocate*, Vol. 1 (7), 16.

<sup>152</sup> Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice," 185.

<sup>153</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War*, 149.

<sup>154</sup> Ruck, *The Black Battalion*, 26.

<sup>155</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War*, 149.

<sup>156</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured) Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 1.

mortality: Private John R. Lambert died in a military hospital on 31 May 1917.<sup>157</sup> The circumstances of the outbreak of pneumonia and subsequently, Lambert's death, were attributed to inefficient medical supplies as well as a lack of appropriate lodgings for the soldiers in Edmunston, who were reportedly housed in boxcars rather than proper barracks.<sup>158</sup> While this is considered war-work, this experience would have served as an excellent training exercise for the 250 soldiers who participated, as the unit served with forestry and railway battalions overseas.

### The Treatment of African Canadian Soldiers While in Canada

The recruiting crisis occurred in Canada between 1916 and 1917, as enlistment reportedly fell from thirty thousand to six thousand per month.<sup>159</sup> To solve this problem, the Military Service Act was passed on 29 August 1917 to help Canada gather the promised 500,000 volunteers, many of whom would be desperately needed to reinforce the Canadian Corps on the Western Front. The act ensured that any British Subject between twenty and forty-five who was, or had been, a resident of Canada as of 4 August 1917, was liable to serve in the CEF. Exemptions were given only to members of the clergy or anyone who received exemption papers.<sup>160</sup> The implementation of the Military Service Act signifies a dramatic turn of events with regard to the enlistment of African Canadians. For the patriots who had been rejected, conscription provided them with the means to enlist. This was an ironic twist of fate considering

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<sup>157</sup> LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 5339 – 26, Lambert, John Richard and Nova Scotia Vital Statistics, "John R. Lambert, died 1917 in Halifax, Halifax County" <<https://novascotiagenealogy.com/ItemView.aspx?ImageFile=21-306&Event=death&ID=95684>> (accessed March 8 2012). There is a discrepancy in Sean Flynn Foyn's work that originally led me to question Ruck's statement that John Lambert was the soldier who died of pneumonia. Foyn reported that the deceased soldier's name was Seymour Bundy; however, Bundy's death record actually reported that the former member of the No. 2 CB died on 11 May 1920 as a result of a fractured skull from a falling rock. Nova Scotia Vital Statistics, "Seymour Bundy, died 1920 in Preston, Halifax County" <<https://www.novascotiagenealogy.com/ItemView.aspx?ImageFile=82372&Event=death&ID=161429>> (accessed March 7 2012).

<sup>158</sup> Foyn, "The Underside of Glory," 132-133.

<sup>159</sup> Robin W. Winks, *The Blacks in Canada: A History*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1997), 317.

<sup>160</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 37. Exemptions were likely given for medical or work reasons.

African Canadians were originally considered unsuitable for military service. Now their service was in demand. However, some African Canadians reportedly refused to answer conscription's call because of their resentment towards the military based on their initial rejection.<sup>161</sup>

Perhaps the most dramatic twist in the treatment of African Canadians in relation to the implementation of the Military Service Act was the newfound expectation that they serve in the CEF. As shown, African Canadians were not expected to serve in the CEF when the war began. When conscription began, however, they were reportedly treated exactly the same as European Canadians. If a man was seen in public and he appeared as if he met the enlistment criteria, he would be questioned regardless of the race to which he belonged. Hilda Lambert recalled that her father was stopped by members of the Military Police and taken to the Halifax Armouries to be conscripted but was released after "he told them he had two sons fighting overseas while they stayed at home sitting on their butts."<sup>162</sup> Sure enough, his sons, Harold and John, were both serving in the No. 2 CB when he was taken to the Halifax Armouries. According to Henry Isaac Phills, who was conscripted in Sydney, Nova Scotia, on 22 May 1918, quite a few African Canadians volunteered and were rejected in Sydney.<sup>163</sup> Phills added: "However, around 1917, the Canadian army was up against it they had lost a lot of men in France. At that point they were willing to take anyone. Conscription came in and then they took Blacks and Whites. You had no choice you had to go."<sup>164</sup>

Before the implementation of conscription, the members of the No. 2 CB often faced racial discrimination when they were in public because of the prevalence of European Canadian racism. For instance, they often attended the theatre in Truro which only permitted African

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

<sup>162</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 37-38.

<sup>163</sup> Attestation Paper, LAC RG 150, Accession 1992-92/166, Box 7804-19.

<sup>164</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 38.

Canadians to sit in the balcony. This practice continued until protests from both officers and NCOs in the battalion caused the policy to be changed.<sup>165</sup> Although the evidence suggests that officers in the CEF were typically unaccepting of African Canadians, this account shows us that the officers in charge of the No. 2 CB were different from the officers who had originally rejected African Canadians for active service. The fact that the European Canadian officers in the No. 2 CB were willing to advocate for their soldiers' right to sit wherever they pleased in the theatre shows that their attitudes towards African Canadians were different. Whether this was a result of their work with the No. 2 CB or whether they had always been sympathetic towards African Canadians is an open question.

Despite the racist treatment which African Canadian members of the No. 2 C B received while in Canada, the members continued to dutifully represent the African Canadian community. Because of their ability to maintain the standard of dress and deportment, as well as their ability to participate in the CEF regardless of racism among European Canadians, the members of No. 2 CB became a symbol of pride and hope for African Canadians. There is little known about the activities of members of the No. 2 CB stationed in Windsor, Ontario, while the battalion was recruiting. However, local newspapers reflect the positive impression made on the city by the soldiers. According to the (Windsor) *Evening Record*, "by their good behaviour while here, members of the battalion won the respect and admiration of all Windsor citizens. They earned the reputation of being a sober, well-disciplined and hardworking company of soldiers."<sup>166</sup> Evidently, the ability of African Canadians was grossly misunderstood by the CEF.

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<sup>165</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 62.

<sup>166</sup> Quoted in Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice," 185.

At Market Wharf in Pictou, Nova Scotia, residents Pat McGuire and her brother Russell Hayden were playing on the wharf when Russell, who had been born with cerebral palsy, fell into the water. She recalled that one of the soldiers from the No. 2 immediately jumped into the water to rescue Russell. After that, McGuire's mother supplied the soldiers with baked goods for the remainder of their stay in Pictou.<sup>167</sup> George McCullion, another resident of Pictou, recalled how often he would socialize with members of the No. 2 CB. He remembered: "we had a local ball team and we would challenge the soldiers to a game on a regular basis. When we were not playing ball we would sit around the wharf singing and harmonizing."<sup>168</sup>

In a final demonstration of pride and a celebration of the No. 2 CB's formation, the No. 2 CB participated in a patriotic parade through the streets of Dartmouth, N.S. before sailing overseas. Resident Edith Colley recalled her appreciation for the departure of the soldiers: "It was a lovely spring day when the Battalion came marching down Ochterloney Street... The band was playing the Colonel Bogey March. The soldiers all looked so smart. Their buttons and boots were shining; they were marching proudly and so straight."<sup>169</sup> Resident Mabel Saunders recalled watching the parade from Prince Albert Road: "I was standing by my gate when they came marching by, with their chests stuck out, and the band playing...Everybody was out watching; Black people and White people, waving their hands, cheering and clapping."<sup>170</sup> The reception of the soldiers in Dartmouth demonstrates mixed attitudes among Canadians regarding African Canadians' military service during the First World War. Though there was reluctance among military officials and recruiting officers to allow African Canadians to serve in the military, it

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<sup>167</sup> Interview with Mrs. Arthur (Pat) McGuire, River John, N.S. September 30, 1984 in Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 24

<sup>168</sup> Interview with Mr. George McCullion, Pictou, N.S., September 30, 1984, in *Ibid.*

<sup>169</sup> Interview with Ms. Edith Colley, Dartmouth, April 7, 1984, in Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 26.

<sup>170</sup> Interview with Ms. Mabel Saunders, East Preston, N.S., July 14, 1984, in Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 27.

appears that Canadian citizens were open to the idea of any man contributing to the war effort at this point in the war, regardless of their race.

### Training Received While Overseas

As one can imagine, the training of a soldier is never truly finished. There are always new policies put in place that need to be reviewed as well as briefings regarding new strategies that the soldiers need to receive. The war diary kept by the No. 2 Construction Company (No. 2 CC), as it became known upon arrival overseas, referenced several training exercises in which the soldiers partook while overseas, including weapons training. On 26 April 1918, members of the No. 2 CC reportedly received an hour of military training, during which they made use of the “limited number of rifles at [their] disposal.”<sup>171</sup> The No. 2 CC received three additional hours of military training on 12 May 1918, including two hours of aiming practice and a one hour lecture.<sup>172</sup> On 18 May 1918, a severe storm reportedly caught members of the No. 2 CC while they were receiving training in the French trenches.<sup>173</sup> Moreover, on 1 June, 1918, an entry in the No. 2 CB’s war diary stated that the members received “military training in the French Trenches” but did not describe what this training involved.<sup>174</sup> Then, on 8 June 1918, it referenced “Military Training and Medical Inspection.” On 22 June 1918, an entry in the unit’s diary stated that the members received “military training” but did not specify what that training involved.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 12 (1 April to 30 April 1918), 4.

<sup>172</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 13 (1 May to 31 May 1918), 2.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

<sup>174</sup> LAC RG 9-111-D-3 File No. 727 “War Diary: 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured), Vol. 14 (1 June to 31 June 1918), 2.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

Furthermore, on 20 July 1918, an entry in the unit's diary stated that the unit received three hours of military training for "care of arms and aiming."<sup>176</sup>

However, no further "military training" was reported after one final entry on the subject made on 22 July 1918 reported that "instructions [were] received from District Headquarters to cease Military Training."<sup>177</sup> The fact that the battalion's military training was ordered to cease shortly after the members received instruction in care of arms and aiming demonstrates the military's refusal to prepare African Canadians to fight. Although the command might have been given because it was believed that the members would not require training, the commencement and cessation of weapons training was most likely involved with fears of the ferocious German offensives occurring on the Western Front between 21 March and 18 July. These offensives pushed back portions of the Allied lines and precipitated a strategic crisis that potentially required the support of all personnel in order to repulse the German advance, including those personnel who were not members of combat units. When the last of the enemy offensives was halted, the imperative to arm support troops would have ended.

In addition to the brief stint of military training that the No. 2 CB received while overseas, the members regularly received lectures regarding military life overseas as well as regular inspections. The lectures were considered part of their formal training as they supplemented the men's understanding of daily routine, care of equipment, and personal hygiene while strenuously working in support of the war effort. Moreover, the inspections were considered part of the unit's training because they served to reinforce and review the members' cleanliness and their deportment. On 26 August 1917, an entry in the unit's war diary reported that the No. 2 CC's camp was inspected by officers from Marseilles. The company was

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<sup>176</sup> LAC RG 9-111-D-3 File No. 727 "War Diary: 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured), Vol. 15 (1 July to 31 July 1918), 2.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid.

complimented on the condition of their camp.<sup>178</sup> On 18 July 1918, an entry in the No. 2 CC's war diary referenced a medical inspection and a lecture presented by the Medical Officer regarding general diseases, with an emphasis on venereal disease.<sup>179</sup> These entries, along with several others that reference medical and barrack inspections, show that personal care while working overseas was being stressed in order to reduce the number of maladies among soldiers. This included ensuring that health was maintained through the care of barracks space and sleeping quarters as well as ensuring a standard of physical health.<sup>180</sup>

Lectures were also held to help boost morale and to reiterate the importance of maintaining morale. Thus, on 9 May 1918, the No. 2 CC received a lecture in the cinema at La Joux by a French officer regarding "British Morale."<sup>181</sup> The final entry in the unit's war diary regarding lectures was an entry on 29 July 1918 that referenced a lecture given by Captain A.J. Vining of the Canadian Y.M.C.A. Though it described the lecture as "interesting" and "appreciated by all present," it did not discuss the importance or the subject of the meeting. However, it is likely that a lecture from the Y.M.C.A would regard health and wellness as high priorities.<sup>182</sup> Overall, these entries demonstrate the importance of educating the members of the No. 2 CB on daily military life. As stated above, these lectures contained information on how to maintain proper hygiene, but they likely also provided the members of the No. 2 CB with instructions regarding care of their kit and themselves, as well as proper military etiquette or discipline and deportment. The lectures demonstrate that the members of the No. 2 CB were held

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<sup>178</sup> LAC RG 9-111-D-3 File No. 727 "War Diary: 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured), Vol. 4 (4 August 27 August 1917), 1.

<sup>179</sup> LAC RG 9-111-D-3 File No. 727 "War Diary: 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured), Vol. 15 (1 July to 31 July 1918), 2.

<sup>180</sup> Such instruction and concern for personal hygiene and cleanliness of quarters were standard in all military units, and that may not reflect any particular problems with No. 2 CB.

<sup>181</sup> LAC RG 9-111-D-3 File No. 727 "War Diary: 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured), Vol. 13 (1 May to 31 May 1918), 1.

<sup>182</sup> LAC RG 9-111-D-3 File No. 727 "War Diary: 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured), Vol. 14 (1 June to 31 June 1918), 3.

to the same military standards of discipline and deportment as their European Canadian counterparts, despite the initial reservations of allowing them to enlist in the CEF.

The No. 2 CB was born out of racism and misconceptions regarding the ability of African Canadians to perform the same duties as European Canadians in the CEF. Once the recruiting crisis set in between 1916 and 1917, commanding officers could no longer be as selective with their recruiting process as they once were. Moreover, conscription denied them their ability to argue that enlisting African Canadians would result in a loss of more desirable European Canadian volunteers. Conscription also limited the chances for African Canadians to join non-segregated battalions. Due to the recruitment crisis, one would assume that the relaxed standards would have resulted in a greater number of African Canadians being accepted into combat units. However, this was not the case. Instead, African Canadian conscripts were trained with European Canadians but placed in segregated work groups once they arrived overseas. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that it was recommended that those African Canadians be transferred to the No. 2 CB. This marks a continuation of the notion that African Canadians should serve in segregated labour units instead of non-segregated battalions. Conscription might have limited the ability for African Canadians to serve in combat; however it did alter their training. Instead of being segregated like the volunteer members of the No. 2 CB, African Canadian conscripts were trained and quartered with their European Canadian counterparts while stationed in Canada.

Overall, there were mixed reactions to the formation of the No. 2 CB, as well as differing experiences of racism while the members of the battalion were in Canada. Members of the No. 2 CB experienced racism when attempting to indulge their free time at the theaters; but they also experienced pride in themselves and support from both African and European Canadians when they marched through the streets of Dartmouth before proceeding overseas. While some African

Canadians regarded the formation of the No. 2 CB as the opportunity they had been so desperately seeking to prove their ability, their manhood, and their dedication to Canada, others saw it as a reflection of institutionalized racism in Canada. Moreover, while many had high hopes that the formation of the No. 2 CB would lead to the improvement of the social status of African Canadians, their experiences proved that it would not immediately change prevailing racist thought and practices among European Canadians. Change was not immediate; but the varying experiences among African Canadians of both racism and acceptance show that Canadians were beginning to adopt a more tolerant attitude toward African Canadian military service.

### Chapter Three: Overseas Experience

The No. 2 Construction Battalion left Pier 2 in Halifax on 25 March 1917 onboard the *SS Southland*. The ship was under the command of Captain Morehouse, while the troops were commanded by Lieutenant Colonel D.H. Sutherland.<sup>183</sup> They had been requested by officials in Ottawa to proceed overseas as soon as possible. Sutherland had only recruited nineteen officers and six hundred and five other ranks when the battalion left Halifax; therefore, orders were received later in May 1917 to change the status of the No. 2 CB to a company due to its being understrength.<sup>184</sup>

This chapter will examine the No. 2 CB's overseas service through the unit's war diary as well as Reverend Captain William White's personal war diary. This includes the duties performed by the members, leisure activities, and race relations. This chapter will also demonstrate the degree to which racial prejudices shaped the work performed by the No. 2 CB, how African Canadian soldiers were treated overseas, and how racism was different in Europe than in Canada. In France, much of the daily routine was spent racially integrated. The colour line was apparently drawn only in the soldiers' quarters and in the Champagnole Hospital, as the No. 2 Construction Company (No. 2 CC), as it was now called, operated and slept in a separate camp and was quartered in a segregated wing in Champagnole Hospital. Otherwise, African and European Canadians worked and relaxed together; they even shared mess facilities.<sup>185</sup> African Canadians were also integrated during their leave time. They were able to spend their periods of

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<sup>183</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War*, 149. Morehouse's first name and initials are not provided.

<sup>184</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 27.

<sup>185</sup> The term "mess" refers to a facility in which soldiers could relax, drink, smoke, and socialize. The only separation of mess facilities was between officers and Other Ranks.

leave in France and England with Europeans without issue (though a few soldiers managed to get themselves into trouble with civilians while on leave, as shown later in this chapter).<sup>186</sup>

### The Journey Across the Atlantic

During the journey, members of the No. 2 CB were escorted across the Atlantic with “four other transports and a converted cruiser.”<sup>187</sup> It was noted that “the excellent behaviour and discipline [*sic*] of the men during the voyage, was the subject of favorable comment by the Captain of the ship.”<sup>188</sup> According to Captain M.S. Hunt, numerous precautions were taken to protect the convoy: “no lights were shown, no bugles blown and a constant watch was kept day and night for floating mines and submarines.”<sup>189</sup> However, such precautionary measures to ensure a safe voyage for the No. 2 CB were not uppermost in the minds of everyone in the CEF. In a letter sent to the Navy Department, Major General Gwatkin demanded to know whether the Navy objected to sending a vessel containing the No. 2 CB overseas without an escort. He wrote: “We want to send overseas a labour battalion, comprised of negroes, with whom white troops object to travel. We should like to embark this battalion, by itself... I suppose she would be looked after as she approached home waters.”<sup>190</sup> Although Gwatkin stated that the concerned shipping company was “willing to take the risk,” the suggestion to send the No. 2 CB across the Atlantic unprotected was not approved by the Navy.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Reverend White’s diary includes several entries that mention him being invited to dinner or afternoon tea with French women. Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*.

<sup>187</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured) Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 1.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>189</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia’s Part in the Great War*, 150.

<sup>190</sup> LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1469. HQ 600-10-35, V.1, Gwatkin to Naval Secretary Interdepartmental Committee, 21 February 1917.

<sup>191</sup> *Ibid.*, Stephens to Gwatkin, 23 February 1917.

The journey from Halifax to Liverpool between 25 March and 7 April 1917 was in the midst of the most dangerous period of submarine warfare during the First World War. Although he did not provide the number of ships sunk in this period, M.S. Hunt claimed that “more ships were sunk during the week April 1 to April 8 1917, than at any time during the War. [sic]”<sup>192</sup> John Terraine’s research regarding tonnage sunk monthly by the enemy during the First World War supports Hunt’s statement. It does not confirm the figures for the specific week of April 1-8, but it does show that April 1917 saw the heaviest monthly losses.<sup>193</sup> According to Gordon Charles Wilson, the trip overseas was rough, and the convoy encountered enemy fire along the way. He stated: “a ship in the convoy was hit and sunk not far from the Irish Coast.”<sup>194</sup> These accounts certainly suggest that had the No. 2 CB been forced to cross the Atlantic without protection, their ship might very well have been sunk. Although this period of intense submarine warfare could not have been foreseen, the fact that an unescorted crossing was initially suggested at all demonstrates the profound racism present in the CEF as exemplified by Gwatkin, in particular.

The *SS Southland* arrived in Liverpool on 8 April 1917 with the No. 2 CB onboard. The No. 2 CB was stationed in Seaford from 8 April to 17 May. According to M.S. Hunt, while in Seaford, the No. 2 CB “was detailed into working parties and employed in building trenches for the troops in training and in building and repairing roads within the bounds of the Canadian command.”<sup>195</sup> The unit’s war diary counters his claim. It stated: “In England, Military training was subordinated to agricultural labor, mostly planting potatoes.”<sup>196</sup> This statement suggests that

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<sup>192</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia’s Part in the Great War*, 150.

<sup>193</sup> John Terraine, *The U-Boat Wars: 1916-1945* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), Appendix C, 766.

<sup>194</sup> Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 62.

<sup>195</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia’s Part in the Great War*,” 150.

<sup>196</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured) Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 1.

it was typical for most battalions to receive (additional) training upon arrival overseas. However, as a unit whose primary duty was to perform labour tasks wherever needed, their arrival in England meant that they could complete important tasks (such as planting potatoes) that supplemented the war effort. As important as agricultural work was, one wonders whether the members of the No. 2 CB regarded such activities as vital war work. Considering the initial fears that African Canadians were being recruited only to perform undesirable tasks, combined with the belief that there was more honour and glory in combat roles, it is not likely that members of the unit were pleased to be planting potatoes after their arrival in England. Even though members of the No. 2 CB were aware that they were not going to be fighting the enemy as they had initially hoped, it is doubtful that they would have acknowledged the importance of agricultural work.

On 17 May 1917, the No. 2 CB disembarked from transport in Boulogne “after one and a half hours uneventful voyage from Folkestone, in company with three other Steamships and convoyed by two destroyers. [*sic*]” They spent the night at St. Martin’s Rest Camp.<sup>197</sup> The following day, members of the No. 2 CB were “entrained in comfortable cars, after being issued with Iron Rations and Steel Helmets. The men had a hearty dinner at Abbeville.”<sup>198</sup> On 19 May 1917, the company continued on their journey but only received one meal at Les Laumes, France. The company finally arrived in La Joux, in the Jura Mountains, at 1 a.m. on 20 May 1917. They detrained at 9 a.m. and pitched tents in the forest, along a road, on the Plain de Barbarene.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured) Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 1.

<sup>198</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

### The Campaign to Retain Canada's Only African Canadian Unit

Due to issues with recruiting, the No. 2 CB was not able to achieve the required number of soldiers as established by the CEF before proceeding overseas. Its numbers created a problem in England, as it was not large enough to be a battalion, yet too large to be considered a company. Officials considered dissolving the battalion and reassigning the troops to various railway and construction battalions; however, so as to not to deviate from recommendations made earlier by COs in Canada, it was decided that European Canadians should not be forced to work with African Canadians in fully integrated units.

Eventually, the No. 2 CB was reorganized and given the designation No. 2 Construction Company (No. 2 CC). It was then attached to No. 5 District, Jura Group of the Canadian Forestry Corps (CFC), which was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel George Johnson.<sup>200</sup> Moreover, as the unit no longer fit the definition of a battalion, Lieut. Col. Sutherland was forced to revert to the rank of Major, but was still able to remain in command of the unit.<sup>201</sup> The reorganization of the unit into a company meant that surplus officers were attached to various units in England. Surplus soldiers were left in England as well, to form a Base Company.<sup>202</sup> The surplus soldiers remained in England until it was decided that they should join the No. 2 CC in La Joux as reinforcements. Forty-Eight soldiers arrived in La Joux on 8 April 1918. It was reported that “these men came with #2 Construction B’n (Colored) and for the past year have

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<sup>200</sup> For more information on the CFC, see G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: The Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962) and 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). Another useful source regarding the CEF is C.W. Bird and Lieutenant J.B. Davies, *The Canadian Forestry Corps: Its Inception, Development and Achievements* (London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1919).

<sup>201</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War*, 150.

<sup>202</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured) Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 1.

been training as Infantry.”<sup>203</sup> An additional 17 soldiers who were left in England when the No. 2 CC proceeded to France arrived in La Joux on 6 June 1918.<sup>204</sup>

In La Joux, the No. 2 CC was able to preserve its identity when it was decided not to dissolve the unit. Although the soldiers were assigned to work parties with various construction companies stationed there, the soldiers had their own separate camp to which they returned each night.<sup>205</sup> This helped preserve the unit’s identity, but one wonders if there was an ulterior motive to allowing the unit to have a camp that was separate from those of the other companies with which the soldiers worked. Despite the increasing level of integration on a daily basis, the separate camp, and thus the separate sleeping quarters, meant that European Canadians were still not forced to mix with African Canadians in the same quarters.

According to John Armstrong, the primary function of the No. 2 CC was that of an administrative holding unit, which kept administrative records and maintained the overall responsibility for the soldiers in the unit, though they were assigned to various work parties from other units on a temporary basis. Such temporary assignments were not uncommon in the CFC, which helps to explain the context for increasing integration of African Canadian and European Canadian troops.<sup>206</sup> The No. 2 CC was not only a holding unit for African Canadians in La Joux, however. It was also a holding unit for various groups of Russian soldiers who performed labour duties in La Joux despite the fact that Russia was not in the war at the time. These soldiers were not regarded as trustworthy, and the No. 2 CC’s war diary complained about them on several different occasions. For instance, a diary entry made on 2 April 1918 reported with minimally concealed annoyance that of the 100 Russians attached to and quartered with No. 2 CC, 40 were

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<sup>203</sup> Ibid., Vol. 12 (1 April to 30 April 1918), 3.

<sup>204</sup> Ibid., Vol. 14 (1 June to 30 June 1918), 1.

<sup>205</sup> Armstrong, “The Unwelcome Sacrifice,” 189.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid., see also Bird and Davies, *The Canadian Forestry Corps*, 41-42.

unfit for duty. Regarding the soldiers who were unfit for duty, the entry stated that “they not only stay in camp idle all day, but spread socialistic doctrines among the others so that it is frequently difficult to get these Russians out to work.”<sup>207</sup> It also complained that the division of pay among the men did not vary according to the work done by each soldier.<sup>208</sup> Thus, the men who were unfit for duty were being paid the same as those who worked all day in the field. The No. 2 CC’s complaints regarding the Russians attached to the unit were legitimized, however. The Russians must have proved troublesome at times. An entry in the unit’s war diary made on 18 May 1918 reported that an armed guard was placed “over 56 Russian malcontempts [*sic*] in one of our huts.”<sup>209</sup> Regardless of how the Russians behaved once they arrived in La Joux, the fact that these “undesirable” soldiers were quartered with the African Canadian soldiers cannot be ignored. The situation was filled with irony, the Russians, who were victims of Allied prejudices, were quartered with previously undesirable African Canadians who also regarded the Russians as undesirables.

### Overseas Work and Duties

Upon arrival in La Joux and its attachment to No. 5 District, Canadian Forestry Corps, the men of the No. 2 CC were quartered in tents. They reported that “their arrival had been well prepared for with water supply laid in, latrines provided, and buildings erected for an infirmary as well as an officers’ mess.”<sup>210</sup> The soldiers were assigned to assist the CFC, and would likely have gone to work the following day had they not been placed in quarantine for ten days due to a suspected outbreak of measles among the men.<sup>211</sup> Once the quarantine was over, the officers of

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<sup>207</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 55015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured) Vol. 12 (1 April to 30 April 1918), 2.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., Vol. 13 (1 May to 31 May 1918), 2.

<sup>210</sup> Armstrong, “The Unwelcome Sacrifice,” 188.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., and Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 3.

No. 2 CC served wherever they were needed and were therefore not always solely responsible for the members of No. 2 CC. Major Sutherland continued to oversee the discipline and the work performed by members of the No. 2 CC; however, other officers were assigned to various tasks. For instance, Captain James Grant was appointed as the Officer in Charge of shipping for No. 5 District.<sup>212</sup> Thus, he was in charge of “everything that is produced at the Mills of Jura Group.”<sup>213</sup> Captain Roderick Livingston was appointed Transport Officer and was assisted by Lieutenant Russell McLean. The two were in charge of all transportation arrangements for No. 5 District.<sup>214</sup> Lieutenant James Hayes was placed in charge of pumping stations and water lines which pumped water to the camp.<sup>215</sup> Finally, in addition to their regular duties in their respective work parties, sergeants from the No. 2 CC were placed in charge of a hut in which African Canadian NCOs were quartered. The sergeants were required to inspect and report on the cleanliness of the men on a weekly basis.<sup>216</sup>

The NCOs of the No. 2 CC were employed in several small work parties and assisted in all forms of work performed by the CFC. This included “teaming, cutting, logging, mill-work, etc.”<sup>217</sup> In April 1918, it was reported that the members of the No. 2 CC were employed at La Joux as teamsters, millmen, bushmen, and cooks. They were also employed in road work, company duties, shipping, and other “miscellaneous duties.”<sup>218</sup> According to M.S. Hunt, “all lumber sawn by the four [Forestry] Companies were shipped at La Joux Station by No. 2

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<sup>212</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War*, 151.

<sup>213</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured) Vol. 2 (1<sup>st</sup> June to 26<sup>th</sup> June 1917), 1.

<sup>214</sup> *Ibid.*, and Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 3.

<sup>215</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War*, 151.

<sup>216</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 10 (1 February to 28 February 1918), 3.

<sup>217</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 1 (17<sup>th</sup> May to 24<sup>th</sup> May 1917), 4.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 12 (1 April to 30 April 1918), 1.

Construction men.”<sup>219</sup> Moreover, Lieutenant Ernest Fyles was placed in charge of a group of fifty men who assisted No. 22 Company of the CFC “in logging and in the construction of a narrow gauge railway to transport saw-logs to the mill.”<sup>220</sup> As recorded in the unit’s war diary, Lieut. Fyles “moved up to and camped on La Glacier” with a work party of 92 men on 2 June 1917.<sup>221</sup> There, they “engaged in building and operating a 2 mile railroad through the forest and in logging generally.”<sup>222</sup> Captain David Anderson was placed in charge of one hundred men who worked to maintain the roads in La Joux.<sup>223</sup> Throughout June 1917, 65 members of the No. 2 CC also partook in night work, though their duties were not specified by the unit’s war diary.<sup>224</sup> On 12 November 1917, 50 men were sent to Cartigny, near Peronne, to assist No. 37 Company of the CFC.<sup>225</sup> In February 1918, the unit’s war diary reported that:

Of the 8 Officers at La Joux, 6 have special work to supervise under the Forestry Corps. Of the 257 OR’s., [Other Ranks] 30 are employed as Teamsters, 50 in various Mills, 50 in the bush operation of the various companies, 30 in the Shipping Department, 15 cooks, 35 on the roads, 20 other District Employ and the balance on miscellaneous Labour.<sup>226</sup>

Similar to the group sent to Peronne, work parties were often sent on missions that were different from their regular duties. For instance, on 3 February 1918, six soldiers, supervised by one NCO, were sent to Pontarlier for the day “to maintain discipline.”<sup>227</sup> Similarly, on 10 February 1918, three groups were sent to “patrol the nearby villages to maintain discipline.”<sup>228</sup> On 10 March 1918, a group of six soldiers and one NCO were sent to Champagnole to maintain

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<sup>219</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia’s Part in the Great War*, 151.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid.

<sup>221</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 3 (1<sup>st</sup> June to 26<sup>th</sup> June 1917), 1.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid.

<sup>223</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia’s Part in the Great War*, 151.

<sup>224</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 3 (1<sup>st</sup> June to 26<sup>th</sup> June 1917), 1.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid., Vol. 7 (1 November to 30 November 1917), 2.

<sup>226</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 10 (1 February to 28 February 1918), 2.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., Vol. 10 (1 February to 28 February 1918), 1.

<sup>228</sup> Ibid., Vol. 10 (1 February to 28 February 1918), 2.

discipline.<sup>229</sup> Moreover, on 22 March 1918, a group of six soldiers and one NCO were sent to Pontarlier; this time, with an officer as well. They were sent there for the day to maintain discipline since a disturbance had occurred there a week before.<sup>230</sup> Although it is unclear why there were disturbances occurring in nearby towns, the fact that members of the No. 2 CC were sent to these towns demonstrates the level of faith officers in La Joux had in their ability to maintain good order and discipline. It shows that African Canadians had indeed proven their ability to represent the CEF with dignity, and to uphold not only their own discipline, but also the discipline of others when necessary.

Officers and members of the No. 2 CC would have followed Routine Orders that described their daily responsibilities depending on where their respective work parties were assigned. A typical working day was as follows:

5:00 a.m. – Reveille [A signal sounded each morning to alert personnel that it is time to wake up and prepare for the day]  
 5:30 a.m. – Breakfast  
 6:40 a.m. – Parade forms up and working parties move off in sufficient time to reach various places of employment at 0700hrs.  
 12:00 p.m. – Dinner. Parties near the camp return for dinner; balance of dinners sent out to work by G.S. Wagon.  
 12:45 p.m. – Fall in, Afternoon work starts at 1300hrs and continues until 6:00 p.m.  
 6:00 p.m. – Supper.  
 6:30 p.m. – O.C's Orders.  
 9:00 p.m. – First Post.  
 9:30 p.m. – Last Post. Weekly, on Monday, an inspection of the men and barracks.  
 9:45 p.m. – Lights Out<sup>231</sup>

While the length of the work day was typical, the ten hours of intense labour duties must have proven to be exhausting. While combat units were able to gain relief from their

<sup>229</sup> Ibid., Vol. 11 (1 March to 31 March), 1.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid., Vol. 11 (1 March to 31 March 1918), 2.

<sup>231</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 10 (1 February to 28 February 1918), 1.

regular front line duties by performing labour tasks, members of the No. 2 CC and other labour and construction companies were forced to perform the same tasks for the entirety of the war. It is no wonder that men were becoming ill or collapsing while on duty, as shown in the following section.

### Working and Living Conditions

In La Joux, the working conditions were dependent on the weather as well as the quality of clothing that the soldiers received. Unfortunately, entries in Reverend Captain William White's diary demonstrate that the weather was treacherous and demoralizing to the members of the No. 2 CC.<sup>232</sup> The majority of his diary entries report that it rained almost constantly in La Joux. Moreover, winter weather conditions in La Joux began to settle in during October 1917, which led to cold, wet working environment for the men. Considering that the men were constantly either working in the forest, or in the French trenches, the cold, wet autumn and winter of 1917 and 1918 would have quickly taken a toll on the men working in La Joux. The summer of 1918 proved to be the exact opposite. Due to drought, soldiers stationed in La Joux were only permitted to bathe on Saturdays.<sup>233</sup> The inability to bathe after their ten hour work days would have quickly created unsanitary working and living conditions. Furthermore, White's diary shows that the members of the No. 2 CC were not receiving enough clothing to shield them from the elements. On 22 October 1917, Private Robert Brent reportedly collapsed on his way to work. He remained outside all day, and was not brought to a hospital until late that night – most likely when soldiers from his work party found him on their way back to camp. According to

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<sup>232</sup> Reverend Captain William Andrew White was the chaplain of the No. 2 CC and has been presumed the only "black" commissioned officer in the CEF. He was a prominent African Canadian leader in Truro and became an important influence on the morale of the No. 2 CC. For a suggestion that as many as seven African Canadians held commissioned rank in the CEF, see Armstrong, "The Unwelcome Sacrifice," endnote 10, 194-195.

<sup>233</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 16 (1 August to 31 August 1918), 1. Regular bathing did not resume until 11 September 1918. LAC RG 9-111-B-3, "Routine Orders, Canadian Forestry Corps, No. 5 District," 11 September 1918.

Reverend White, Brent was not wearing socks or underwear that day.<sup>234</sup> On 30 November 1917, Reverend White reported that a soldier, with the last name Johnson, was being treated in the hospital for trench foot, a serious situation considering the level of attention junior officers were supposed to be paying to the condition of their soldiers' feet.<sup>235</sup> Johnson's infection as well as Brent's collapse and subsequent diagnosis of influenza demonstrate that their ten hour work day in cold, wet working environment was exhausting the members of the No. 2 CC. These incidents were clearly significant to Reverend White, who did not record the details of every illness in his diary; thus, it is likely that these cases exemplified the most extreme reactions to the amount of clothing issues to members of the No. 2 CC. It is unclear whether this was due to an inadequate supply of clothing or the notion that African Canadian soldiers should not receive adequate clothing when European soldiers could benefit from it.

A detachment of three officers (Captain Morrison, Lieutenant Hood, and Captain White) and 180 other ranks left La Joux on 30 January 1918. Their return date is unknown. Regarding their transport arrangements, it was reported that: "Train accommodations very poor, as all the men placed in open box cars and exposed to the cold weather. The reason given for moving these men away that the climatic conditions at La Joux are too severe for the colored men do not correspond with the train service furnished [*sic*]."<sup>236</sup> This was not an uncommon notion among members of the CEF. In a 1916 poll of officers commanding recruitment zones across Canada, the majority insisted that climactic unsuitability made African Canadians unfit for duty.<sup>237</sup> The

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<sup>234</sup> Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*. 22 October 1917.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 20 November 1917. There were at least 15 Johnsons in the No. 2 CC. Those who did have accessible service records had no mention of them being treated for trench foot on the reported date. On the issue of trench foot, the CEF required junior officers to inspect the condition of their men's feet to ensure proper hygiene so that the men could effectively work. See Sir Andrew Macphail, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919: The Medical Services* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1925), 270.

<sup>236</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 8 (1 December to 31 December 1917), 3.

<sup>237</sup> Mathieu, *North of the Color Line*, 106.

fact that they were transported in inadequate rail cars, while images of the transportation of European soldiers show that they were transported in covered rail cars, demonstrates the quality of treatment they received in this circumstance regardless of the military's concern.<sup>238</sup> Evidently, members of the No. 2 CC were given whatever was available, regardless of its quality.

While the working conditions took a toll on the members of the No. 2 CC, the facilities within their camp appear to have been well maintained. It was reported that there was "ample hot water and good bathing facilities" for the soldiers, with the exception of the drought conditions during the summer of 1918, which limited the soldiers to one shower per week.<sup>239</sup> Moreover, the members appear to have received packages from home. Reverend Captain White regularly reported the packages he received from home that often contained items he needed or food. Although there are no sources available to confirm this, it is likely that the members of the unit also received packages from home. The unit also received shipments of "Red Cross Comforts."<sup>240</sup> The first was received on 19 February 1918. The second included extra cigarettes and tobacco from the Montreal Gazette Company and was received on 27 September 1918.<sup>241</sup> The parcels from home and from the Red Cross would have certainly helped the morale of soldiers stationed in La Joux. When one was serving overseas, any demonstration of care and concern from people back in Canada was important.

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<sup>238</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 11 (1 March to 31 March 1918), 2.

<sup>239</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>240</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>241</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 17 (1 September to 30 September 1918), 4.

### Leisure Activities

While employed overseas, members of the No. 2 CC were authorized to partake in numerous leisure activities. These activities were essential to maintaining morale among soldiers. Such activities promoted not only a sense of pride and dedication to the unit, but also healthy competition and socialization among companies. Most importantly, they provided soldiers with a means to get their minds off the war. Aside from the regular leave days the soldiers were entitled to take, they also participated in activities in camp. For instance, the No. 2 CB's war diary and Reverend Captain William White's personal diary make several references to the members taking leave in France. On 31 January 1918, the unit's war diary reported that "leave for U.K. and Paris [were] coming through for this unit the first time since our arrival in France nine months ago."<sup>242</sup> This was consistent with the frequency of leave granted to other ranks throughout the CEF and the British Armies. Soldiers could typically expect ten days of leave for each year served overseas.<sup>243</sup> Members of the companies stationed in La Joux were also able to spend their free time in the men's mess, while officers, including Reverend White, had a separate mess.

The only days that members of the No. 2 CC did not work were Sundays, unless it was necessary. Reverend White usually delivered Church service, although service was sometimes conducted by Captain Church, who arrived in La Joux in April 1918.<sup>244</sup> Afterwards, soldiers were free to engage in various leisure activities. Usually, they traveled to local towns; but there were also various forms of entertainment in camp, such as concerts held by the No. 2 CC's

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid.

<sup>243</sup> Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993), 234.

<sup>244</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 12 (1 April to 30 April 1918), 2.

band.<sup>245</sup> Much to Rev. White's disapproval, the officers often played cards on Sunday afternoons as well.<sup>246</sup> Throughout the war there were also a few parades and concerts that the soldiers attended. For instance, on 14 July 1918, the Mayor of Salins invited the No. 2 CC to take part in a review parade with American and French soldiers. Major Sutherland acted as the Reviewing Officer for the parade, which was quite an honour for any officer. No. 2 CC's band played the National Anthems along with a number of other tunes in order to support the soldiers on parade.<sup>247</sup> Moreover, on 22 September 1918, the band played all day at the Canadian hospital in Champagnole for the patients there.<sup>248</sup> Reverend White and Captain Murray often visited soldiers in the same hospital, in order to provide additional medical care and spiritual support.<sup>249</sup>

Both war diaries also make several references to various sports competitions played against European Canadian units, as well as the games between other units that the members of No. 2 CC were able to watch. While in Seaford, England, the No. 2 CC was able to win second place in a sports competition against members of the CEF.<sup>250</sup> On 2 July 1917 in La Joux, there was a sports day organized to celebrate the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Canada's Confederation. The No. 2 CC's track team "carried off the honours and won the day."<sup>251</sup> A sports competition was held again on 1 July 1918 to celebrate Dominion Day. Events included baseball, football, "running high," shot put, "running broad," "blindfold sect.," 880 yard race, "Team & GS Wag.," 440 yard race, 100 yard race, sack race, horseback wrestling, and a one mile relay. No. 2. CC won third

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid., Vol. 10 (1 February to 28 February 1918), 3.

<sup>246</sup> Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*. 3 February 1918.

<sup>247</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 15 (1 July to 31 July 1918), 1-2.

<sup>248</sup> Ibid., Vol. 17 (1 September to 30 September 1918), 2.

<sup>249</sup> Captain Murray was the battalion Medical Officer and was said to have been particularly sympathetic to the needs and sensibilities of the African Canadian soldiers in his care. Personal communication with Dr. Henry Bishop, Curator of the Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia, Cherry Brook, Nova Scotia.

<sup>250</sup> Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War*, 150.

<sup>251</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 3 (2 July to 31 July 1917), 1.

place in the competition with a total of 17 points.<sup>252</sup> It was also noted that the band “[with] their excellent music, greatly assisted in entertaining the crowd and making the holiday a success.”<sup>253</sup>

The No. 2 CC completed a number of baseball games during the summer which would have served as an excellent morale booster. On 28 May 1918, Reverend White reported that a game had occurred between the officers and sergeants. The officers lost: 9-17.<sup>254</sup> Then, on 5 June 1918, he reported that the baseball team from La Joux went to play at Villes. They were defeated 13-12.<sup>255</sup> On 23 June, men from the No. 2 CC played against 40 Company CFC and won with a score of 24-4.<sup>256</sup> The team was victorious again on 3 August 1918 when they defeated 50 company at baseball with a score of 15-0.<sup>257</sup> On 18 August 1918, White wrote that No. 2 CC defeated men from 21 and 36 Companies, the score being 22-17.<sup>258</sup> The number of sports games played throughout the summer of 1918 in La Joux indicates that leisure was considered an important war-time morale booster for the soldiers, and that racial differences did not interfere with inter-company leisure. Evidently, African and European Canadian soldiers had no difficulty competing with and against each other, likely because they were beginning to form relationships with each other due to the number of hours they spent working and relaxing together.

Members of the No. 2 CC were able to relax at the cinema in La Joux, which was taken over by the Companies at La Joux and run solely for the soldiers for the duration of the war.<sup>259</sup>

There, soldiers were able to watch movies, boxing contests and enjoy live music. For instance,

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<sup>252</sup> LAC, RG 9-III-B-3, “Routine Orders, Canadian Forestry Corps, No. 5 District, Central Group, France,” “List of points won by each company at Sports held on 1 July 1918.

<sup>253</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 15 (1 July to 31 July 1918), 1.

<sup>254</sup> Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*. 28 May 1918.

<sup>255</sup> *Ibid.*, 5 June 1918.

<sup>256</sup> *Ibid.*, 23 June 1918.

<sup>257</sup> *Ibid.*, 2 August 1918.

<sup>258</sup> *Ibid.*, 18 August 1918.

<sup>259</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 10 (1 February to 28 February 1918), 3.

on 23 February 1918, the first concert at the cinema was reportedly “highly successful.” That night, the No. 2 CC’s band was part of the successful entertainment.<sup>260</sup> Then, on 13 March 1918, the soldiers watched a film of the work performed by the Canadian Forestry Corps at La Joux.<sup>261</sup>

While stationed overseas, members of the No. 2 CC experienced one Christmas in La Joux, in 1917. As Christmas was an important time of year for the soldiers, as well as an emotional time during which they became homesick, it was vital that the holiday was celebrated for religious reasons as well as for morale. Moreover, this particular Christmas came shortly after the Halifax explosion on 6 December, which the soldiers were well aware of. Ensuring that morale was maintained among the soldiers at a time of anxiety and concern for their families would have been essential. Thus, the quarters were decorated and there were several celebrations during the Christmas season.<sup>262</sup> On 23 December, there was a religious service held. The No. 2 CC’s band played when the unit marched to and from the Christmas service.<sup>263</sup> On Christmas day, the soldiers were given a day off and they received turkey dinner at noon; though they were disappointed that they were unable to receive plum pudding.<sup>264</sup> In the evening, the soldiers attended a dance.<sup>265</sup>

The integration and variety of leisure activities available to members of the No. 2 CC reveal that, for the most part, African Canadians stationed in La Joux were treated as equals. The fact that they were able to participate in friendly competition with Europeans and European Canadians would have provided an important morale boost for African Canadians and would have given them some hope that European Canadian racist attitudes were diminishing. The

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<sup>260</sup> Ibid.

<sup>261</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 11 (1 March to 31 March 1918), 2.

<sup>262</sup> Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*. 22 December 1917.

<sup>263</sup> Ibid., 23 December 1917.

<sup>264</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 8 (1 December to 31 December 1918), 2.

<sup>265</sup> Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*. 25 December 1917.

number of leisure activities made available also reflects the military's acknowledgement of the significance of the work performed by members of the No. 2 CC. Evidently racism and racial prejudices did not lead to a denial of rest or recreational activities for African Canadians stationed in La Joux, as they were permitted the same quality of leisure as Europeans and European Canadians.<sup>266</sup>

#### Behaviour Among Soldiers and War-Time Courts Martial

While overseas, the No. 2 CC received numerous approbations for their level of discipline and deportment. As mentioned earlier, the battalion's behaviour was first recognized during the crossing to England by the captain of the *SS Southland*. On 7 July 1918, the No. 2 CC's camp was inspected by Lieutenant General Sir Richard Turner, Brigadier General A. McDougal, and Lieutenant Colonel Johnson. The inspecting officers provided favorable comments regarding the "interior economy and general tidiness of the camp."<sup>267</sup> The last mention in the unit's war diary of compliments received by the No. 2 CC regarding their discipline and the quality of work they performed was made on 13 October 1918. All the companies in La Joux were assembled at the request of Lieutenant Colonel Farris, the senior chaplain in the area. According to the entry, "he complimented the men of the forestry corps on the splendid work done by them and pointed out that necessity of continuing in the selfsame spirit in order to bring this war to a victorious end."<sup>268</sup> While these compliments were not directed specifically to the members of the No. 2 CC, they were included in the general round of praise given, and would have benefited from the morale boost nonetheless.

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<sup>266</sup> For more information regarding the leisure activities made available for soldiers overseas, see: J.G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies, 1914-1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990).

<sup>267</sup> LAC, RG 9-111-D-3 File No. 727 "War Diary: 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured), Vol. 14 (1 July to 30 July 1918), 1.

<sup>268</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

In addition to maintaining a disciplined work ethic while overseas, Major Sutherland ensured that members of the No. 2 CC maintained a high level of military discipline. For instance, on 12 September 1918, sections 4-44 (inclusive) of the Army Act were read to the men on parade.<sup>269</sup> This was done periodically to remind soldiers of the level of discipline they were required to maintain in accordance with the King's Regulations and Orders.<sup>270</sup> Moreover, on 2 April 1918, it was reported in the unit's war diary that "it is believed that this is the only unit in this District complying with the order that parties are to march to and from work in a military fashion."<sup>271</sup> This entry demonstrates the sense of pride that the officers of the No. 2 CC must have felt for their soldiers' success in learning and maintaining proper discipline. On the other hand, one wonders what would have resulted, had the members of the No. 2 CC followed the trend of ignoring the order to march to and from work. It is possible that, had the members of the No. 2 CC not followed the order, they likely would have only "confirmed" the common stereotype that African Canadians were lazy and unfit for military life. Instead, Sutherland's insistence on following the order proved that African Canadians were capable of maintaining good military discipline. Sutherland's act also demonstrated that African Canadians were able to keep better discipline than the European Canadians stationed in La Joux.

Despite of the praiseworthy state of its overall level of discipline, No. 2 CC, like any unit, contained individuals who were not always able to maintain the high disciplinary standards demanded by military regulations. Some members were given light punishments for various acts of misconduct or misbehaviour, while others faced more severe consequences. Some members were sentenced to several days of "field punishments" while others were forced to forfeit a

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<sup>269</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 18 (1 October to 31 October 1918), 1.

<sup>270</sup> Minister of Militia and Defence, *King's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia (1917)*, para. 440.

<sup>271</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 12 (1 April to 30 April 1918), 2.

number of days' pay, depending on the nature of their offence and how often they had been caught misbehaving. There were two versions of field punishments. Field Punishment No. 1 consisted, among other elements, the convicted man being tied to a post or wagon.<sup>272</sup> This was reportedly the most humiliating punishment of all, as the convicts were tied so that they were unable to keep themselves warm or ward off fleas and lice.<sup>273</sup> Field Punishment No. 2 consisted of heavy exercise while wearing full kit as well as close confinement.<sup>274</sup> The length of these punishments varied: some members of the No. 2 CC were sentenced to several days of field punishments, up to a maximum of twenty-eight days.<sup>275</sup> This seems to have been the same for other soldiers, depending on the severity of their actions. For instance, Private Michael Norman was given twenty-eight days of F.P. No. 1 after he shot himself while cleaning a rifle.<sup>276</sup>

Soldiers were punished for a variety of reasons. The most common charge was "drunkenness," but soldiers were also punished for disrespecting superior officers, disobeying orders, and absence without leave, to name a few. On 25 October 1917, Reverend White reported that there was a fight in the camp during a crap game among the soldiers. Shots were fired, but there were no injuries.<sup>277</sup> Although the men involved could have faced punishment for gambling and for firing weapons, but there is no record of any soldiers being punished in relation to the incident, despite its severity.<sup>278</sup> This was not always the case, however. Some members were

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<sup>272</sup> Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2007), 205.

<sup>273</sup> Cook, *Shock Troops*, 249.

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> In extreme cases, courts martial could convict a soldier to a longer duration of field punishments. Though I have not found record of No. 2 CC soldiers being awarded more than 28 days of F.P. No. 1, an unnamed soldier was allegedly sentenced to fifty-six days of F.P. No. 1 after he assaulted a French woman. Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993), 240.

<sup>276</sup> Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 249. The battalion in which this soldier served is not mentioned.

<sup>277</sup> Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*. 25 October, 1917.

<sup>278</sup> Minister of Militia and Defence, *King's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia (1917)*, para. 437. "All gambling in garrisons, camps, or cantonments is forbidden."

forced to perform extra duties, or fatigues; some to forfeit their rank as punishment; others were sentenced to several days of forfeited pay for their indiscretions.

On 4 September 1918, Acting Corporal Robert Irving was deprived of his acting appointment for “improper conduct after being inspected prior to proceeding on leave – changing his uniform” as well as for being “improperly dressed – wearing brooches and cap not of a standard pattern.”<sup>279</sup> Then, on 6 September 1918, Acting Corporal Norman Bowden and Acting Lance Corporal Joseph Harris were deprived of their acting appointments for “neglect of duty – Whilst in charge of a party, allowing men to be idle.”<sup>280</sup> Private Obediah Johnson was sentenced to ten days of field punishment and was forced to forfeit 1 day’s pay after he had been absent from duty without leave from 7:30 a.m. to 5:30 p.m. on 17 June 1917.<sup>281</sup> On 30 May 1918, Percy Steward was sentenced to 28 days of Field Punishment No. 1 (In which the accused was bound to a fence) for “willfully wounding a comrade” after he stabbed Pte. Bushfan.<sup>282</sup> Then, on 21 May 1917, seventy eight soldiers were all ordered to forfeit five days’ pay for “making away with iron rations.”<sup>283</sup> This incident was reported only a day after the No. 2 CC arrived in La Joux, and only two days after the battalion received only one meal for an entire day while they

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<sup>279</sup> LAC, RG 9-III-B-3, “Routine Orders, Canadian Forestry Corps, No. 5 District,” 4 September 1918.

<sup>280</sup> Ibid., 6 September 1918.

<sup>281</sup> LAC, RG150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4892-28

<sup>282</sup> LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9299-50. It is unclear which Bushfan was injured in this incident as there were three soldiers in the company with that name, and their records are not available for public viewing.

<sup>283</sup> LAC RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, “Casualty Forms.” The following soldiers were involved in this incident: Canadians Robert Brent, Joseph Palmer, Lloyd Byer, Grandville Collymore, Garnett Cox, Clarence Darlington, Milton Jackson, Joseph Harris, David King, Thomas Montague, Da Costa Hall, Ralph Jarvis, Ralph Midleton, Evans Waith, Samuel Collins, Columbus Bowen, Arnold Harris, Joseph Madden, Harry Logan, Charles Nelson, William Robinson, Obediah Johnson, and Nathaniel Steward, along with Americans Fessie Allen, Cyrus Austin, John Backer, Benjamin Barnes, Charles Battle, William Bennette, William Black, Ellis Bland, Robert Brent, George Briscoe, Leon Bush, Gaile Carr, Early Cooper, Fred Alvin Davis, James Darden, Roy Davis, Lun Dorsey, William Hamilton, Mitchell Foster, Harry Gates, Wallace Garnett, William Leroy Harper, Oscar Harris, Harry Hunter, Obediah Johnson, John Madison Lewis, Claud McDowell, Clemons McNeil, Melvan Minor, Louis Nealy, Anthony Parker, Henry Phillips, Gus Pratcher, William Rodgers, William Savage, James Stewart, William Thomas, John Tivis, Alex Toulmen, Ben Trice, Alfred Tudor, Samuel Wallace, Archer Walton, Joseph Ward, Harrison Webster, John Whitaker, Jessie Wigfall, Henry Williams, Harvey Wilson, Ottinger Wilson, John Woodson, John Young, Nathaniel Young, and Rubin Zeigber.

travelled. The fact that seventy eight soldiers were so desperate to steal rations demonstrates the level of neglect the soldiers experienced. Evidently the soldiers were famished at the time; so they attempted to steal food for themselves and their friends without considering the likelihood that an NCO or an officer would notice almost eighty men attempting to steal rations.

The No. 2 CC's first courts martial began on 12 July 1917 and tried John Munroe with drunkenness and "refusing to obey an order given by a superior officer."<sup>284</sup> Then on, 5 September 1917, Private James Allen, Private Obediah Johnson, and Private William Smith were tried at a court martial. Allen and Johnson were both charged with: "When on Active Service, Committing an offence against the person of an inhabitant in the country which he was serving (rape)."<sup>285</sup> They were also charged with: "When on Active Service, Committing an offence against the person of an inhabitant in the country which he was serving (theft)."<sup>286</sup> The two were sentenced to death, which was then commuted to penal servitude for life. They were then discharged from the CEF for having been sentenced to penal servitude, and sent to prison in England to serve their sentences.<sup>287</sup> Private William Smith, from New Glasgow, was charged with "When on Active Service committing an offence against the person of an inhabitant of the country in which he was serving. [*sic*]"<sup>288</sup> The war diary did not elaborate on what this offence was, but it did reveal that he was sentenced to 15 years of imprisonment with hard labor.<sup>289</sup> On 30 May 1918, a Court Martial for Private John Lewis Sullivan's trial assembled. He was charged with "Offering Violence to his superior officer" and with "Disobeying a lawful command given

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<sup>284</sup> LAC, RG 150, Ministry of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada, Series 8, File 649-M047292, Reel T-8679.

<sup>285</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 5 (1 September to 30 September 1917), 1.

<sup>286</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>287</sup> Service records. Pte. Allen: RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 100-12; Pte. Johnson : RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 4892-28.

<sup>288</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 5 (1 September to 30 September 1917), 1.

<sup>289</sup> *Ibid.*, Vol. 5 (1 September to 30 September 1917), 2.

by his superior officer.”<sup>290</sup> He was found guilty of both charges on 10 June 1918, and sentenced to ten years of penal servitude, which was later changed to five years.<sup>291</sup>

Given the overall good discipline of the unit, those who were charged and convicted of offences did not typify the state of discipline among the No. 2 CC as a whole. Moreover, it is not likely that racism played a role in the frequency and nature of punishments given. While it is possible that the men were forced to steal rations because they were the victims of neglect aggravated by racism, it is also possible that they were the victims of poor planning. That being said, the fact that there were clearly rations available to steal means that either the men were simply not given any, or that there were few rations available during the trip; thus, due to irrationality caused by hunger, the soldiers took rations as soon as they became available. Perhaps the soldiers were worried that they were going to continue to be fed an inadequate number of meals.

#### War-Time Casualties Overseas

On 4 July 1917, the No. 2 CC lost a second soldier; the first to die overseas. Private (Pte.) Charles Henry Bryant died at Camp Detention Hospital from “general tuberculosis.” He was buried “at Supt Cemetery Department at Jura” on 6 July 1917.<sup>292</sup> On 20 November 1917, John Mitchell died from peritonitis at the military hospital in Bramshott.<sup>293</sup> On 1 December 1917, Private William Boone died at La Joux from “nephritis.”<sup>294</sup> According to Reverend Captain White’s diary, he had been in the hospital since 29 November 1917.<sup>295</sup> On 14 January 1918,

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<sup>290</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 13 (1 May to 31 May 1918), 3.

<sup>291</sup> Ibid., Vol. 14 (1 June to 30 June 1918), 1.

<sup>292</sup> Ibid., Vol. 3 (2<sup>nd</sup> July to 31<sup>st</sup> July 1917), 1. Unfortunately, little is known about Pte. Bryant at this time, as his service record has not been made public on the LAC website.

<sup>293</sup> LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-3/166, Box 6257-35.

<sup>294</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 8 (1 December to 31 December 1917), 1.

<sup>295</sup> Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*. 29 November, 1917.

Private John Mansfield died. Mansfield had been initially sent to the hospital on 8 January 1918 but was discharged on 10 January because the doctor believed that he was faking his illness. On 13 January 1918, White reported that Mansfield's illness had worsened and that he spent the day reading and praying with him. He also stated that Mansfield was taken to the hospital a second time, but that the doctor still thought that he was malingering. On 14 January, White wrote that Mansfield had died and that "now they think he was not faking."<sup>296</sup> Private John Mansfield was buried in Supt on 16 January 1918.<sup>297</sup> White's entry on the subject stated: "I used to think that I did not want to die but when work and worry get hold of you, death is sweet."<sup>298</sup>

On 28 January 1918, Private Tilman McKinley Williams died in Champagnole Hospital from tuberculosis, which had developed from pneumonia. He was buried on 29 January 1918 at Champagnole.<sup>299</sup> Then, on 28 April 1918, Private George Sylvie died in Champagnole hospital from tuberculosis.<sup>300</sup> On 12 June 1918, Early Cooper died from an intestinal hemorrhage.<sup>301</sup> On 22 October 1918, Private Belfield Hall died at Champagnole Hospital, from tubercular peritonitis.<sup>302</sup> Hall had repeatedly been ill with influenza and other similar illnesses until he was diagnosed with tubercular peritonitis.<sup>303</sup> Finally, on 3 November 1918, Private Michael Jackson reportedly died from a contusion.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>296</sup> Ibid., 14 January, 1918.

<sup>297</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 9 (1 January to 31 January 1918), 2.

<sup>298</sup> Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*, 16 January, 1918.

<sup>299</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 9 (1 January to 31 January 1918), 3.

<sup>300</sup> Ibid., Vol. 12 (1 April to 30 April 1918), 4.

<sup>301</sup> LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-3/166, Box 1968-17.

<sup>302</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 18 (1 October to 31 October 1918), 2.

<sup>303</sup> LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3937-27.

<sup>304</sup> LAC RG 9-III-B-3, "Routine Orders, Canadian Forestry Corps, No. 5 District," 5 November 1918.

On 23 September 1918, the No. 2 CC received word of their first casualty whose death was not related to illness. Private Charles Some had been found dead on Road 45, which led from Andelot Road to Salins. French authorities reportedly stationed Gendarmes to guard Some's body while the case was investigated.<sup>305</sup> On 25 September 1918, Lieutenants Norman and Peacock were sent to bring Some's body back to La Joux. There, a post mortem (an autopsy) was carried out by Captain Scarlett. Private Some was buried in Supt Churchyard, in Jura, on 26 September 1918. The report regarding Some's death documented "numerous incisions which appear to have been made by a sharp instrument such as a knife on [the] face, chest, back, and neck of Pte. Some. [His] throat [was] cut, severing the carotha artery and juglar vein and respiratory tract. [*sic*]"<sup>306</sup> It also was reported that there was strong suspicion that a French soldier, who was absent at the time of Some's murder, was responsible.<sup>307</sup> French authorities investigated the soldier, but there were no charges laid and there is no record that a court martial was convened regarding the matter. There was no mention of this in the Routine Orders for the Canadian Forestry Corps, which kept otherwise accurate records of leave, rank confirmations, hospital admissions, discharges, punishments, courts of inquiry, courts martial, and so on. As Private Some's death currently remains a mystery, additional research in French police records is necessary in order to further pursue the investigation.

On 10 November 1918, No. 2 CC received word of their second and final casualty whose death was not related to illness. Private Sydney David had been found dead at the bottom of a cliff from which he had presumably fallen. The CFC held a court of inquiry composed of three officers from No. 2 CC on 13 November 1918 to investigate the circumstances of David's death.

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<sup>305</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 17 (1 September to 30 September 1918), 3.

<sup>306</sup> LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9149-40, "Report on Accidental or Self-Inflicted injuries."

<sup>307</sup> Ibid.

The findings of the inquiry were not documented in the Routine Orders for the CFC; however, David's cause of death was listed on his grave register as "fall over cliff – accidental" which suggests that the inquiry ruled that his death was unintended.<sup>308</sup>

All members of the No. 2 CC were buried with full military honours, and were therefore treated with the same amount of respect as European or European Canadian casualties. The only alleged deaths of soldiers in the No. 2 CC that were not mentioned above were those of Arthur Benson Cromwell, from Weymouth, and Lieutenant Samuel Clifford Hood, from Yarmouth. According to Sean Foyn, Cromwell died on 16 June 1918, but there is no mention of his death in either the unit's diary or William White's diary, and his service record is not available.<sup>309</sup> Hood's death was reported in William White's diary on 8 May 1918; however, there is no mention of it in the unit's war diary.<sup>310</sup> Moreover, Hood's death certificate reports that he died on 3 December 1938 in Yarmouth.<sup>311</sup> It is unclear why White reported that Hood had died, when it is apparent that he survived the war, and continued to live in Yarmouth.

Overall, it is unlikely that the wartime deaths of members of the No. 2 CC were linked to racism, though it is possible that some illnesses were related to inadequate clothing, which might have been linked to someone's reluctance to provide African Canadians with adequate supplies that could be used by the highly valued combat troops. It is possible that racism was involved in John Mansfield's death, but accusations of malingering were often leveled by medical officers against soldiers, no matter what their perceived racial background. On the other hand, the fact that African Canadians were treated in a "colored wing" of the Champagne Hospital shows that

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<sup>308</sup> LAC, "Commonwealth War Graves Registers, First World War," microform 313830\_B016600.

<sup>309</sup> Foyn, "The Underside of Glory," 134.

<sup>310</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)" Vol. 13 (1 May to 31 May 1918), 1.

<sup>311</sup> Nova Scotia Historical Vital Statistics, "Province of NS – Certificate of registration of death," *Samuel Clifford Hood, died 1938 in Yarmouth, Yarmouth County*, <<https://novascotiagenealogy.com/ItemView.aspx?ImageFile=184-219&Event=death&ID=275954>>

racism certainly played a role in the treatment they received when they were ill or injured.<sup>312</sup>

Moreover, though there is no definitive evidence, one wonders if Sydney David's fall to the bottom of a cliff was assisted in some way. Charles Some's death remains a mystery as well, although racism cannot be ruled out conclusively. It is clear that Some had a confrontation with someone, and though the extensive nature of his injuries suggests that his murder was fuelled by rage, and possibly hate, it is impossible to definitively conclude that the violence exhibited toward Pte. Some was related to racism.

### Manifestations of Racism Overseas

There are several ways in which racism was manifested while the No. 2 CB was overseas. According to the 4<sup>th</sup> Canadian Labour Battalion's war diary, the battalions were refused arms on the grounds that "parties from Labour Battalions are not supposed to work within rifle shot distance of the enemy."<sup>313</sup> Yet the Construction Company was often near reserve trenches, and Rev. Charles Nathan M. Smith even recalled one instance when the battalion "came under fire in France from bombing raids carried out by German planes."<sup>314</sup> This shows that the battalion was sometimes working in areas of defensive importance, and might have required the ability to defend themselves more often than regulations stipulated at the time. Moreover, as discussed in Chapter Two, an entry in the No. 2 CC War Diary on July 20, 1918 suggests that members were in possession of, or were being prepared for, the possession of fire arms, as it states that the unit received three hours of military training regarding "Care of Arms and Aiming."<sup>315</sup> Contrary to this entry, however, another made on 22 July stated that instructions

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<sup>312</sup> LAC, Records of the Department of Militia and Defence, RG 9-III-B-3, "Routine Orders, Canadian Forestry Corps, No. 5 District," 15 August 1918.

<sup>313</sup> Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), Department of National Defence, Ottawa, 74/672, Folder 7, File "Labour and Infantry works Battalion"

<sup>314</sup> Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 56.

<sup>315</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, "War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)

to cease military training were received from District Headquarters.<sup>316</sup> This suggests that a decision to restrict the members of No. 2 CC from carrying arms was made shortly after they received their training to do so, and was possibly a reflection of the notion that African Canadians would not make good fighters. On the other hand, it is possible that weapons training was deemed necessary due to the aggressive German offensive during this period, and was believed to be unnecessary once the fears of German attack began to subside.

The ability to defend themselves was not the only basic military privilege denied the members of the No. 2 CC. An entry in the unit's war diary on 25 September 1918 suggests that African Canadian soldiers were not being officially promoted through the rank structure. This entry states that "the following NCOs have been confirmed in their respective ranks on dates as set against their names, after being in France for 16 months." Yet the names listed all hold a rank of either "Acting Sergeant (A/Sgt.)" or "Acting Corporal (A/Cpl.)." This is problematic, as "Acting" was a title placed in front of a rank to signify that the person holding the specific rank was not qualified to be officially promoted to that rank, but was only performing the duties required of a person in that rank in order to fill the required position temporarily. That the diary was confirming these "acting" positions demonstrates that the unit needed each position to be filled, but that the military was unwilling to place an African Canadian soldier in an official position of authority. Although European Canadians also often held acting ranks, once they proved their ability to perform the duties and to fulfill the responsibilities required of their acting ranks, European Canadians were awarded substantive ranks. The same did not occur for the majority of African Canadians, who held acting ranks for the duration of their overseas service. This suggests that African Canadian soldiers were not being awarded official ranks at the time,

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<sup>316</sup> Ibid.

which was likely because European Canadian soldiers holding a lower rank might not have taken orders from an African Canadian.

Interestingly, Reverend Captain William White was referred to as “H-Capt.” (Honorary Captain) and “Acting Captain” interchangeably in the No. 2 CC’s war diary. Moreover, Captain Edward Church was referred to only as “Capt.” when the diary made reference to him.<sup>317</sup> Both men’s Attestation papers have their rank recorded as “Captain” and their profession as “Clergyman.” Although Church had previous military service (he belonged to No. 1 CB), it is unlikely that the honorary rank was given to White due to his lack of military service, since it was not recorded as an honorary rank on his Attestation paper. Moreover, since Major Sutherland had not served in the military before he enlisted, it is unlikely that the honorary rank was given to White due to his lack of previous military service. Finally, the section on honorary ranks in the King’s Regulations and Orders (KR&Os) from 1917 only listed the ranks of Honorary Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel, which were given to officers upon retirement if they had served as a Lieut. Col., or to a person with no previous military service for educational and administrative purposes. The only time that other honorary ranks were given was upon the retirement of a commissioned officer. At this time, the officer would be given an honorary rank equivalent to the rank he held prior to retirement.<sup>318</sup> These inconsistencies indicate that White was likely only identified as an Honorary Captain due to his race, as there was nothing in the KR&Os to stop him from receiving a full commission. As it was a common notion that African Canadians should not serve in the CEF, this notion likely affected the treatment of Captain White. While his Attestation paper indicated that he enlisted as a Captain, he was probably only

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<sup>317</sup> LAC, RG 9, III-D-3, Vol. 5015, file no. 747, “War Diary – 2<sup>nd</sup> Canadian Construction Company (Coloured)” Vol. 12 (1 April to 30 April 1918), 2.

<sup>318</sup> Minister of Militia and Defence, *King’s Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia (1917)*, paras. 212-217, 243-247.

referred to as an Acting Captain because racist European Canadian members of the CEF did not want to recognize the authority of an African Canadian officer.

Prejudices often affected the ways in which Reverend Captain William White was treated. The 6 November 1917 entry in his personal diary noted that the commanding officer of No. 5 District, Jura Group, Lieut. Col. George Johnson, entered White's private quarters without knocking and likely took White by surprise. Yet Johnson verbally attacked him: "Don't you know enough to rise when your Commanding Officer comes into the room?"<sup>319</sup> This situation reveals much about the expectations held by some European Canadian Officers regarding African Canadian soldiers. The insult held by the words "Don't you know enough" suggests that the officer in question did not believe that African Canadians were capable of understanding certain military standards. Moreover, the fact that White found the situation significant enough to record in his diary shows that there were deep racist connotations in Lieut. Col. Johnson's speech that affected White. It is not common for an officer to enter another commissioned officer's quarters unannounced as Johnson did, and then to show further disrespect to the officer by demanding that he pay his respects. In fact, the King's Regulations and Orders (KR&Os) state that officers "should maintain at all times that courtesy towards each other which is calculated to perpetuate friendly and social relations between them and create an 'esprit de corps.'" <sup>320</sup> Chaplains in particular were to be treated "with the respect due to their rank and profession, and a C.O. will render them every assistance in carrying out their duties."<sup>321</sup> The entire ordeal suggests that there was more at work than simply the pursuit of a regular standard of military

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<sup>319</sup> Black Cultural Center for Nova Scotia Library Collection, *Diaries of Rev. William A. White*. Nov 6<sup>th</sup>, 1917. Maj. Sutherland was the commanding officer of the No. 2 Construction Company; thus, the Lieut. Col. referred to here was not the CO of No. 2 CC; he was the commanding officer of No.5 District, CFC, according to Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War*, 151. White refers to him as "colonel" however it was common for soldiers to simply refer to a Lieut. Col. as a Col. in an informal setting.

<sup>320</sup> Minister of Militia and Defence, *King's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia (1917)*, para. 420.

<sup>321</sup> *Ibid.*, para. 1236.

discipline. Johnson went against the KR&Os by acting as he did towards Reverend White and could have been reprimanded if White had filed a complaint against him.

Discrimination also manifested itself in England during demobilization, as the return of European Canadian officers was prioritized, while the departure of many working-class Canadians was delayed because they were required for further duties.<sup>322</sup> When the war ended, No. 2 CB was sent to England before returning to Canada. The unit left La Joux on 2 December 1918 and was sent to Kinmel Park.<sup>323</sup> According to Robert Sheppard, a Sergeant Major from another unit ignored orders and interfered with a lineup of companies awaiting their turn in the bathing facility. Sheppard recalled that “when [the Sergeant Major] was arrested, some of his comrades attempted to remove him from the Guard House. A riot broke out and a number of soldiers ended up in the hospital.”<sup>324</sup> While his recollection of the end result of the riot was the same, Benjamin Elms also stated that “a white soldier made a racial remark and old Sergeant Sealy ordered his men to put him in the guard house.”<sup>325</sup> The report dealing with the incident indicated that Sgt. Sealy placed the European Canadian under arrest for insubordination and left him under the supervision of an African Canadian soldier. Factoring into this situation, the previously described notions of African descendants as dirty, animalistic, uncivilized persons, allows us to consider the possibility that the Senior NCO mentioned opposed the idea of forcing his troops to follow behind African Canadians in the bath parade, and as a result an inter-racial riot began.

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<sup>322</sup> Mathieu, *North of the Colour Line*, 109.

<sup>323</sup> Armstrong, “The Unwelcome Sacrifice,” 193.

<sup>324</sup> Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 58.

<sup>325</sup> Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 60.

Race and racism shaped the overseas experiences of African Canadian members of the No. 2 CB in a variety of ways. Notions of race inequality and race-appropriate work affected the duties performed by members of the No. 2 CC; but they did not affect their opportunities for leisure and friendly inter-company competitions with European Canadian soldiers. Although the work performed by members of the No. 2 CC in France was not deemed exclusive to African Canadian soldiers, racist attitudes had certainly prevented their service in a combat role. We also know that racism and prejudices sometimes shaped the experiences of African Canadian soldiers. For instance, Charles Smith recalled that members of the No. 2 CC encountered prejudices in France, “where American servicemen had spread bad reports concerning Black soldiers.”<sup>326</sup> The fact that Reverend Captain William White’s commission was not recognized by European Canadian officers and the fact that African Canadian NCOs were not awarded substantive ranks shows that a glass ceiling was limiting the ranks and appointments that African Canadians could achieve in the CEF. Moreover, the riot in Wales while the battalion was waiting in line for bath parade had racist undertones that resulted in violence towards African Canadians. Finally, though the person or persons responsible were never tried, the murder of Private Charles Some suggests that racial tensions had some effect on members of the No. 2 CC. That being said, the majority of African Canadians seem to have mixed well with European Canadians in La Joux. Overall, they recalled their overseas experience fondly and stated that Europeans treated them with more respect than European Canadians did.<sup>327</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 56. For more information on race relations in the U.S. Army during the First World War, see: Tyler Stovall, “The Color Line Behind the Lines: Racial Violence in France during the Great War” *The American Historical Review*, 103, no. 3 (1998): 737-769.

<sup>327</sup> Ruck, *Canada’s Black Battalion*, 60.

## Conclusion

African Canadians became the forgotten soldiers of the First World War because they lived within a racist society that placed them in a wartime service role which was obscured by more valued and revered combat units. Because the European Canadian majority was influenced by racism, African Canadians were treated as members of a subordinate caste in Canadian society. Thus, racial tensions significantly hindered the ability of African Canadians to enlist in the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Although racism in Canada had not affected the official stance of the CEF regarding the enlistment of African Canadians, it led to their exclusion through other means. Sam Hughes insisted that African Canadians were to be enlisted in any battalion; however, he refused to interfere directly with recruiters' rights to deny the enrollment of any man they deemed unfit for duty. Because of racism, the colour of one's skin became an enlistment criterion for many recruiting officers.

Even though the use of African Canadians in combat units was consistently questioned, the CEF could not ignore the growing recruitment crisis in 1916. While the beginning of the war was met with a steady flock of volunteers, by mid to late 1916, the supply of willing recruits had been depleted almost completely. Because of Robert Borden's promise of 500,000 soldiers for the British Empire's war effort, not to mention the impact of heavy casualties, the CEF became increasingly desperate to collect enough volunteers. With the additional need for soldiers to meet labour demands and the prejudiced notion that African Canadians would make more effective labourers than front-line soldiers, the CEF was led to approve the formation of the No. 2 CB. Thus, the unit was formed as a result of racial stereotypes and logistical requirements that would dictate the role this unit filled both in Canada and overseas.

As the use of African Canadians in combat units was consistently questioned, so were their motives for pursuing enlistment. Although African Canadians were more than willing to serve for reasons of patriotism and social advancement, their persistence in seeking to enlist was met by European Canadian cynicism regarding their desire to enlist and their effectiveness as soldiers. Nevertheless, African Canadians disproved negative assumptions about their reasons for enlisting, such as those expressed by Major General Gwatkin, through their persistent advocacy for their right to serve in the CEF. Overseas, members of the No. 2 CB had a somewhat different experience. While they faced some racial prejudice, for the most part, African Canadians were treated as equals in France. Although they had segregated sleeping quarters and hospital facilities, work and leisure activities in La Joux were integrated with Europeans and European Canadian soldiers. The majority of incidents related to racism overseas appear to have involved European Canadian soldiers who maintained their racial prejudices, despite their service alongside African Canadians. Otherwise, the majority of soldiers serving in La Joux appear to have presented no serious objections to working and relaxing with African Canadians.

This examination of the No. 2 CB's service provides a more complete account of African Canadians' experience during the First World War than has been presented in previous sources. The findings are drawn from all phases of the unit's service, as the thesis provides a detailed examination of the enlistment barriers, the training received, and the overseas service of African Canadians in the No. 2 CB. This thesis therefore contributes to scholarship concerning the No. 2 CB and the service of African Canadians in the First World War.

Unfortunately, the findings are limited by a lack of concrete evidence regarding the attitudes of African Canadians toward their overseas service. Their written words and their memories of wartime service preserved by their descendants may unlock the extent to which

African Canadians were treated as equals while stationed in La Joux. Therefore, the collection of oral histories will require future pursuit, along with an examination of French police records in order to further explore the possibility of racism's involvement in the deaths of Charles Some and Sydney David. This evidence may reveal additional information regarding the relationships between African and European Canadians and will advance our understanding of racism's impact on the service of African Canadians in the No. 2 CB.

This thesis shows that the attitudes of European Canadians regarding the enlistment and wartime service of African Canadians were primarily racist due to the notion that African Canadians were inferior persons meant for different work than European Canadians. It also demonstrates that racism led some European Canadians to reject the prospect of serving in the same units as African Canadians. Even if some recruiting officers or commanding officers did not fully support these racist notions themselves, they invoked the racist sensibilities of other European Canadians – whether existing unit members or potential recruits – as grounds for rejecting the enlistment of African Canadians. Fears that the enlistment of African Canadians would deter European Canadians from serving trumped official regulations that prohibited the operation of racial discrimination in recruiting for the CEF.

For the most part, the members of the No. 2 CB were treated with respect while they were in Canada to train and recruit because wartime military service in any form was generally respected. That being said, the members of the No. 2 CB were not always free from the effects of racism, as shown by the experience in Truro regarding where they could sit in the theatre. However, the fact that this issue was disputed by the officers of the battalion demonstrates that the African Canadian members of the No. 2 CB had the support of some European Canadians.

Finally, this thesis shows that the experience of African Canadians in France was more positive than it had been in Canada. Instances of racism still occurred; such as Lieut. Col. Johnson's unwarranted verbal abuse of Reverend White in the latter's private quarters. However, European and African Canadians were able to interact more easily and amicably in France than in Canada during their work, training, and leisure activities. In the end, racism continued to place limits on African Canadians' opportunities for advancement in the CEF. Yet the extent of integration experienced in France reveals a growing tolerance among European Canadian soldiers for the military service of African Canadians. As they performed their logging and construction duties in the Jura Mountains, African Canadians of the No. 2 Construction Battalion also worked to erode the mountain of racism in the CEF. In doing so, they set the precedent for greater integration of African Canadians in Canada's armed forces later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

## **Appendix A: Rank Structure and Terminology**

All aspects of the Military are hierarchical in order to ensure the proper and efficient execution of tasks as well as the communication of information and instructions. The Canadian Expeditionary force was primarily organized by a rank system; however, information is also passed through a ‘chain of command’ that is organized by rank and also by position. For the purposes of this thesis, the ranks listed below are all those in the Army element.

### **Commissioned Officers**

This category refers to those who hold a Commission from the current Reigning Monarch which signifies that they are in a position of high authority and respect. The ranks listed below are in order from highest to lowest seniority with their respective abbreviations, and are grouped into sub-categories in accordance with seniority levels.

#### **Generals**

General (Gen.)  
Lieutenant General (Lieut. Gen.)  
Major General (Maj. Gen.)  
Brigadier General (BGen.)

#### **Senior Officers**

Colonel (Col.)  
Lieutenant Colonel (Lieut. Col.)  
Major (Maj.)

#### **Junior Officers**

Captain (Capt.)  
Lieutenant (Lieut.)

### **Non-commissioned Officers (NCOs) and “Other Ranks”**

This category refers to members of the CEF who hold senior ranks subordinate to that of officers, but superior to that of other members. These individuals are often in positions of authority that liaise between officers in order to help implement training and to deliver orders to the soldiers over whom they are in charge.

Warrant Officer (WO.)  
Master Gunner, 3<sup>rd</sup> Class (MG3)  
Sergeant-Major (If not a WO.)  
Quartermaster Sergeant (QMS.)  
Sergeant (Sgt.) – Including: Squadron, battery, troop, or company Sergeant Major  
Squadron, battery, troop, or company quartermaster sergeant  
Colour Sergeant  
Staff Sergeant

Corporal (Cpl.)  
 Bombardier/ Second Corporal  
 Trooper, Gunner, Driver, Sapper, Pioneer (engineers), or private.

As shown above, some ranks were given different names depending on the special responsibilities of the person who held said rank. Some ranks were given higher precedence than others depending on the responsibilities of that rank. The order of precedence was as follows:<sup>328</sup>

Warrant Officers:

- (i) Conductor
  - Master-Gunner, 1<sup>st</sup> class
  - Staff Sergeant-Major, 1<sup>st</sup> class
- (ii) Master-Gunner, 2<sup>nd</sup> class
- (iii) Garrison Sergeant-Major
- (iv) All other WOs except;
- (v) City or Rural Corps Sergeant-Major  
 City of Rural Corps bandmaster

Non-commissioned Officers: (i) Master-Gunner, 3<sup>rd</sup> class

- (ii) Regimental or Battalion Sergeant Major (If not a WO.)
  - Garrison, Regimental or Battalion QMS.
- (iii) Squadron or Company, etc., Sergeant Major
  - Squadron or Company, etc., QMS.
  - Colour-Sergeant
  - Staff-Sergeant
- (iv) Sergeant
- (v) Corporal
- (vi) Bombardier or 2<sup>nd</sup> Corporal
- (vii) Trooper, Gunner, Diver, Sapper Pioneer, Private,  
 Trumpeter, Drummer, or Bugler.

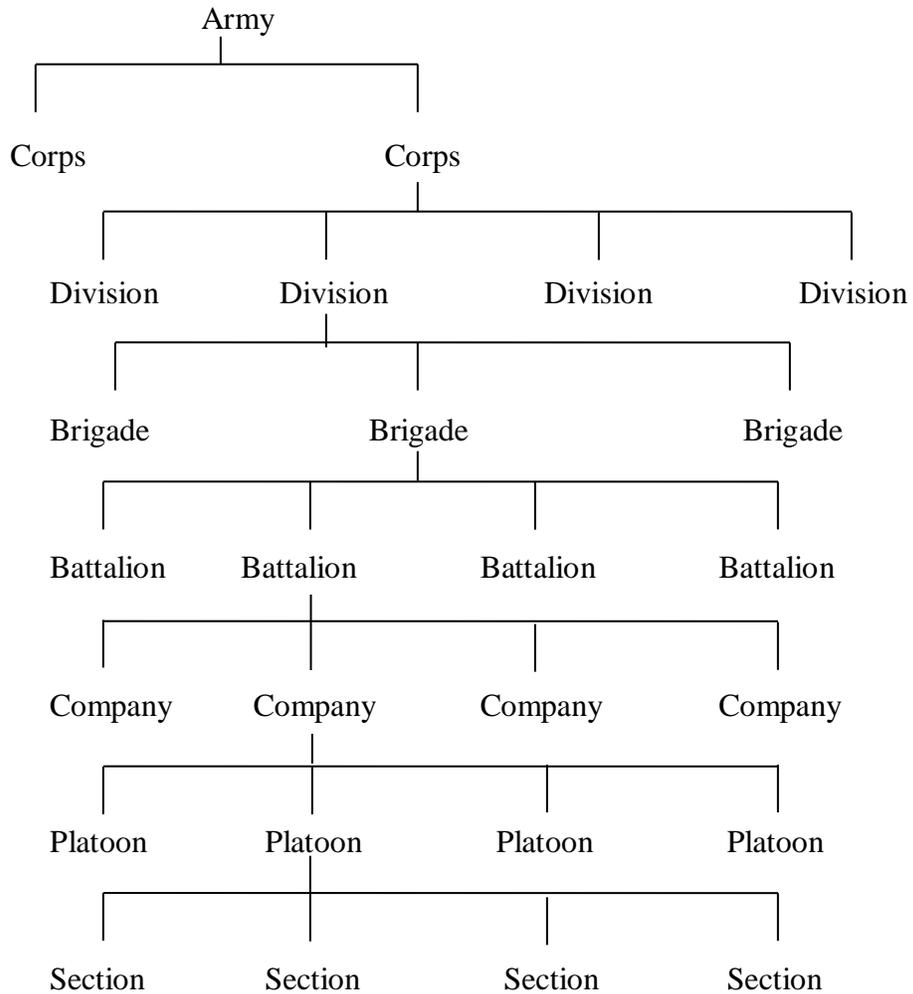
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<sup>328</sup> Minister of Militia and Defence, *King's Regulations and Orders for the Canadian Militia* (1917), paras 316-327.

**Appendix B: Organization of the Canadian Expeditionary Force**

The Canadian Forces had followed a structure that has been fairly consistent since 1900. The organization can change from unit to unit, as can the rank of the person holding a certain appointment. Therefore, the following can be used as a rough guide to demonstrate the “chain of command” that was and is used to efficiently pass information between all levels of the military.

The Chain of Command is organized as follows:



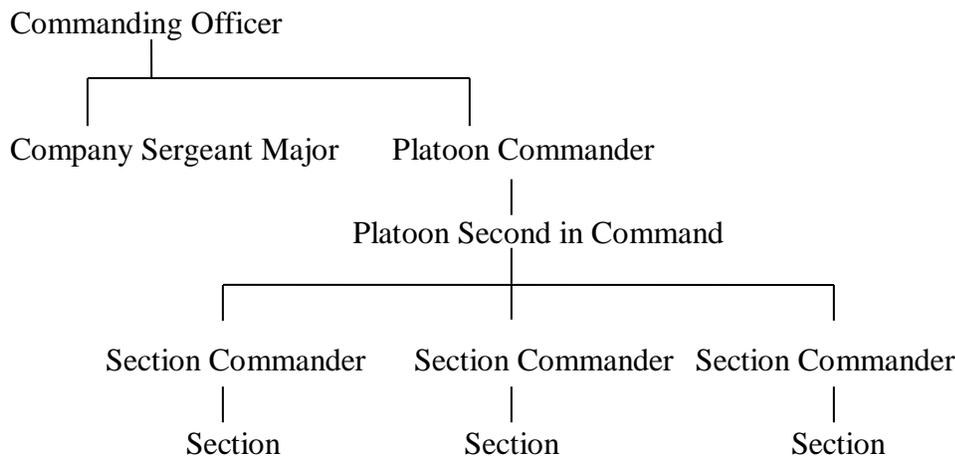
### Appendix C: Command Structure in the Canadian Expeditionary Force

Each formation and unit consists of an approximate number of personnel and is commanded by an officer or a non-commissioned officer of a specific rank.

<b>Formations and Units:</b>	<b>Commander:</b>	<b>Approximate Size:</b>
Army	General	200,000 to 800,000
Corps	Lieutenant General	80,000 to 100,000
Division	Major General	18,000 to 20,000
Brigade	Brigadier General	4,000 to 5,000
Battalion	Lieutenant Colonel	800 to 1,000
Company	Major/Captain	150 to 200
Platoon	Lieutenant	30 to 50
Section	Sergeant/ Corporal	8 to 12

#### Chain of Command

Each unit has a strict chain of command that must be followed so that information can be passed to each level quickly and effectively. This also means that questions are passed on to the next highest rank in the echelon so that high ranking members are not burdened by general knowledge questions that do not directly concern them. Below is the general chain of command for a company.



**Appendix D: Appointments**

There are a number of special appointments awarded to officers and non-commissioned officers that give them specific jobs within their unit. The following lists the preferred rank that the individual in each position should hold. When there was no member of sufficient rank available, the most qualified individual will be promoted to an “acting” rank.

<b>Appointment:</b>	<b>Rank:</b>	<b>Responsibilities:</b>
Commanding Officer Chaplain	Major/Captain Captain	-Directly in control of the unit. -Responsible for the implementation of religious services providing support to the members of their unit.
Regimental Sergeant Major	Warrant Officer	-Responsible for the drill, dress, and deportment of the NCOs and men in the Regiment.
Company Sergeant Major	Warrant Officer	-Responsible for the drill, dress, and deportment of the NCOs and men in his or her Company.
Platoon Commander	Lieutenant	-Responsible for the ensuring that all tasks assigned to the platoon are accomplished effectively and efficiently as well as for the training, deportment, moral, and discipline of his or her platoon.
Platoon Second in Command	Warrant Officer	-Reports directly to the Platoon commander and must ensure that all duties and tasks are completed effectively and efficiently.
Section Commander	Sergeant/ Corporal	-Reports directly to the Platoon Second in Command, and is responsible for the drill, dress, and deportment of the members of his section.
Quartermaster	Quartermaster Sergeant*	-Responsible for the maintenance and distribution of all uniforms and equipment required by the platoon

\*For more information on available appointments, see: 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).

\*In certain situations a Quartermaster might hold a different rank than QMS such as Sergeant or Corporal.

**Appendix E: John T. Richards to Sam Hughes, 21 November 1915**

Hon. Sir:

On behalf of St. John's Colored residents I desire to return thanks to you for remarks made in regards to Coloured Men enlisting in Canada's fighting lines. I received a letter from you along the same lines, dated October 6/15. I showed the letter to the Coloured Boys shortly after it reached me. Some of them tried to enlist but were turned down. I sent them back again with the threat that I would call for a showdown if they did not get a chance, after a while 20 were accepted, sworn in, etc., ordered to be ready to join the 104<sup>th</sup> Sussex, 15 Nov. They reported, went forward at noon with about 50 Whites.

On arrival they met the 2<sup>nd</sup> Commanding Officer who told them he knew nothing of their coming, and to get right away from there as he would not have them at all, in fact insulted them. He told them that a Coloured Battalion was being formed in Ontario and to go there. They arrived back in the city at 9:30, the same night Nov. 15/15. Reported to the recruiting office Mill St., they were told to come around in the morning. They went from there to other Recruiting Officers, but nothing has been done for them.

They have been told that they are not on the payroll, not entitled to sub-sistence [*sic*] money, and that in fact they are only Militia men. These men are all poor men, some with families. On an average each was making at least \$12.00 per week when they threw up their jobs to enlist and fight for their Empire and King.

Nothing has been done for these people by the Military here, it is a downright shame and an insult to the Race, the way our people have been used in regards to wanting to enlist, etc.

England and some of her allies are using many Colored troops, and the Colored people are talking of appealing to the embassys [*sic*] at Washington whose countries are using Colored Men to be allowed to enter the Foreign services.

I have counseled against this as I believe you will right the wrong.

I wish you would have this matter cleared up at your earliest moment of leisure and issue a general order that Colored, where fit, shall not be discriminated against by the Military Recruiting Officers in Canada.

I am quite against a Battalion myself as I am directly opposed to segregation.

Yours "for a square deal for each and for all"

John T. Richards

274 Prince William St. [*sic*]\*

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\* LAC, RG 24, Vol. 1206, file HQ 297-1-21, Richard to Hughes, 21 November 1915.

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