

# Race and Recruitment in World War I: Enlistment of Visible Minorities in the Canadian Expeditionary Force

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CONTEMPORARIES CALLED IT 'the war to end all wars' and 'the war to make the world safe for democracy.' During it, women throughout the North Atlantic world stepped forcefully into public affairs; subject populations in central Europe emerged into national self-determination; the proletariat triumphed beyond the Eastern front. But if World War I has thus been deemed 'progressive,' whatever its horrible cost, it was not intended as a liberal social instrument. For example, the relations between categories of people termed 'races' were regarded as immutable, and therefore expected to emerge from the war intact. Science and public opinion accepted that certain identifiable groups lacked the valour, discipline, and intelligence to fight a modern war. Since those same groups were also the subjects of the European overseas empires, prudence warned that a taste of killing white men might serve as appetizer should they be enlisted against a European enemy. The obvious conclusion was that this must be 'a white man's war.'

This decision was reached by virtually all the protagonists, but it was modified by an admission that since the subject races would clearly benefit from the victory of their own masters, they might be allowed to do their bit for the cause as appropriate to their own perceived abilities. Early in the war, when they constituted the empire's largest reserve of trained men, British Indian troops from the 'martial races' of the subcontinent were committed to France. But when the nature of the

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conflict became evident, and British forces available, it was discovered that Indian combat troops were unsuitable for Europe. Most were diverted to the Middle Eastern campaigns, where their targets were non-Europeans, though thousands of Indian labourers remained in Europe. Similarly New Zealand sent a Maori infantry unit to Gallipoli, and a Maori labour unit to Belgium and France. Even sensitive South Africa agreed, when labour shortages were most pressing in 1916, to enlist blacks for non-combat duties in Europe. China's contribution as an ally was to provide 50,000 'coolies' to labour behind the lines in France. Typically contrary, France itself began the war using its 'force noire' only at Gallipoli and as garrison troops in the French colonies, but the huge losses of men on the Western Front overcame the doubts of the high command and in 1916 African troops appeared in the European trenches. When the Americans entered the war in 1917, black volunteers were at first rejected. Though later recruited and conscripted in large numbers, fewer than 10 per cent ever fired a rifle in the direction of a German; the overwhelming majority were consigned to non-combat service battalions.<sup>1</sup>

Canada shared the Western ideology of 'race,' and Canadian wartime practice generally was in step with the allies: until manpower needs at the front surmounted the obvious objections, killing Germans was the privilege of white troops. Even when called upon, members of Canada's 'visible' minorities were accompanied overseas by a set of presumptions about their abilities which dictated the role they were to

<sup>1</sup> For example, see Jeffrey Greenhut, 'The Imperial Reserve: The Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914-15,' *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 11 (1983): 54-73, and 'Sahib and Sepoy: An Inquiry into the Relationship between the British Officers and Native Soldiers of the British Indian Army,' *Military Affairs* 48 (1984): 15-18; Keith L. Nelson, 'The Black Horror on the Rhine: Race as a Factor in Post-World War I Diplomacy,' *Journal of Modern History* 62 (1970): 606-8; Fred Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers* (Penticton, BC, 1985), 24, 74-5; B.P. Willan, 'The South African Native Labour Contingent, 1916-1918,' *Journal of African History* 19 (1978): 61-86; C.J. Balesi, *From Adversaries to Comrades in Arms. West Africa and the French Military, 1885-1918* (Waltham, Mass. 1979), 112-13, 120-1; C.M. Andrew and A.S. Kanya-Forstner, 'France, Africa, and the First World War,' *Journal of African History* 19 (1978): 11-23; A.E. Barbeau and F. Henri, *The Unknown Soldiers. Black American Troops in World War II* (Philadelphia 1974); J.D. Foner, *Blacks and the Military in American History. A New Perspective* (New York 1974), 109-32. Black combat troops remained an American embarrassment. The all-black 93rd Division, for example, was first offered to the British army, and upon refusal was eventually attached to the French army for its combat service. The Chinese 'coolies' were shipped across Canada, en route to and from France, in sealed railway carriages. There are voluminous files on this episode in the Directorate of History, Department of National Defence (DND), Ottawa, and in RG 24 at the National Archives of Canada (NA).

play and which limited the rewards they were to derive.<sup>2</sup> An examination of policy towards them and of their participation in the war offers a temporary opening in the curtain which typically covers Canadian racism, revealing some details from the set of stereotypes applied to certain minorities. The curtain also lifts upon the determination and self-confidence of Canadian minorities, and their struggle to be accorded equal responsibilities as well as equal opportunities. The struggle is further revealed, in many instances, as a community effort: communities encouraged, organized, and financed the enlistment of their young men, and those men volunteered in order to gain group recognition and to further the rights of whole communities.

In August 1914 a surge of patriotism, assisted by severe unemployment, prompted the enlistment of more than the 25,000 volunteers initially required for the first CEF contingent. For over a year, in fact, the supply of men exceeded demand: recruiting officers could afford to be selective, and one of the selection criteria was the 'race' of the applicant. Under the terms of the minister of militia's 'call to arms,' existing militia units enrolled volunteers directly, and the local militia officers had complete discretion over whom to accept.<sup>3</sup> There was one exception, however: within days of the first shots in Europe, the Militia

2 A small but growing literature is available on the subject of minority Canadian participation in the world wars. Pioneering chapters on black Nova Scotians in M. Stuart Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War* (Halifax 1920), 148–53, and Ontario blacks and Indians in Barbara M. Wilson, *Ontario and the First World War, 1914–1918: A Collection of Documents* (Toronto 1977), cviii–cxiv, 166–75, are being supplemented with more detailed studies. Gaffen's *Forgotten Soldiers* is a colourful description of native Indian soldiers in both world wars, a welcome addition to James Dempsey's brief account, 'The Indians and World War I,' *Alberta History* 31 (1983): 1–8, and a useful corrective to Duncan Campbell Scott, 'The Canadian Indian and the Great World War,' in *Canada and the Great World War* (Toronto 1919), III, 285–328. Calvin W. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion. No. 2 Construction 1916–1920* (Halifax 1986), is anecdotal and illustrative, with portraits and quotations from several of the black veterans themselves. The first scholarly treatment of the No 2 is Major John G. Armstrong's 'The Unwelcome Sacrifice: A Black Unit in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1917–1919,' unpublished paper presented at RMC Military History Symposium, March 1986. Roy Ito, *We Went to War: The Story of the Japanese Canadians who Served During the First and Second World Wars* (Stittsville, Ont. 1984), is a valuable combination of scholarship and reminiscence, though most of the attention is paid to the second war. Further detail on World War II can be found in Patricia Roy, 'The Soldiers Canada Didn't Want: Her Chinese and Japanese Citizens,' *Canadian Historical Review* (CHR) 59 (1978): 341–58.

3 Robert Craig Brown and Donald Loveridge, 'Unrequited Faith: Recruiting the CEF 1914–1918,' *Revue internationale d'histoire militaire* 51 (1982): 56; Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada* (Edmonton 1985), 130, G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914–1919* (Ottawa 1962), 18, 19, 212, 213

Council forbade the enlistment of native Indians on the reasoning that 'Germans might refuse to extend to them the privileges of civilized warfare.' This directive was not, however, made public, and some recruiting officers remained ignorant of it. Indian youth, like their white counterparts, were anxious to participate and presented themselves to their local units. Many were enlisted only to be turned away when their Indian status was discovered. Some were able to slip through undetected, with or without the collusion of their commanders, so that the early contingents did contain some native soldiers despite the official policy.<sup>4</sup>

Members of other 'visible' groups were less successful. Individual unit discretion appears to have kept East Indians entirely outside the Canadian forces, and in British Columbia, where most of them lived, Japanese were rejected completely. The fate of Chinese Canadians is less clear, but if any were accepted in the early years of the war their numbers must have been extremely small.<sup>5</sup> In a memo of November 1914 responding to a query on 'coloured enlistment,' the militia would only refer to the established policy that personnel selection was a matter for each commanding officer, though the chief of general staff offered the prevailing opinion: 'Would Canadian Negroes make good

4 NA, RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, vol. 1, telegram, 8 Aug. 1914, Scott to Hughes, 16 June 1915, and reply, 23 June, Nethercott to Hughes, 11 Oct. 1915, Armstrong to Hughes, 10 Oct. 1915, and replies, 18 Oct., Brown to Hodgins, 9 Oct. 1915, and reply, 22 Oct. Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers*, 20, points out correctly that since 'race' was not recorded on recruitment documents, it is not possible to give precise numbers on Indian volunteers. The same caveat should apply to the other minority groups discussed here as well.

5 After the war, the minister of militia and defence, Hugh Guthrie, told the House of Commons that the CEF had enlisted 'something like twelve' Chinese and no East Indians; *Debates*, 29 April 1920, 1812. Several sources refer to larger numbers of Chinese veterans in postwar Canada, for example, Jin Tan and Patricia Roy, *The Chinese in Canada* (Ottawa 1985), 15, Edgar Wickberg et al., *From China to Canada. A History of the Chinese Community in Canada* (Toronto 1982), 200, and Carol F. Lee, 'The Road to Enfranchisement. Chinese and Japanese in British Columbia,' *IBC Studies* 30 (1976): 57-8. A search of the records in the National Archives of Canada and the Directorate of History, Department of National Defence, failed to identify these men. Some could have served as British 'coolies' rather than as Canadian soldiers. Guthrie's comment does suggest that a small number were enlisted as regular soldiers, an impression confirmed by Professors Graham Johnson and Edgar Wickberg who report in a personal communication, 31 Oct. 1987, having seen photographs of Chinese in the uniform of the CEF. A separate Sikh regiment had been suggested as early as 1911, apparently with favourable comment from Sam Hughes, but no action was ever taken. Norman Buchignani, personal communication, 14 Oct. 1987. On British Columbia's rejection of all Japanese volunteers see NA, RG 24, vol. 4740, file 448-14-262, vol. 1, Cruikshank, circular letter, 26 April 1916.

fighting men? I do not think so.<sup>6</sup> One Cape Breton black volunteer, who decided that 'Its a job that I'll like killing germans,' was told he was ineligible to join any white unit; a group of about fifty blacks from Sydney, who went to enlist together, were advised: 'This is not for you fellows, this is a white man's war.'<sup>7</sup>

The Canadian volunteers rejected by this policy were not content to accept either their exclusion or the reasoning that went with it. They sought enlistment in large numbers, and insisted on knowing why their offer was not accepted. As early as November 1914 the black community of North Buxton was complaining to Ottawa and seeking corrective action; from Hamilton blacks came the charge that it was 'beneath the dignity of the Government to make racial or color distinction in an issue of this kind'; blacks in Saint John condemned recruitment discrimination and added for the record an account of the discrimination they met daily in their home city.<sup>8</sup> Saint John MP William Pugsley, at the request of Ontario and New Brunswick black representatives, raised the issue in the House of Commons. The government insisted that 'there is no Dominion legislation authorizing discrimination against coloured people,' and the militia was able to state that 'no regulations or restrictions' prevented 'enrollment of coloured men who possess the necessary qualifications,' but no remedies were offered or comment made upon clear evidence of exclusion for 'racial' reasons.<sup>9</sup> And yet the urge to enlist persisted. A group of Cape Croker Indians applied to four different recruitment centres and were rejected from each one; Japanese in British Columbia made repeated attempts to enlist; blacks in Nova Scotia travelled from one unit to another hoping to find acceptance.<sup>10</sup> To some extent this persistence must have been prompted by young men's sense of adventure and patriotism, but they were moved as well by a consciousness that a contribution to the war effort could help to overcome the disadvantages faced by their communities. The Japanese believed that

6 NA, RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, memo, 13 Nov. 1914, Gwatin to Christie, 30 Sept. 1915

7 NA, RG 24, vol. 4562, file 133-17-1, Bramah to Rutherford, 4 Oct. 1915, and reply, 6 Oct.; Ruck, *Black Battalion*, 58, quoting interview with Robert Shepard. Despite these obstacles, some Nova Scotia blacks are reported to have been in the first contingent which left Canada in October 1914. *Ibid.*, 11

8 NA, RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, Alexander to Hughes, 13 Nov. 1914, Morton to Hughes, 7 Sept. 1915, Richards to Duke of Connaught, 4 Oct. 1915, Hamilton to Duke of Connaught, 29 Dec. 1915

9 House of Commons, *Debates*, 24 March 1916, 2114-15; NA, RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, Edwards to Stanton, 31 Jan. 1916, Hodgins to Stewart, 16 Oct. 1915

10 NA, RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, Duncan to Scott, 19 Nov. 1915; RG 24, vol. 1860, file 54; RG 24, vol. 4740, file 448-14-262, vol. 1; RG 24, vol. 4562, file 133-17-1, Bramah to Rutherford, 4 Oct. 1915

war participation would earn them the franchise, a hope that was shared by some Indian groups. Blacks maintained that a war for justice must have an impact on 'the progress of our race' in Canada.<sup>11</sup>

White intransigence was not overcome by these efforts, but a compromise seemed possible: if whites and non-whites could not stand shoulder to shoulder in defence of the empire, perhaps they could stand separately. 'Coloured candidates are becoming insistent,' a Vancouver recruiter complained, and his superior advised that 'as white men will not serve in the same ranks with negroes or coloured persons,' the only solution was to create a separate unit.<sup>12</sup> Because of the numerous black applications in Nova Scotia, several similar suggestions were made, and one commanding officer, though rejecting individual blacks, agreed to accept an entire platoon if one were formed.<sup>13</sup> On the 'reliable information' that 10,000 blacks inhabited Edmonton region from whom 1000 could easily be recruited, Alberta district commander Cruikshank, with the support of the lieutenant governor, offered to create a black battalion since a racially integrated Alberta regiment 'would not be advisable.' On the same principle General Cruikshank proposed that a 'Half-Breed Battalion' be recruited in Alberta.<sup>14</sup> More insistent and widespread were suggestions to raise distinct regiments of native Indians. Every province from Ontario west produced proposals to enlist natives in segregated units where, under careful supervision of white officers, their 'natural' talents as fighters and marksmen could best be utilized.<sup>15</sup> Some of these suggestions were enthusiastically endorsed by the affected groups, believing that as a recognizable unit they could gain more attention for their communal cause,<sup>16</sup> but none were more energetic than the Japanese. In August

- 11 Ito, *We Went to War* 8ff; NA, RG 10, vol. 2640, file 129690-3, Jacobs, circular letter, 17 Aug. 1917; RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, *Canadian Observer*, 8 Jan. 1916
- 12 NA, RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, Henshaw to Ogilvie, 7 Dec. 1915, Ogilvie to Hodgins, 9 Dec 1915
- 13 *Ibid.*, Tupper to Hughes, 11 Nov. 1915, Allen to Rutherford, 14 Dec; NA, RG 24, vol. 4562, file 133-17-1, Langford to Rutherford, 23 Sept. 1915, Borden to Rutherford, 23 March 1916
- 14 NA, RG 24, vol. 4739, file 448-14-259, McLeod to Cruikshank, 25 Nov. 1915 and 20 Jan. 1916, Munton to Cruikshank, received 11 March 1916, Cruikshank to Hodgins, 11 March 1916, Brett to Cruikshank, 13 March 1916, Martin to Cruikshank, 17 March 1916; RG 24, vol. 4739, file 448-14-256, 'Half Breed Battalion,' 1915
- 15 NA, RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, vol. 1, inspector of Indian agencies, Vancouver, to Fiset, 23 Dec 1915, Jackson to Ruttan, 20 Dec. 1915, McKay to Hodgins, 3 Jan. 1916, Donaldson to Hughes, 26 Nov 1915, Read to Militia Council, 3 Feb 1916, Rendle to Department of Indian Affairs, 17 Feb. 1916, Henderson to Hughes, 18 March 1916
- 16 For example, see *Canadian Observer*, 8 and 15 Jan. 1916; NA, RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, vol. 1, Chief Thunderwater, on behalf of the Council of the Tribes, to Hodgins, 29 May 1916; RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, White to McCurdy, nd; RG 24, vol. 4662, file 99-256, resolution, BC Indian Peoples, 1 Feb. 1916

1915 the Canadian Japanese Association of Vancouver offered to raise an exclusively Japanese unit. Receiving a polite reply, the association began to enlist volunteers, eventually 227 of them, who were supported at Japanese community expense and practised their drill under British veteran and militia captain R.S. Colquhoun. With one company thus trained, the association made a formal offer to the government in March 1916 of a full battalion.<sup>17</sup>

The Japanese offer, like every other proposal to create a racially defined battalion, was rejected by Militia Headquarters. Officials doubted that enough volunteers from any group could be found to create and maintain a unit as large as a battalion, and furthermore its members could not be used as reinforcements in other battalions, as was frequently required in trench warfare, if integration should prove difficult. Privately, the combat abilities of blacks and Indians were considered questionable, and although Japanese were regarded as 'desirable soldiers,' their enlistment was feared as a step towards enfranchisement. Individual 'half-breeds,' blacks, and Japanese were theoretically admissible into all militia units. 'There is no colour line,' insisted the adjutant general, but commanding officers were free to accept or reject any volunteer for any reason.<sup>18</sup> One incident more than any other provoked this statement. In November 1915 twenty black volunteers from Saint John were sent to Camp Sussex, where they were told to go instead to Ontario where a 'Coloured Corps' was being formed. Protesting that this action was 'shameful and insulting to the Race,' the Saint John blacks pressed their case with the governor general and militia minister Sir Sam Hughes. Apparently outraged, Hughes ordered a full investigation into the incident and promised that there would be no racial barriers and no segregated units in his army. When the Sussex commanding officer complained that it was not 'fair' to expect white troops 'to mingle with negroes,' a sentiment supported by all the commanding officers in the Maritime district,

<sup>17</sup> NA, RG 24, vol. 1860, file 54, 'Recruiting - Special Units and Aliens.' numerous letters and telegrams, Jan.-April 1916; Roy Ito, personal communication, 18 Nov. 1987. An overseas battalion in the CEF consisted of approximately 1000 men grouped in four companies each with two platoons.

<sup>18</sup> NA, RG 24, vol. 1860, file 54, Gwatkin to Yamazaki, 21 April 1916, RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, Gwatkin to Christie, 30 Sept. 1915, Hodgins to Tupper, 11 Nov. 1915, Hodgins to Armstrong, 19 Nov. 1915, Gwatkin to Hodgins, 22 Dec. 1915, Hodgins to Ogilvie, 23 Dec. 1915, Hodgins to Gwatkin, 21 March 1916, MacInnes to Hodgins, 25 March 1916; RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, vol. 1, Fiset to inspector of Indian agencies, Vancouver, 29 Dec. 1915, Hodgins to McKay, 3 Jan. 1916, Gwatkin, memo, 12 Feb. 1916, Ogilvie to Hodgins, 23 March 1916; RG 24, vol. 4599, file 133-17-1, Hodgins to Rutherford, 29 Oct. 1915; RG 24, vol. 4739, file 448-14-256, Hodgins to Campbell, 15 July 1915, Hodgins to Cruikshank, 20 Nov. 1915; file 448-14-259, Hodgins to Cruikshank, 9 Dec. 1915 and 23 March 1916, Cruikshank to Martin, 27 March 1916; Ito, *We Went to War*, 25

militia officials quickly explained that local commanders retained their discretionary powers: 'it is not thought desirable, either in the interests of such men themselves or of the Canadian Forces, that Commanding Officers should be forced to take them.'<sup>19</sup> Whatever Hughes's intentions, the statement reinforced the status quo. It remained a white man's war.

At the outbreak of the war a surplus of volunteers had afforded considerable latitude in selecting recruits. By the spring of 1915, when the second Canadian Contingent sailed, trench warfare had eroded all hopes for a short and glorious war, and casualty rates were horrifying. Domestic production competed with the armed services for manpower, just as more and more men were required for the trenches. Selectivity became less rigid, as height, medical, and marital requirements were relaxed, and the recruitment method itself came under scrutiny. In the fall of 1915 a new policy was substituted, enabling any patriotic person or group to form a battalion. This 'patriotic phase,' distinguished from the earlier 'militia phase,' led to the proliferation of new units and to rivalries among them for the available manpower. Since the fighting regiments were not being reinforced directly by new recruitment, the 'patriotic' policy also meant that the units thus raised almost inevitably had to be broken up on arrival in Europe to be used to fill the gaps caused by casualties in the existing regiments. The entire situation was compounded by Prime Minister Borden's announcement that, as of 1 January 1916, Canada would pledge 500,000 troops to Europe. With prevailing casualty rates, it would require 300,000 new recruits per year to maintain this figure in the field.<sup>20</sup>

All these developments – the scramble for men, the raising of special regiments, and their use as reinforcements for fighting units overseas – had implications for recruiting 'visible' minorities. First to fall was the restriction against Indian enlistment. Certain regiments had been discreetly recruiting Indians since 1914, but when Ontario's new 114th Battalion was being formed in November 1915 its commander hoped

19 RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, Richards to governor general, 20 Nov. 1915, *Saint John Standard*, 20 Nov. 1915, Hughes to Richards, 25 Nov. 1915, Fowler to GOC Halifax, 25 Nov. 1915, Hodgins to GOC, Halifax, 29 Nov. 1915, reply, 10 Dec. Hodgins to GOC Halifax, 22 Dec. 1915, Gwatkin to Hodgins, 22 Dec. 1915, MacInnes to Hodgins, 25 March 1916. Interestingly, at least one commanding officer interpreted the minister's statement as a direct instruction. Lt Col W.H. Allen of the 106th Battalion, Halifax, accepted sixteen black Nova Scotians into his unit, though he reported that it discouraged white volunteers, since 'word has come from Ottawa that there is to be no distinction of colour for enlistments' Allen to GOC Halifax, 14 Dec. 1915

20 Brown and Loveridge, 'Unrequited Faith,' 59, 60, Morton, *History*, 135-41, 147, Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 212-15, 223; J.I. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto 1977), 22-59



to enlist four companies of Brantford and region Indians. His superior, the Toronto district commander, lent support to the plan on the understanding that all Indians recruited in his division would be transferred to the 114th. It was apparently this limited plan, consistent with the 'special units' policy, that was at first approved by the militia minister; Indians already in other regiments were invited to transfer to the 114th, and the new battalion was permitted to recruit Indians outside its own geographical territory.<sup>21</sup> The memo that went out to commanding officers, however, stated that Indian enlistment was henceforth authorized 'in the various Units for Overseas Service,' and this impression was reinforced in individual letters to commanders permitting Indian enlistment. The confusion amongst recruiting officers was shared by the chief of general staff, Willoughby Gwatkin, who confessed that he did not know whether open enlistment was now the rule or whether Indian battalions were to be formed.<sup>22</sup> Meanwhile, the 114th was advertising itself, even in the public press, as *the* Indian unit, and at least a dozen regiments transferred their Indian recruits to the 114th.<sup>23</sup> In the event, pressure from other battalion commanders convinced divisional headquarters to cease transferring Indians to the 114th, which was therefore unable to fill more than two Indian companies. The result was a concentration of Indians in the 114th, but others were scattered individually throughout the battalions willing to accept them.<sup>24</sup>

It was perhaps this reigning confusion over special units, coupled with the pressure to find a half million men, that led to one of the war's most discouraging episodes for black Canadians. In November 1915 J.R.B. Whitney, editor of a Toronto black newspaper, the *Canadian Observer*, wrote to Hughes asking if the minister would accept a platoon of 150 black men provided it would be maintained at that strength throughout the war. Hughes warmly replied that 'these people can form a platoon in any Battalion, now. There is nothing in the world to stop them.'<sup>25</sup> On this basis Whitney began to advertise through the

21 NA, RG 14, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, Logie to Hodgins, 23 Nov. 1915, and reply, 26 Nov., Logie to Hodgins, 27 Nov. 1915, and replies, 6 Dec. and 10 Dec.; RG 24, vol. 4383, file 34-7-109, transfer order, 11 Dec. 1915

22 NA, RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, Hughes to Donaldson, 4 Dec. 1915, Hodgins to McLean, 9 Dec. 1915, Hodgins, circular letter, 10 Dec. 1915, Gwatkin to Hodgins, 6 Jan. and 4 May 1916

23 NA, RG 24, vol. 4383, file 34-7-109, 'Enlistment of Indians in CEF,' numerous reports, OC 44th Regiment to Logie, 17 Jan. 1916, Scott to Logie, 19 Jan. 1916, and reply, 21 Jan., OC 114th Battalion to Logie, 27 Jan. 1916

24 *Ibid.*, Logie to OC 114th Battalion, 22 Jan. and 28 Jan. 1916, Hodgins to Logie, 31 Jan. 1916, Hodgins to Baxter, 8 Feb. 1916

25 NA, RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, Whitney to Hughes, 24 Nov. 1915, and reply, 3 Dec. A platoon would contain about 125 men in a standard CEF overseas battalion

*Observer*, and enlisted volunteers in the projected platoon. Early in January 1916 he was able to report to Hughes that he had enlisted a number of Toronto recruits, adding a request to second a black enlisted man for a recruitment tour of southwestern Ontario. Hughes passed this on to the adjutant general, W.E. Hodgins, for action, and this latter official was forced to return to Whitney for an explanation of what was meant by all this. In the process Hodgins discovered that no arrangement had been made with any battalion commander to receive a black platoon. In fact, advised Toronto's General Logie, it was doubtful if any commander would accept 'a coloured platoon' into 'a white man's Battalion.' Hodgins therefore decided that permission to recruit a black unit could not be granted, and he asked Toronto division so to inform Mr Whitney. On 15 March Whitney received a blunt letter from the Toronto recruiting officer stating that as no commanding officer was willing to enlist them, the plan must be abandoned.<sup>26</sup>

A very hurt Whitney asked for a reconsideration; he had already gathered forty volunteers and could not now tell them to disband. An embarrassed Hodgins begged Logie to find some unit prepared to admit Whitney's platoon, and Logie diligently conducted a canvas of his district. The responses from battalion commanders dramatically revealed the prevailing feelings among the military leadership in 1916. Most rejected the idea without explanation, stating simply their unwillingness to accept blacks. Several acknowledged that white recruitment would be discouraged, and dissatisfaction aroused amongst men already enlisted. Some confirmed that they had already rejected numbers of black volunteers. The most ambiguous answer came from the 48th Highlanders, whose adjutant stated that 'we have, being a kilted regiment, always drawn the line at taking coloured men.' No one apologized or offered any positive suggestions. No one seemed to think his prejudices would not be understood, and shared, in headquarters. Logie replied to Hodgins that the situation was obviously hopeless. Whitney's personal appeal to Hughes provoked sympathy and some furious cables, but the result could not be changed. Even with a half million soldiers to find, Ontario's military establishment could not 'stoop' to the recruitment of blacks.<sup>27</sup>

26 *Ibid.*, *Canadian Observer*, 8 and 15 Jan. 1916, Whitney to Hughes, 19 Jan. 1916, and reply, 26 Jan., Hodgins to Logie, 3 Feb., 8 and 13 March 1916, Logie to Hodgins, 4 and 10 March 1916, Trump to Whitney, 15 March 1916

27 *Ibid.*, Whitney to Logie, 24 March 1916, to Kemp, 29 March 1916, Hodgins to Logie, 31 March 1916, Logie to commanding officers, 3 April 1916, Logie to Hodgins, 10 April 1916, Whitney to Hughes, 18 April 1916, Hughes to Logie, 3 May 1916, and reply, 4 May. Battalion replies to Logie's appeal of 3 April 1916 are found in NA, RG 24, vol. 4387, file 34-7-141, as are copies of much of the correspondence cited from file 297-1-21.

But Ottawa desks had been shaken, and General Gwatkin was ordered to write a report on 'the enlistment of negroes in the Canadian Expeditionary Force.' Besides Whitney's experience, overtures from black Nova Scotians had become more difficult to ignore, since they were supported by several influential Conservative politicians.<sup>28</sup> Gwatkin's memorandum was scarcely complimentary, but it did offer an opportunity for blacks to join the war. 'Nothing is to be gained by blinking facts,' Gwatkin began:

The civilized negro is vain and imitative; in Canada he is not being impelled to enlist by a high sense of duty; in the trenches he is not likely to make a good fighter; and the average white man will not associate with him on terms of equality. Not a single commanding officer in Military District No. 2 is willing to accept a coloured platoon as part of his battalion; and it would be humiliating to the coloured men themselves to serve in a battalion where they were not wanted.

In France, in the firing line, there would be no place for a black battalion, CEF. It would be eyed askance; it would crowd out a white battalion; it would be difficult to reinforce.

Nor could it be left in England and used as a draft-giving depot; for there would be trouble if negroes were sent to the front for the purpose of reinforcing white battalions; and, if they are good men at all, they would resent being kept in Canada for the purpose of finding guards &c.

Gwatkin concluded with the recommendation that blacks could be enlisted, as at present, in any battalion willing to accept them, and that a labour battalion could additionally be formed exclusively for them.<sup>29</sup> On 19 April 1916, with Prime Minister Borden presiding, the Militia Council decided to form a black labour battalion headquartered in Nova Scotia, provided the British command would agree. This approval was received three weeks later.<sup>30</sup>

'It is a somewhat peculiar command,' admitted Adjutant General Hodgins, after some difficulty was experienced in finding a qualified officer willing to head a black battalion. But Prime Minister Borden, himself a Halifax politician, took a personal interest in the new project and suggested the name of a potential commander, Daniel H. Sutherland. On 5 July, the day after Sutherland's acceptance, the Nova

<sup>28</sup> NA, RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, Christie to Gwatkin, 29 Sept. 1915, Allen to GOC Halifax, 14 Dec. 1915; RG 24, vol. 4562, file 133-17-1, Langford to Rutherford, 23 Sept. 1915; RG 9, III, vol. 81, file 10-99-40, McCurdy to Harrington, 16 July 1919

<sup>29</sup> NA, RG 24, vol. 1206, file 297-1-21, 'Memorandum on the enlistment of negroes in Canadian Expeditionary Force,' 13 April 1916

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., Militia Council minutes, 19 April 1916, cable to War Office, 19 April 1916, and reply, 11 May

Scotia No 2 Construction Battalion (Coloured) was formally announced. Officered by whites, the unit was authorized to recruit blacks from all across Canada.<sup>31</sup> The black community in Nova Scotia heartily welcomed the formation of the No 2. 'Considerable joy and happiness' erupted, particularly among the young men, for the No 2 seemed to recognize that 'they were men the same as everybody else.' The African Baptist Association, at its 1916 annual meeting, expressed the view that through the No 2 'the African race was making history,' and pledged to do all in its power to encourage enlistment.<sup>32</sup> Although the all-white No 1 Construction Battalion complained bitterly about its name, fearing association with 'work which might be done by the negro race,'<sup>33</sup> no doubts seem to have been uttered by black representatives at the nature of the work or the fact of segregation.

By the summer of 1916 Canadian blacks, Indians, and Japanese were all being actively recruited into the services. Following the rejection of the Canadian Japanese Association's offer to form a full battalion, militia authorities encouraged other battalions to accept the volunteers who had already received basic training through their private efforts. The association itself promoted this policy, appealing to Alberta's General Cruikshank to permit Japanese to enlist in his district, since BC commanders remained adamantly opposed. On his return trip to Vancouver from Ottawa, where he had gone to present the case for a Japanese battalion, association president Yasuchi Yamazaki met with Cruikshank in Calgary, and the general immediately wrote to battalion commanders with the offer of up to 200 Japanese recruits.<sup>34</sup> The response was overwhelmingly positive. The 192nd Battalion offered to receive all 200, and the 191st asked for 250, but this was vetoed from headquarters as 'there is no objection to the enlistment of odd men, but large numbers are not to be enlisted.' Advertisements from Alberta recruiters appeared in Vancouver's Japanese language press, and temporary recruiting offices were established in British Columbia, though this latter practice was contrary to regulations. Battalions from other provinces, too, sought Japanese recruits. Eventually 185 served overseas in eleven different battalions, mainly in the 10th, 50th, and 52nd infantry battalions. It

31 Ibid., Militia Council, memo, 2 June 1916; RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, Hodgins to Gwatkin, 5 June 1916, and reply, 11 June, Hodgins to Sutherland, 13 June 1916, and reply, 4 July

32 Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 27, quoting interview with Mrs Mabel Saunders, African Baptist Association, annual meeting, minutes, 1916

33 NA, RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, Ripley to Hodgins, 7 and 15 July 1916, Hodgins to Ripley, 10, 19, and 21 July 1916

34 NA, RG 24, vol. 1860, file 54, 'Recruiting - Special Units and Aliens'; RG 24, vol. 4740, file 448-14-262, Ityama to Cruikshank, 24 April 1916, Cruikshank, circular letter, 26 April 1916

was undoubtedly at this time that individual Chinese were being enlisted by under-strength battalions.<sup>35</sup>

The rivalry to recruit Japanese was being reflected in the much larger campaign to enlist native Indians. The 114th began with the advantage of being identified as an Indian battalion, and confusion continued for several months over whether all Indians, recruited before or since December 1915, were to be transferred to it. Some Indians who had enlisted in other regiments applied to transfer to the 114th; others asked not to be transferred because they preferred not to serve with 'Mohawks.'<sup>36</sup> The Department of Indian Affairs lent its official support to the 114th recruitment drive, and seconded Charles Cooke to the regiment with the honorary rank of lieutenant. Described as 'the only male Indian employed in the Service at Ottawa,' Cooke toured the Ontario reserves on behalf of the 114th, sometimes in the company of an Indian commissioned officer, stressing the pride and the opportunity derived from serving in an identifiably Indian unit. Although by this time it had been determined that only two companies, that is half the battalion, would in fact consist of Indians, the 114th stressed its Indian connection. The regimental badge contained two crossed tomahawks, and its band, composed mostly of Brantford reserve Iroquois, gave concerts which included Indian war dances.<sup>37</sup>

Other battalions were not slow to enter the recruitment race. Hodgins's attempt to settle the 114th's jurisdiction, by giving it authority to recruit Indians beyond its regimental territory but not *exclusive* authority, seems merely to have stimulated rivalries. Other commanding officers sought to entice Charles Cooke into their service; one battalion allegedly was offering a \$5 recruitment bonus to Indians plus a free trip to Europe in case the war ended before they went

35 Ibid., oc 192nd Battalion to Cruikshank, 28 April, 19 May, 4 Aug. 1916, Cruikshank to oc 192nd Battalion, 16 and 20 May and 1 Aug. 1916, Cruikshank to Hodgins, cable, 4 May 1916, and reply, same date, Cruikshank to Yamazaki, 5 May 1916, Ito, *We Went to War*, 34, 70 and App. III, and personal communication, 18 Nov. 1987. RG 24, vol. 1860, file 54, gives the number of Japanese Canadians enlisted as 166, while the militia minister reported 194 Japanese enlistments; House of Commons, *Debates*, 29 April 1920, 1812. On Chinese recruits see note 5, above.

36 NA, RG 14, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, vol. 1, Chief Thunderwater to Hodgins, 29 May and 20 June 1916; RG 24, vol. 4383, file 34-7-109, Mewburn to oc 119th Battalion, 26 April 1916, oc 227th Battalion to Mewburn, 4 May 1916. Although the adjutant general directed in February that Indian transfers should thereafter be carried out only when 'special circumstances exist, as in the case of brothers,' Colonel Mewburn was still writing in April demanding the transfer of Indians to the 114th. See Hodgins to Baxter, 8 Feb. 1916.

37 NA, RG 24, vol. 1221, file 597-1-7, vol. 1, Cooke to minister of militia, 15 Dec. 1916; RG 24, vol. 4383, file 34-7-109, Hodgins to Logie, 31 Jan. 1916, Baxter to Hodgins, 2 Feb. 1916, Scott to Logie, 22 Jan. 1916, Logie to Hodgins, 22 Feb. 1916, Thompson to Mewburn, 13 April 1916; Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers*, 23

overseas; others were reportedly recruiting young boys from the residential schools. In July 1916, when Colonel Mewburn called for a report on Indians enlisted in Military District 2, headquartered in Toronto, the 114th had 348, including five officers, and 211 others were arrayed across fifteen different units. This did not include the 107th battalion, raised in Winnipeg and commanded by G.L. Campbell, a senior Indian Affairs official. At first intended as an all-Indian battalion, the 107th shared the experience of Ontario's 114th and eventually enlisted approximately one-half its membership among Indians.<sup>38</sup>

Although these numbers were all recruited, at least ostensibly, into infantry battalions, there were parallel efforts to enlist Indians in non-combatant labour and construction units, particularly for forestry. Duncan Campbell Scott, the senior Indian Affairs official, urged this movement through Indian agents across Canada. When white officers and recruits in forestry units, primarily on the west coast, objected to working amongst 'Indians and Half-breeds,' authority was granted to establish separate native companies and platoons.<sup>39</sup> One of the construction units to recruit amongst Indians was none other than the No 2, from Nova Scotia. Five Indians joined the No 2 at Windsor, Ontario, allegedly on the promise of becoming non-commissioned officers. Once enlisted they claimed to be disgusted by the fighting, gambling, and drinking going on in the No 2 camp, and they called for a transfer. When Colonel Sutherland's response was slow, Chief Thunderwater of the Great Council of the Tribes took up the Indians' case, claiming 'a natural dislike of association with negroes on the part of Indians.' The adjutant general in Ottawa and General Logie in Toronto had to become involved before this entanglement could be settled and the Indians moved to the 256th Railway Construction Battalion, which had a large Indian component. Chief Thunderwater admonished the adjutant general 'that you so arrange that Indians and negroes are kept from the same Battalions.'<sup>40</sup>

38 NA, RG 24, vol. 4383, file 34-7-109, Hodgins to Logie, 22 Feb. 1916, Thompson to oic Divisional Recruiting, 1 March 1916, Thompson to Mewburn, 20 April 1916, Mewburn to oc 227th Battalion, 10 April 1916, and reply, 26 April, various regimental reports to Mewburn, July 1916; Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers*, 23

39 NA, RG 10, vol. 6766, file 452-13, Scott to Renison, 15 Jan. 1917, cables to Indian agents, 15 Jan. 1917, Militia Department to Tyson, 5 April 1917; RG 24, vol. 1221, file 597-1-7, vol. 1, Scott to Fiset, 15 Jan. 1917, vol. 2, Ogilvie to Hodgins, cable, 22 March 1917; RG 24, vol. 4662, file 99-256, Ogilvie to Hodgins, 23 March 1916, Reynolds to Ogilvie, 20 March 1917, Tyson to Scott, 21 March 1917, Ogilvie to Hodgins, 22 March 1917

40 NA, RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, vol. 1, Chief Thunderwater to Hodgins, 30 Dec. 1916, 2 Jan. 1917, Hodgins to Logie, 8 Jan. 1917, vol. 2, John to Thunderwater, 19 Feb. 1917, Mrs Maracle to Thunderwater, 17 Feb. 1917, Thunderwater to

The reason the No 2 was in Windsor, Ontario, was that Sutherland had been given authority to recruit nationally, though this clearly meant that he could recruit blacks, for whom there was no inter-regimental competition. Information was sent to every commanding officer in the country authorizing 'any of the coloured men in Canada, now serving in units of the C.E.F., to transfer to the No. 2 Construction Battalion, should they so wish.' Several black volunteers did transfer from other units, at least some with the overt encouragement of their officers.<sup>41</sup> Within Nova Scotia a regimental band was organized, holding recruiting concerts in churches and halls wherever a black audience might be attracted. In the larger black communities, Citizens Recruiting Committees were formed to encourage enlistment, the Rev. W.A. White of the African Baptist Church in Truro gave 'stirring' speeches, and black church elders lent moral support.<sup>42</sup> Early recruiting reports were satisfying, but by November 1916 Sutherland felt it necessary to undertake a more active campaign outside Nova Scotia. His request to recruit in the West Indies was turned down, but funds were authorized in January 1917 to take the band on a tour to Montreal and Toronto, and black centres in southwestern Ontario. After a decline between October and December, recruitment picked up again in January, most of it in Windsor, Ontario, where many American blacks joined the Canadian unit.<sup>43</sup> In western Canada Captain Gayfer established a recruiting office in Edmonton, from which he too conducted tours and spoke in black churches. He later moved his headquarters to Winnipeg, leaving a black enlisted man in charge of the Edmonton office while a white lieutenant visited British Columbia. All across Canada young black men were being advised that 'the need

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Hodgins, 23 Feb. 1917, Hodgins to Logie, 9 and 22 March 1917, Logie to Hodgins, 15 and 24 March 1917. Colonel Thompson of the 114th Battalion had rejected the offer of Whitney's Toronto black volunteers by explaining 'The introduction of a coloured platoon into our Battalion would undoubtedly cause serious friction and discontent.' RG 24, vol. 4387, file 34-7-141, Thompson to Logie, 4 April 1916

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., Wright to Logie, 4 April 1916; RG 24, vol. 4680, file 18-25-2. Adjutant General's Office to district commanding officers, circular letter, 16 August 1916; RG 24, vol. 4486, file 47-8-1, transfer order. 28 Aug. 1916

<sup>42</sup> NA, RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, Sutherland to McCurdy, 7 Aug. 1916, Hodgins to Sutherland, 8 Aug. 1916; RG 24, vol. 1550, file 683-124-2, Sutherland to Hodgins, 27 Nov. 1916, to McCurdy, same date

<sup>43</sup> NA, RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, Sutherland to Hodgins, 25 Aug. 1916. Elliott to Hodgins, 19 Oct. 1916, Hodgins to Sutherland, 1 Dec. 1916; RG 24, vol. 1550, file 683-124-2, Sutherland to Hodgins, 27 Nov. 1916 and 4 Jan. 1917, memorandum, Minister's Office, 5 Jan. 1917, adjutant general to GOC Halifax, 23 Jan. 1917; RG 24, vol. 4486, file 47-8-1, Morrison, memo, 31 Aug. 1916. The Sailing List of the No 2 Construction Battalion, 28 March 1917, contains information on the birth place, recruitment place and date for each man, so that monthly and regional totals can be compiled.

of the day' was for pioneers and construction workers whose contribution to the movement forward to victory was vital.<sup>44</sup>

Two years into the war, recruitment policy towards 'visible' minorities had been reversed completely. But during those two years, the ardour to join their white brethren in the defence of Canadian democracy had been somewhat dampened among the minority youth. Japanese recruitment never remotely approached the thousand men projected by Yamazaki, perhaps because they were not allowed to serve in recognizable units as they believed was essential to win rights for their community. Native Indians did have the opportunity to enlist in concentrated units, but where such units existed they never recruited up to their authorized strength. The fact was that the invitation to serve was coming too late, and after a discouraging demonstration of majority attitudes towards their potential contribution. The Six Nations, who had offered their assistance as allies to the king in 1914, now opposed recruiters on the ground that they were an independent people and would enlist only upon the personal appeal of the governor general and recognition of their special status.<sup>45</sup> Other Indian groups complained that 'We are not citizens and have no votes, as free men'; anti-recruiters followed recruiters around the reserves, speaking out against Indian enlistment during 'Patriotic' meetings, reminding Indians of their grievances and the many government promises made to them which had been broken throughout history.<sup>46</sup> Other factors interfered as well. There was resentment against recruitment methods, including reports of intimidating tactics and the enrolment of under-age boys. Indignation followed a rumour that overseas the Indians would be disguised as Italians, thus preventing any recognition for their accomplishments. Complaints from Indians already enlisted, alleging racial discrimination and inferior treatment in the forces, filtered back to the reserves. Other letters from Indians at the front described 'the awfulness of war' and 'openly advised the Indians not to think of enlisting.'<sup>47</sup>

44 NA, RG 24, vol. 4739, file 448-14-259, Duclou to Cruikshank, 8 Sept. 1916, Gayfer to Cruikshank, 6 and 18 Sept. 1916, 9 and 15 Oct. 1916; No 2 Recruitment Poster. Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, Appendix, 126

45 NA, RG 10, vol. 6765, file 452-7, Cooke to Scott, 12 Feb. and 4 March 1916; minutes of the Six Nations Council, 15 Sept. 1914, in Wilson, *Ontario and the First World War*, 174

46 NA, RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, vol. 1, Chief George Fisher to Gray, 19 Feb. 1916; RG 24, vol. 4383, file 34-7-109, Baxter to Williams, 18 Dec. 1915, Whitelaw to Baxter, 31 Dec. 1915; RG 10, vol. 6765, file 452-7, Cooke to Scott, 4 April 1916

47 NA, RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, vol. 1, Chief Thunderwater to Hodgins, 20 June and 29 Nov. 1916, Indian Mothers from Saugeen Reserve to Sir Robert Borden, 12 Oct. 1916, Smith to Scott, 1 Oct. 1916; RG 10, vol. 6765, file 452-7, Cooke to Scott, 28 Feb. 1916



Nor did black Canadians fail to register scepticism at the recruitment campaign. In Nova Scotia, where black community leadership was won over, many individuals 'were feeling keenly that their Loyal offers of service were refused in so many instances,' and were reluctant now to join the No 2. Blacks in the west told recruiters the same thing.<sup>48</sup> Resentment at previous insult was reinforced by continued insult: in Winnipeg black recruits were derided and called 'nigger' by medical staff assigned to examine them. When Colonel Sutherland decided to move his headquarters from Pictou to Truro, he rented a suitable building and had begun furnishing it when the owner suddenly cancelled the contract. The same thing happened to Captain Gayfer when the owner of his recruiting office cancelled the contract 'on account of color of recruits.' Eventually established in Truro, black recruits met segregation in the local theatre. Rumours percolated through the black communities as well, for example that they were to be used only as trench diggers in France.<sup>49</sup> Although several prominent whites, notably Nova Scotian MPs Fleming McCurdy and John Stanfield and businessman H. Falconer McLean, assisted in the formation and recruitment of the No 2, the military hierarchy itself was less than enthusiastic, perhaps feeling that the black battalion had been imposed on them for political reasons. The chief of general staff regarded the unit as 'troublesome.' It took Sutherland two months to gain approval for his tour beyond Nova Scotia, and then only with the strictest admonitions to economize. Western recruiter Gayfer was denied office supplies, had his transport warrants delayed, and received no rations or barrack accommodation for his recruits.<sup>50</sup> And yet Sutherland received constant memos and cables asking him when his unit would be ready for overseas service. The first target was three months; after seven months, Sutherland was told to prepare the men already recruited for sailing, and new recruits could follow later; eventually it was in March 1917, nine months after recruitment began, that the No 2 embarked for England, and with only 603 men enlisted of an

48 NA, RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, Sutherland to Hodgins, 18 Dec. 1916; RG 24, vol. 4599, file 20-10-52, Gayfer to Gray, 22 Nov. 1916; RG 9 III, vol. 81, file 10-9-40, Sutherland to Perley, 27 April 1917

49 NA, RG 24, vol. 4599, file 20-10-52, Gayfer to GOC Winnipeg, 23 Oct. 1916, to Gray, 22 Nov. 1916; RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, Stackford to McCurdy, 7 Sept. 1916, Sutherland to Hodgins, 17 Jan. 1917, to Kemp, 18 Jan. 1917; RG 24, vol. 4558, file 132-11-1, GOC Halifax to Sutherland, 5, 8, and 10 Sept. 1916; Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 24, and Appendix interviews

50 NA, RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, Gwatkin to Hodgins, 18 Sept. 1916; RG 24, vol. 1550, file 683-124-2, Militia Ottawa to GOC Halifax, 23 Jan. 1917; RG 24, vol. 4739, file 448-14-259, Gayfer to Cruikshank, 6 Sept., 18 Sept., 4 Oct., and 7 Nov. 1916, and replies, 9 Sept., 19 Sept., 10 Oct., Cruikshank to Grant, 6 Nov. 1916, Aitken to Cruikshank, 9 Nov. 1916

authorized strength of 1033 other ranks.<sup>51</sup> Because it arrived in Britain below battalion strength, the No 2 was converted to a labour company of 500 men, and Sutherland was reduced in rank to major.<sup>52</sup>

It was not only 'visible' minority youth who had developed a reluctance to volunteer. In July 1916 recruitment in general plummeted, from monthly peaks near 30,000 earlier in the year to fewer than 8000, and continued to fall to around 3000 a month. Not a single battalion raised after July 1916 reached its full strength, from any part of Canada. Employment in domestic war production, and increasing awareness of the carnage at the front, caused the virtual collapse of the voluntary system just at the time when the push was being made to enlist 'visible' minorities. In May 1917, when casualty rates in Europe were more than double new recruitment, Prime Minister Borden announced his intention to introduce conscription with the cry that 'the battle for Canadian liberty and autonomy is being fought today on the plains of France and Belgium.' The Military Service Act, when effected later that year, was less than a popular success among those liable to its call. Over 90 per cent of them applied for exemption.<sup>53</sup>

Canada's Indians were immediate and outspoken in denying the legality of their conscription. 'Indians refuse to report,' cabled one anxious Indian agent. More sophisticated responses referred to the fact that Indians were 'wards of the government,' legally 'minors' and treated as children: surely children were not being called to defend the empire? Since they had no vote, and no voice in the conduct of the war or of the councils of state, it was unfair to expect them to participate now in the war. 'We cannot say that we are fighting for our liberty, freedom and other privileges dear to all nations, for we have none,' stated an Ontario Indian declaration. BC Indians considered 'that the government attitude towards us in respect to our land troubles and in refusing to extend to us the position of citizens of Canada are unreasonable, and until we receive just treatment ... we should not be subject to conscription.' Still others quoted the treaties made in the 1870s, and the negotiations surrounding those treaties, during which

51 NA, RG 24, vol. 4558, file 132-11-1, Hodgins to GOC Halifax, 31 July 1916, to Sutherland, 22 Dec. 1916. Sailing List. No 2 Construction Battalion, 28 March 1917. Of the 603 enlisted men and non-commissioned officers (not including white officers), 342 were Canadian-born, 72 were West Indian, 169 American, and 20 of various other nationalities. Nova Scotia supplied 296, Ontario 207, and the west 33.

52 NA, RG 9 III, vol 81, file 10-9-40, Sutherland to Perley, 27 April 1917, McCurdy to Perley, 1 Oct 1917, and reply, 1 Nov., White to Stanfield, 18 Oct. 1917

53 Brown and Loveridge, 'Unrequited Faith,' 55-6, 60-4, 67, App. D, 76; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 344, 347, 350, App. C, 546, Morton, *History*, 153, 156-8; Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, 60-104; A.M. Williams, 'Conscription 1917: A Brief for the Defence.' CHR 37 (1956): 338-51

Indians were assured that they would never be called to war. Petitions flowed to Ottawa, and even to the king: if they were not to have the rights of citizens, they must not be forced to perform a citizen's duty.<sup>54</sup> Similar petitions came from BC Japanese, pointing out that although they were naturalized Canadians they lacked the franchise and other citizenship privileges, and they claimed exemption from obligatory military service.<sup>55</sup> In these objections to conscription there was a scarcely submerged articulation of the 'war aims' of Canadian minorities: if it was to be their war, it must result in the extension of equality to their people.

The government hesitated. Indians were first granted an extension of the time required to register; then they were advised officially to seek exemption under some existing regulation, such as agricultural employment.<sup>56</sup> Finally, on 17 January 1918, an order in council exempted Indians and Japanese, on the grounds of their limited citizenship rights and, for the former, the treaty promises. The order also referred to the War Time Elections Act which had deprived certain naturalized Canadians of the franchise and at the same time relieved them of military service. In March the regulations were amended so that any British subject disqualified from voting at a federal election was exempted from conscription. Despite the fact that they would already have been covered by this regulation, East Indians were granted a special exemption order three months later.<sup>57</sup>

This did not of course apply to black Canadians, who already enjoyed the franchise and therefore remained liable to conscription. The No 2, still smarting from its demotion to a labour company, immediately requested that all blacks conscripted across Canada be sent to it, so that it could be restored to battalion status. The No 2 proposal was promoted by Nova Scotian MP Fleming McCurdy, among others, and was received sympathetically by the new militia minister, General Mewburn, who confessed that "The whole problem of

54 NA, RG 10, vol. 6768, file 452-20, Mississauga of New Credit to Scott, 22 Oct. 1917, Nishga to prime minister, Nov. 1917, Chief Peter Angus to the King, 13 Nov.

1917, Committee of Allied Tribes to prime minister, 17 Nov. 1917, BC Indian agent to department, 26 Nov. 1917, Chief John Prince to Scott, 27 Nov. 1917, Garden River Reserve to governor general, 4 Dec. 1917, Katzelash band to Department of Indian Affairs, 4 Dec. 1917, Kitzumkalwee band to department, 4 Dec. 1917, Michipicoten band to department, 5 Dec. 1917, Edmundston, NB, Reserve to department, 15 Dec. 1917, Manitoba Rapids Reserve to department, 24 Dec. 1917, Hurons of Lorette to governor general, 10 Jan. 1918; RG 24, vol. 1221, file 593-1-7, vol. 2, Military Sub-committee to Chisholm, 28 Nov. 1917, and reply, 29 Nov.

55 DND, DHist, minister of justice to Governor General in Council, 31 Dec. 1917

56 NA, RG 10, vol. 6768, file 452-20, Scott to Ditchburn, 1 Dec. 1917, to Anaham Reserve, 14 Dec. 1917

57 PC 111, 17 Jan. 1918; Military Service Regulations, Sections 12 and 16 as amended, 2 March 1918; PC 1459, 12 June 1918

knowing how to handle coloured troops has been a big one for some years back.' A collection depot was established in London, Ontario, where No 2 reinforcements could be made ready for overseas, and orders were sent to commanding officers to transfer all 'coloured men' to the London depot. The wording of the order did not appear to leave the commanders with any choice in keeping black conscripts in their own units.<sup>58</sup> In March, when it began to seem that black numbers were lower than anticipated, No 2 recruiters travelled to Detroit to attract black Canadians living there, but this was squelched by Ottawa on the grounds that 'we are not hunting for coloured recruits but merely making a place for them as they come in under the Military Service Act.' Again, when the British-Canadian Recruiting Mission in New York announced that 'about two thousand colored British subjects have registered,' some or all of whom could be sent to reinforce the No 2, Ottawa's answer was a terse 'none required.'<sup>59</sup> Deciding that the number of black conscripts coming in, directly or by transfer, was not worth the effort, Ottawa ordered the abandonment of the London reception centre in May. Sutherland was informed that his company would not be restored to battalion strength after all.<sup>60</sup>

There was one more try. The Rev. William White, chaplain to the No 2 and as an honorary captain 'the only colored officer in our forces,' wrote an impassioned letter to the prime minister. 'The coloured people are proud that they have at least one definite Unit representing them in France,' he stated, requesting that the conscripted blacks be sent to strengthen the No 2.<sup>61</sup> As a consequence Major Bristol, secretary to the Canadian overseas militia minister in London, was asked to make a report. In a response labelled 'personal,' Bristol admitted that 'these Niggers do well in a Forestry Corps and other Labour units,' but since numbers were so limited 'the prospects of maintaining a battalion are not very bright.' Following a survey of district commanders, it appeared that scarcely more than 100 identified black conscripts were already enlisted, and 'on this showing it would hardly be possible to carry out the suggestion made' to use them

58 NA, RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, McLean to McCurdy, 10 Oct. 1917, McCurdy to Perley, 14 Nov. 1917, White to McCurdy, nd, Gwatin to adjutant general, 21 Oct. 1917, Shannon to adjutant general, 16 Jan. 1918, McCurdy to Mewburn, 17 Jan. 1918, and reply, 21 Jan., adjutant general to Shannon, 5 Feb. 1918, Shannon to adjutant general, 13 and 21 Feb. 1918, adjutant general, circular letter to commanding officers, Feb. 1918, White to Sir Robert Borden, 11 Aug. 1918  
 59 Ibid., Young to Milligan, 13 March 1918, Shannon to adjutant general, 19 April 1918, adjutant general to Shannon, 24 and 30 April 1918, British-Canadian Recruiting Mission, New York, to adjutant general, 1 May 1918, and reply, 2 May  
 60 Ibid., adjutant general to Brown, 8 May 1918, to Sutherland, 22 May 1918  
 61 Ibid., White to Sir Robert Borden, 11 Aug. 1918

to enhance the No 2. The plan was dropped once and for all.<sup>62</sup> Fifty-five black conscripts already gathered in Halifax were trained in Canada as infantrymen, together with white conscripts, but on arrival in England they were placed in a segregated labour unit. Eventually assigned to the 85th Battalion, the Armistice intervened before they could leave Britain.<sup>63</sup>

The ambivalence and the frankly racist confusion surrounding their recruitment was reflected in the overseas experiences of the enlisted minorities. The Japanese, it appears, were consistently used as combat troops, which was their purpose in volunteering.<sup>64</sup> The Indians had a mixed reception. The 114th, recruited with such pride as an Indian unit, was broken up on arrival in England and the men assigned to different battalions, many for labour duties. The 107th, also recruited with an Indian identity and as a fighting unit, was converted to a pioneer battalion in France, where the men dug trenches and built roads and muletracks under direct enemy fire, with heavy casualties. Some Indians did go to the front as combatants, but a sizeable contingent served in forestry work, chiefly within Britain itself.<sup>65</sup> Those blacks who served individually in combat regiments, since their admission had been entirely voluntary on the part of their officers, apparently met few problems. When the 106th Battalion was broken up, for example, its black members went to the Royal Canadian Regiment as reinforcements on the front lines, where they were welcomed. Undoubtedly there were many more where blacks served without incident.<sup>66</sup> But the No 2 itself, as a separate unit with its own

62 Ibid., Bristol to Creighton, personal, 26 Aug. 1918, Creighton to AG Mobilization, 14 Sept. 1918, cable to commanding officers, 17 Sept. 1918, and replies, Creighton to Bristol, personal, 28 Sept. 1918. The record of black conscripts provided by commanding officers showed London, Ont. 23, Toronto 10, Kingston 4, Halifax 55, Saint John 13. The Military Service Council asserted, however, that it had 'no record of coloured men who are liable to draft, as all men are shown according to Nationality regardless of colour.' Ibid., Captain Newcombe, memo, 25 Sept. 1918

63 Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 37-9, and interview with Isaac Phillips, 57

64 Ito, *We Went to War*, 70 and App. III. Of 185 volunteers, 54 were killed and 119 wounded.

65 NA, RG 9 III, vol. 5010, War Diaries, 107th Pioneer Battalion. In 1918 the 107th was disbanded and the men absorbed into an engineering brigade. See also Gaffen, *Forgotten Soldiers*, passim.

66 Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 65, interview with Sydney Jones of the 106th. At a black veterans' reunion in 1982, reference was made to eight different units, besides the No 2, in which the survivors had enlisted; *ibid.*, chap. 6, Reunion and Recognition Banquet. Mr Thamis Gale of Montreal, himself a World War II veteran and whose father was in the No 2, has been assiduously tracking down every black to serve in the CEF. From his as-yet unpublished results it appears that there may have been more than 1200 blacks in the CEF, which would mean over 600 distributed in various units outside the No 2; personal communications, 16 and 24 June 1986 and 14 Feb. 1988

administration and records, leaves a different trail. To avoid 'offending the susceptibility of other troops,' it was suggested that the black battalion be sent overseas in a separate transport ship, without escort. Since their sailing occurred during the war's worst period for German submarine attacks, it is fortunate that this suggestion was rejected by the Royal Navy.<sup>67</sup> The battalion arrived in England under strength, and the decision was made not to absorb the men into different units, where whites might object, but to keep them together as a labour company attached to the Forestry Corps in French territory. Working as loggers and in lumber mills, and performing related construction and shipping work, the men of the No 2 were established near La Joux, in the Jura region of France, with smaller detachments at Cartigny and Alençon. Although they laboured side by side with white units, the black soldiers were segregated in their non-working activities. Remote from any means of amusement, they had to await the creation of a separate 'coloured' YMCA for their evenings' entertainment. When ill, they were treated in a separate 'Coloured Wing' of the La Joux hospital. Those who strayed from military discipline were similarly confined in a segregated punishment compound. An extra Protestant chaplain had to be sent into Jura district 'as the Negro Chaplain is not acceptable to the White Units.' Always regarded as a problem and never seriously appreciated, the No 2 was disbanded with almost unseemly haste soon after the Armistice was announced, though the demand for forestry products remained high, and they were among the earliest Canadian units to leave France.<sup>68</sup>

The treatment received by 'visible' Canadians did not originate with the military; recruitment policy and overseas employment were entirely consistent with domestic stereotypes of 'race' characteristics and with general social practice in Canada. And Canadian attitudes themselves were merely a reflection of accepted and respected Western thought in the early twentieth century. Racial perceptions were derived, not from personal experience, but from the example of Canada's great mentors, Britain and the United States, supported by

67 NA, RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, Mobilization to Gwatkin, 19 Feb. 1917, and reply, nd, memo to naval secretary, 21 Feb. 1917 and reply, 23 Feb.; Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part*, 149-50

68 NA, RG 24, vol. 1469, file 600-10-35, Morrison to Bristol, 20 Dec. 1917; RG 9 III, vol. 1608, file E-186-9, director of forestry to YMCA, 9 June 1917, OC No 12 District to Timber Operations, 17 Jan. 1918, OC No 9 District to Timber Operations, 19 Aug 1918, director of timber operations to General Headquarters, 28 Nov. 1918, and signal, 30 Nov. 1918; RG 9 III, vol. 4616, file C-B-8, assistant director to director, Chaplain Services, 20 Feb 1918; RG 9 III, vol. 4645, folder 747, War Diaries, 2nd Canadian Construction Coy (Colored), vol. 11-10, 13, and 22 March 1918, vol. 12-14 and 17 April 1918, vol. 13-8 and 12 May 1918

scientific explanations.<sup>69</sup> In these circumstances it is notable that the Canadian military, while by no means avoiding the influence of prevailing ideology, at least had the independence to be less restricting than most of the allies. For example, General Headquarters advised the Forestry Corps to reorganize the No 2 to conform to imperial standards, as were applied to South African, Chinese, and Egyptian 'coloured labour' units. This would have affected their pay and privileges, and for black non-commissioned officers it would mean a reduction to private. Colonel J.B. White, Forestry's La Joux commander, rejected this directive because 'the men of this Unit are engaged in exactly the same work as the white labour with whom they are employed ... and it is recommended that no change be made.' Headquarters withdrew the order and the men of the No 2 continued to be treated as other Canadian forestry units.<sup>70</sup> One reason for assigning the No 2 to French territory was to avoid contact and comparison with other British 'coloured labour' units 'who are kept in compounds, and not permitted the customary liberties of white troops.'<sup>71</sup> Black American troops in France were completely segregated, forbidden to leave their bases without supervision, and barred from cafés and other public places. Friendly relations with French civilians led to the strictest measures, including the arrest of blacks who conversed with white women, and to an official American request to the French military beseeching their co-operation in keeping the races separate. British East Indian troops were restricted in their off-base activities and were liable to a dozen lashes for 'seeking romance' from white women. Senior army officials objected to East Indian sick and wounded being treated by white nurses. South African black labourers

69 There is of course a huge literature on the nature and extent of Western racist thought, and it is not considered necessary to recount its features here. Studies which explicitly set Canadian developments within a broader context, usually imperial or continental, include Carol Bacchi, 'Race Regeneration and Social Purity: A Study of the Social Attitudes of Canada's English-Speaking Suffragists,' *Histoire Sociale/Social History* 11 (1978): 460-74; Carl Berger, *The Sense of Power: Studies in the Ideas of Canadian Imperialism, 1867-1914* (Toronto 1970), and *Science, God, and Nature in Victorian Canada* (Toronto 1983); Douglas Cole, 'The Origins of Canadian Anthropology, 1850-1910,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 8 (1973): 33-45; Terry Cook, 'George R. Parkin and the Concept of Britannic Idealism,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 10 (1975): 15-31; Robert A. Huttenback, *Racism and Empire: White Settlers and Colored Immigrants in the British Self-Governing Colonies, 1830-1910* (Ithaca and London 1976); and Howard Palmer, 'Mosaic Versus Melting Pot? Immigration and Ethnicity in Canada and the United States,' *International Journal* 31 (1976): 488-528.

70 NA, RG 9 III, vol. 1608, file E-186-9, Provisional Mobilization Store Table for a Labour Company, White to GHQ, 10 Jan 1918, and reply, 14 Jan.

71 NA, RG 9 III, vol. 81, file 10-9-40, Morrison to Bristol, 20 Dec. 1917

were kept in guarded compounds. Throughout the ranks of the Allies, with the partial exception of the French, non-white soldiers and workers were humiliated, restricted, and exploited. It was simply not their war.<sup>72</sup>

Generally speaking, the efforts of 'visible' enlisted men did not gain recognition for themselves or for their communities at home. Postwar race riots in the United States generated the worst violence experienced by black Americans since slavery. Attempts by Punjabi veterans to gain moderate political reforms led to the infamous Amritsar Massacre in April 1919, where 379 peaceful demonstrators were killed and 1208 wounded while trapped in a box-like park. French use of African troops to occupy defeated Germany led to condemnation by the Allies and to international censure for subjecting white Germans to the horrors of black authority.<sup>73</sup> Respect, evidently, had not been won by four years in defence of Western ideals. There was even a Canadian incident to illustrate this situation: on 7 January 1919 at Kinmel Park Camp in Britain, white Canadian soldiers rioted and attacked the No 2 ranks on parade after a black sergeant arrested a white man and placed him in the charge of a 'coloured' escort.<sup>74</sup> Far from expressing gratitude for their services, the militia minister in 1919 seemed unaware that the No 2 had even existed.<sup>75</sup> It is true that individual Japanese veterans were granted the franchise, belatedly and grudgingly in 1931 by a one-vote margin in the BC legislature, and native Indians actually serving in the forces were enfranchised by the War Time Elections Act and its successors, but their families and other members of their communities remained as only partial Canadian citizens.<sup>76</sup>

72 DND, DHist, 'Secret Information Concerning Black American Troops'; Foner, *Blacks and the Military*, 121-2; Balesi, 'From Adversaries to Comrades,' 112-13; Jeffrey Greenhut, 'Race, Sex and War: The Impact of Race and Sex on Morale and Health Services for the Indian Corps on the Western Front, 1914,' *Military Affairs* 45 (1981): 72-3; Willan, 'South African,' 71-3

73 Nelson, 'Black Horror,' passim; Robert C. Reinders, 'Radicalism on the Left. E.D. Morel and the Black Horror on the Rhine,' *International Review of Social History* 13 (1968): 1-28; John C. Cairns, 'A Nation of Shopkeepers in Search of a Suitable France,' *American Historical Review* 79 (1974): 718; Bernard Shaw, *What I Really Wrote About the War* (New York 1932), 322-3; Robert A. Huttenback, *The British Imperial Experience* (New York 1966), 175-89

74 NA, RG 9, III, vol. 1709, file D-3-13, Collier to OC Canadian Troops, 10 Jan. 1919; Ruck, *Canada's Black Battalion*, 58-60, interviews with Robert Shepard and A Benjamin Elms See also Desmond Morton, 'Kicking and Complaining: Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-19,' *CHR* 61 (1980): 341, 343, 356

75 House of Commons, *Debates*, 20 June 1919, 3741

76 Ito, *We Went to War*, 73; Roy, 'Soldiers,' 343; Provincial Elections Act Amendment Act, *Statutes of British Columbia*, 1931, c 21; War Time Elections Act, *Statutes of Canada*, 1917, c 39



Especially indicative of their failure to attain genuine acceptance was the fact that at the outset of World War II, 'visible' volunteers would again be rejected altogether or directed towards support and service functions consistent with their peacetime stereotypes.<sup>77</sup>

During World War I about 3500 Indians, over 1000 blacks, and several hundred Chinese and Japanese enlisted in the Canadian forces. To their number must be added the many who tried to enlist and were rejected. Though there was an understandable resistance to later attempts to recruit and conscript them, still the numbers in uniform were impressive, a demonstration of loyalty and a confidence that accepting equal responsibilities would win the advantages of Canadian citizenship. Individual exceptions occurred, but as a group they were denied that equal opportunity to defend their country and empire. Stereotypes which at first excluded them continued to restrict their military role, and even survived the war. In 1919 respect and equality remained beyond reach. Lessons which could and should have been learned in the first war had to be taught all over again in a second global conflict.

The experience of 'visible' minorities in World War I illustrates the nature of Canadian race sentiment early in this century. Most abruptly, it demonstrates that white Canadians participated in the Western ideology of racism. This was true not only in the general sense of accepting white superiority, but in the particular image assigned to certain peoples which labelled them as militarily incompetent. Canadian history itself should have suggested the contrary – blacks and Indians, for example, had a proud record of military service prior to Confederation – but the stereotypes derived from Britain and the United States were more powerful than domestic experience. Some degree of cynicism is discernable in the rejection of 'visible' volunteers, for example, the fear that military duty would enable them to demand political equality, yet it is not possible to read the entire record without concluding that most white Canadians, including the military hierarchy, were convinced by the international stereotypes and their supporting scientific explanations. This was carried to the point where Canada's war effort was impeded by prejudices for which there were no Canadian foundations.

77 See, for example, NA, RG 24, vol. 2765, file 6615-4-A, vol. 6, secret memorandum no 1, to all chairmen and divisional registrars, 20 Nov. 1941, and order from adjutant general to all district commanders, 12 July 1943; RG 27, vol. 130, file 601-3-4, 'Conscription of East Indians for Canadian Army'; DND DHist, 'Sorting out Coloured Soldiers' and 'Organization and Administration: Enlistment of Chinese'; *The Kings Regulations and Orders for the Royal Canadian Air Force*, 1924, amended 1943; *Regulations and Instructions for the Royal Canadian Navy*, amended by PC 4950, 30 June 1944. Ito and Roy give considerable detail on Chinese- and Japanese-Canadian efforts to enlist during World War II.

Equally interesting is what the World War I experience reveals about the minorities themselves. Their persistence in volunteering, their insistence upon the 'right' to serve, their urgent demand to know the reasons for their rejection, all suggest that 'visible' Canadians had not been defeated by the racism of white society, had not accepted its rationalizations, and were not prepared quietly to accept inferior status. They retained a confidence in themselves, most obviously that they could achieve a glorious war record if given the opportunity. While recognizing the restrictions imposed on themselves and their communities, they were convinced that by their own efforts and the good will of white Canada they could remove those restrictions. Their appeals to parliament and the crown reveal as well that they had not lost faith in British/Canadian justice. The minority campaigns during World War I, for recruitment and later against conscription, were only possible for persons convinced that they were equal and could achieve recognition of their equality. Their loyalty to Canada and the empire included loyalty to an ideal which the dominant majority had forgotten.