

UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Unwilling to Continue, Ordered to Advance: An Examination of the Contributing Factors
Toward, and Manifestations of, 'War Weariness' in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred
Days Campaign of the First World War

by

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Abstract

This thesis examines the contributing factors and manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the final months of the Great War. The starting point is the acknowledgment that all armies on the Western Front were suffering from ‘war weariness’ by 1918. The historiography for the Canadian Corps, however, ignores or denigrates this issue in its analysis of the operational achievements of the Corps, primarily because of the Victory Campaign narrative and the Colony-to-Nation paradigm. The thesis identifies the preconditions for ‘war weariness,’ namely, the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days, the resultant heavy casualties, and the fact that the majority of the Corps’ troops were long-serving veterans. The final section examines the manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Corps during the final months of the war and after the signing of the Armistice, focussing mostly upon instances of insubordination, indiscipline and the killing of German prisoners.

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This thesis is dedicated to my Grandmother Mary Viola Stapley, who was born just prior to the opening of the Battle of Amiens in 1918 and who passed away while I was revising this thesis in May of 2013.

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Introduction

The Great War from 1914-1918 was the largest and most destructive conflict in the history of the western world to that point. Canada, as a Dominion of the British Empire, provided the mother country with manpower and substantial munitions, to say nothing of its moral and political support for Great Britain. Aside from contributing sailors, cavalry and airmen, forestry and railway troops, medical personnel and labourers, Canada's largest contribution was without a doubt its Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), of which the Canadian Corps was the actual fighting entity. To get an understanding of Canada's commitment, archival records state that over 600,000 Canadians served in the armed forces, representing approximately one-third of the adult male population of the time. Of these, 426,500 went to the continent with the CEF, and of that one in three were wounded and one in seven became a fatal casualty.¹ Tim Cook, Canadian military historian at the Canadian War Museum, has slightly different numbers for enlistment and casualties. Cook states that during the war years 619,636 Canadians served, and of those 424,589 went overseas with the CEF. He asserts that there were 235,012 total casualties in the CEF, of which 60,932 were fatal. Mathematically, this means that over half, or around 55%, of servicemen were either killed or wounded while overseas.²

War is an inherently traumatic experience. Placing human beings in mortal danger for extended periods of time had the ability to overwhelm even the strongest and most stoic of men. Moreover, combat and warfare are not just about rifles and artillery, the mental and emotional states of mind of the combatants wielding these weapons must also be taken into account in any evaluation of the achievements of military units on the battlefield. Not only did the war put extraordinary demands upon the social cohesion, political stability and economic capabilities of the combatant nations, it also served to put unprecedented demands upon the physical strength and the mental, emotional and psychological well-being of the men at the front engaged in combat. Thus morale, discipline and combat motivation are factors that must be incorporated into our understanding of the accomplishments of the Canadian Corps during Great War.

As this is a study of 'war weariness' in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign of the First World War, it would be prudent at this point to expound on this idea and

¹ Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 24, Volume: 1824, Folder: G.A.Q. 5-48, File: 'Vimy: Introduction to Memorial Register – Summary of Cdn. Corps Operations 1914-1918.'

² Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 – Volume II* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008). The statistics and discussion on enlistment and casualties can be found on pages 611-613.

provide some definitions and an explanation of the term itself. 'War weariness' can be defined as the physical, but especially mental/psychological and emotional exhaustion among ordinary troops that, while compromising their fighting ability, did not totally preclude their pressing on in combat. Thus, 'war weariness' undermined the men's ability to carry on and influenced their attitude toward the war, but did not totally eliminate their abilities to continue on in combat. By the latter half of the Hundred Days, it was evident to the men that the war was won, but not yet over. Because of this, thousands of young Canadians continued to be maimed and killed in and behind the line of duty during this period. 'War weariness' also incorporates the perception among ordinary troops that death was merely inevitable, leading to feelings of fatalism, apathy, a sense of doom and hopelessness over personal survival. It must also be acknowledged that during this time period thousands of men were taken out of the line as casualties (often diagnosed with 'Nervous Disorders'), but thousands more faced psychological stress, endured war's grimness and the constant fear of death or mutilation and had no legal means to escape the horrors of the front. 'War weariness' is more an emotional, mental or psychological issue, however physical exhaustion certainly contributed to its onset. 'War weariness' should also be understood as a matter of heart, spirit or will, more than that of physical considerations or biology. 'War weariness' also represented a fed up attitude whereby the troops at the front acknowledged, either overtly or otherwise, that they were worn out and were unable to continue on much longer; they had reached the very limits of their strength, courage and endurance. This thesis will attempt to assess the degree to which combat effectiveness, soldierly morale and ultimately the physical and emotional capacity to follow orders and attack were compromised by high casualty rates, the cumulative effect of continual offensive operations on long-serving soldiers, the steady loss of friends, trusted and experienced leaders and the integration of growing numbers of untested replacements.³

In terms of the men being worn out emotionally, mentally and psychologically, by this point in the war many soldier's nerves were at the breaking point. Troops in the Corps were becoming fed up with the war and sick of seeing their friends and comrades continue to be killed or maimed, especially by October and November of 1918 when it appeared the war would conclude imminently. The men were also worn down due to the constant fear and stress of death,

³ The author acknowledges a huge debt of gratitude to his supervisor, Dr. Patrick Brennan, for his inspiration, guidance, patience and suggestions throughout this process. Especially noteworthy is his assistance in this section on the actual definitions and explanations of war weariness itself.

were tired from the lack of sleep and food (insufficient caloric intake), and weary from having to be awake long hours on high alert; the cumulative and detrimental effects of the stress and strain of combat should also be factored into an assessment of Canadian combat performance during this time period. It must be emphasized that those experiencing ‘war weariness’ during the 100 Days were tired *from* the fighting, but also tired *of* the fighting. Because the war did not come to a rapid conclusion after the substantial advance during the Battle of Amiens, the men were becoming exhausted due to combat, but also fed up with the combat itself. Again, it must be understood that ‘war weariness’ cannot be equated with physical exhaustion; soldiers at the front were without a doubt physically exhausted much of the time, but it was when they were emotionally or psychologically exhausted and began to question the outcome of the war, the methods employed or their survival in tandem with physical exhaustion that ‘war weariness’ began to manifest itself. Many contemporary accounts make clear that the men began to espouse the view that ‘enough was enough.’⁴ Letters, memoirs, diary and journal entries for this period lend credence to this idea, and the writings of George V. Bell of the 1st Battalion provides one such example. After having to bury many of his comrades after a bloody attack on a German machine gun position in the final months of the war, Bell concluded the chapter by writing “Damn this dirty, lousy, stinking bloody war.”⁵

Early indicators of ‘war weariness’ amongst soldiers at the front include poor performance on the battlefield and evidence of less dash or élan on the part of the troops undertaking offensive operations. Moreover, reliance on alcohol as a coping mechanism and the adoption of a fatalistic attitude indicate the emotional exhaustion of the soldiers and the belief that death or mutilation was only a matter of time. Furthermore, examples of insubordination or indiscipline, represented in part by the killing of prisoners, indicate that the men were less able or willing to follow orders so near the end of the war, and a decline in the morale and discipline of

⁴ See, for example, the following accounts: Will R. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands: A Memoir of the Great War 1916-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1968); Norm Christie, ed., *Silhouettes of The Great War: The Memoir of John Harold Becker 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2001); Audrey and Paul Grescoe, eds., *The Book of War Letters: 100 Years of Private Canadian Correspondence* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2003); Bruce Cane, ed., *It made you think of Home: The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1916-1919* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2004); Major D.J. Corrigall, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment): Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Stone & Cox Limited, 1935) and Victor W. Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man’s Land: 50th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Alberta Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000).

⁵ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 113, Diary of George V. Bell, ‘Back to Blighty,’ pg. 135. The fact that he did not say something along the lines of ‘Long Live the King’ or ‘I will do my duty unto death’ is quite telling.

the fighting forces. Finally, the killing of German prisoners was also an indicator of fatalism as the troops, usually unable to strike out at their enemies, took opportunities to do so when their opponent was powerless.

However, in order for this study to be useful as an analysis of the achievements of the Canadian Corps and its effects upon the regular soldier, this phenomenon of ‘war weariness’ would have to be widespread during this time period. It is the contention of this thesis that ‘war weariness’ did in fact plague the Corps during the final months of the war and affected a good deal of its combat troops, and thus it is important to study and incorporate into our understanding of the Corps during the war. It is also important to understand that soldiers were certainly worn out, fed up and questioned their chances of survival earlier in the war, such as during the attritional battles of 1916 or 1917, but the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days Campaign was a unique experience for the Canadian troops, not least because many members of the Corps during the final months of the war were long-serving combat soldiers.

The reasons for selecting the Hundred Days Campaign as the time period to study ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps needs to be clarified and explained. This period was unique in the war experience of the First World War for the Canadian combat troops. Heavy casualties were nothing new, but in the context of sustained offensive operations it meant an increase in the physical and emotional exhaustion, mental strain and fatigue of the troops. The final months of the war was also distinct for the Corps because of the reliance on long-serving veterans prior to, and even after, the influx of large numbers of Military Service Act (MSA) men, with questionable levels of experience, in the latter half of the Hundred Days. This meant that the three major battles undertaken by the Corps during the final months of the war were fought by men who had been fighting in uniform for months or even years, and the fact that they were now mostly fighting in open country took its toll on the combat troops.⁶ Factor in the inclement weather during much of this time period, the increased burden on the soldiers caused by civilians (limiting artillery operations and the sharing of rations), supply, communication and transportation difficulties along with the increasing desperation of the German forces, represented by their growing use of machine gun defences in depth, poison gas and booby traps,

⁶ The three major battles fought by the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign were: the Battle of Amiens, 8-24 August; the Battle of Arras and the Drocourt-Quéant and Hindenburg Lines, 26 August-26 September; and the Battle of the Canal du Nord and Cambrai, 27 September-11 October. See LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4801, Folder: 128, File: ‘Intelligence: German Divisions – 100 Days.’

and this is a perfect storm for the onset of ‘war weariness.’ During the Hundred Days, the development of ‘war weariness’ was exemplified by heavy casualties, the mental and physical exhaustion of the troops, the undermining of the men’s mental health and increasing issues regarding insubordination and indiscipline. The difficulties and problems arising from the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days are well-documented in both primary and secondary sources pertaining to the Corps. For example, in the ‘War Diary’ for the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade, the report of the Commanding Officer for the month of October 1918 highlights the difficulties associated with this time period. These problems included: the many complicated tasks the Brigade was assigned, in tough situations, due to terrain and weather conditions; the very little time available for proper preparation and reconnaissance; the long exhausting marches required; the fact that the men often went days without proper rest or respite and the cumulative and continuous strain on the men’s strength and endurance.⁷

During the final months of the war, the Canadian Corps was called upon to provide a substantial contribution to the destruction of the German armed forces and their will and capacity to resist. Canadian officer E.L.M. Burns described the Hundred Days in his memoir as “almost continuous offensive operations,” leaving the men very little opportunity for proper rest and recuperation.⁸ The problem, of course, was that sustained offensive actions without the proper rest or preparation led to widespread exhaustion, heavy casualties and the constant depleting of the men’s finite reserve of courage and strength. This last point, about how men have only a limited stock of courage and endurance, is expounded upon in Lord Moran’s monograph *The Anatomy of Courage*. In this memoir about his experiences as a medical doctor in the First World War, he explains that men wear out in battle as clothes wear out over time, and that constant offensive operations made the men fed up and “thoroughly tired of the war.”⁹ The fact that the men were fed up and had had enough of the war suggests the onset of ‘war weariness,’ even if Moran does not describe it using that term. This fed up attitude and an acknowledgement of almost certain death was particularly acute among the Canadian soldiers during the final months of the war.

⁷ LAC, RG 9 III D3, Volume: 4891, Folder: ‘Oct. 1 1918 to Nov. 30 1918,’ File: ‘War Diary or Intelligence Summary: Headquarters, 6th Canadian Inf. Brigade.’

⁸ Lieutenant-General E.L.M. Burns, *General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars* (Toronto/Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1970).

⁹ Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967). It is interesting to note that Lord Moran went on to become Sir Winston Churchill’s personal physician during the Second World War.

This thesis will argue that the Hundred Days appears to contain the most fertile conditions for the onset and development of ‘war weariness’ within the Canadian Corps. Additionally, this thesis asserts that ‘war weariness’ was a growing and widespread problem during the final months of the war and it was a factor in the Corps during this time period. As this is not a comparative study, which would be beyond the scope of an MA thesis, this thesis will focus primarily upon the contributing factors toward, and manifestations of, ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the final months of the war.¹⁰

This study will examine how ‘war weariness’ was caused by high casualty rates, which reinforced fatalism, and the physical and emotional exhaustion of the troops due to the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days. Moreover, the loss of experienced, trusted and effective friends and leaders, the mental and emotional states of the men at the front and the increasing reliance on long-serving veterans prior to the substantial influx of MSA men and replacements following the breach of the Drocourt-Quéant Line were all contributing factors toward the onset of ‘war weariness’ in the closing phases of the war. It must also be understood that the majority of these replacements being added on strength to units of the Corps during this time period were long-serving soldiers returning from hospitals. These factors served to compromise the combat effectiveness, unit cohesion, soldierly morale and the physical and emotional capacity to follow orders and stage tough offensive operations day after day. Furthermore, these sustained offensive operations were undertaken without the necessary rest, recuperation and re-fitting from previous operations and without the adequate reconnaissance, preparation, training or acclimatization period for replacements for upcoming operations.

In both the primary and secondary sources examined, it was difficult to find clear, direct evidence of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign. In fact, the term itself was used only once in over 125 archival volumes interrogated.¹¹ One of the main reasons for this is that there are large gaps in the historiography of the Canadian Corps. As Chris Madsen argues in *Another Kind of Justice: Canadian Military Law*, some of these gaps can be

¹⁰ This period is known as the Hundred Days Campaign, also known as the Final Hundred Days, the Victory Campaign and the Last Hundred Days, which took place between August 8th 1918, with the opening of the Battle of Amiens, and November 11th 1918, with the signing of the Armistice between the Allied and Central Powers.

¹¹ The term ‘war weariness’ itself was used in a report of March 1918. See LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4198, Folder: 2, File: 9, ‘Discipline: 9-10-16 to 6-9-18.’ Moreover, this term was used prior to the Hundred Days.

filled by examining and analyzing the records that are available to historians.¹² However, as A.B. Godefroy has pointed out, some of the documents pertinent to this discussion have been lost or destroyed. In particular, the fact that the records of the court proceedings for the trials of the 25 Canadians executed during the war have been lost or destroyed serves to limit our understanding of the morale and motivation of these men charged with desertion or cowardice.¹³ Many of these men may have chosen to desert or take cover in the face of enemy counterattacks simply because they had lost all hope of survival, could no longer stand it and had had enough of the slaughter near the end of the war. It should be emphasised here that the examples provided by the few help put the experiences of the many into perspective, and perhaps assist us in understanding why some troops were able to carry on in combat while others were not.

It is also difficult to find clear and direct evidence of ‘war weariness’ because of adherence to the Victory Campaign narrative. This paradigm argues that the Allies were at the peak of their fighting ability and effectiveness during the final months of the war, and that the glorious Allied troops marched toward victory with their heads held high and with sufficient morale and intact discipline. British historian Paddy Griffith, for example, argues that the cumulative learning and concerted effort throughout the war led to an efficient fighting machine that by 1918 was able to “sweep all before it.”¹⁴ This is clearly a simplification and a very particular reading of the events of 1918. British historians, however, seem to argue that ‘war weariness’ did exist in the British Army by 1918, but focus their analysis upon *why* these men continued to fight.¹⁵ Pertaining to the Canadian Corps, it is very difficult to believe that the optimism and enthusiasm of the High Command and staff officers during the Victory Campaign was shared in the depleted ranks of the junior officers and men who had to carry out their attack

¹² Chris Madsen, *Another Kind of Justice: Canadian Military Law from Confederation to Somalia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

¹³ A.B. Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour? The Story of the 25 Canadian Volunteers Executed in the Great War* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1998).

¹⁴ Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-1918* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).

¹⁵ Tim Travers, for example, argued that the British were able to carry on with offensive operations and eventually emerge victorious because of their use of technology. Tim Travers, *How the War was Won: Factors that led to Victory in World War One* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2005). Paddy Griffith concurs with Travers, but also argued that the tactics and training of the British at this point in the war allowed them to emerge victorious against the Germans. Paddy Griffith, *Battle Tactics of the Western Front: The British Army's Art of Attack 1916-18* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994). Finally, David Stevenson argued that it was the Germans' loss of tactical superiority and their inferiority in resources compared with the Allies that allowed the latter to defeat the Germans. David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

plans. By this point in the war, many of the best trained, most experienced and most daring men in the Canadian Corps were gone. As manpower demands soared, and it appeared that the end was finally in sight, the Canadians were called upon to attempt ever more audacious, and costly, operations with less planning and preparation time. Historian Shane Schreiber has pointed out that although the Corps was achieving success during the Hundred Days, for the average soldier at the front this campaign was difficult, confusing and exhausting.¹⁶ Furthermore, as Desmond Morton argued in *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War*, most generals and staff officers did not understand what made their men fight (combat motivation), nor did they share in the “terror and squalor of the trenches” or front lines.¹⁷ Yet Canadian historians, with their focus on the remarkable operational achievements of the Canadian Corps, have simply inferred from the string of battlefield successes that ‘war weariness’ never plagued the Canadian effort, that if anything, morale actually surged with the hard-fought victories. There are also examples of the Victory Campaign narrative present in the archival sources, which in turn influenced the subsequent writing of Canadian history.¹⁸ In the final months of the War, the Allies were advancing, the Germans were surrendering and yielding ground and things seemed to be going well; because of these successes and positive results, historians have been reluctant to attribute ‘war weariness’ to the victorious Canadian Corps.

Gaps also exist in the literature, making it difficult to identify and prove the existence of ‘war weariness,’ because of lingering ideas about the ‘proper’ way to do traditional military history. Traditional military/political/diplomatic history tends to focus on generals and grand strategy, political and diplomatic manoeuvring, employs a top-down approach and examines armies and corps, but rarely any military unit below the battalion level. Traditional operational military histories, such as Daniel Dancocks’ *Spearhead to Victory*, Shane Schreiber’s *Shock Army of the British Empire* and even G.W.L. Nicholson’s *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, illustrate a lack of interest or emphasis upon the experiences of the regular soldier in the

¹⁶ Shane B. Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing Limited, 2004).

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

¹⁸ See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III D3, Volume 4891, Folder: ‘Oct. 1 1918 to Nov. 30 1918,’ File: ‘War Diary or Intelligence Summary: Headquarters, 6th Canadian Inf. Brigade.’ See also RG 9 III C 1, Volume: 3854, Folder: 73, File: 5, ‘Cdn. Corps: 12-8-18 to 25-8-18.’

trenches. This needs to be remedied in order to gain a more objective and realistic understanding of the Canadian Corps, and of the men who served in it.

Other gaps in the literature exist because the Great War in Canada serves a useful purpose in the formation of Canadian identity and nationalism. It seems there is a tendency among Canadian military historians to praise, rather than assess, the Canadian Corps and its achievements during the war. Moreover, the conflict has been used since the Armistice, and perhaps during the war itself, to sustain the Colony-to-Nation thesis.¹⁹ This notion, adopted by many Canadian historians, asserts that Canada came of age during the war and especially on the slopes of Vimy Ridge; this symbolic victory contributed to the emerging “sense of identity and nationalism” within the Dominion.²⁰ Historian Desmond Morton argued that the Great War was a transformative event for Canada, and even called it Canada’s “war for independence.” Morton cited the appointment of Sir George Perley and Prime Minister Borden to the Imperial War Cabinet as an indication of growing Canadian sovereignty and autonomy.²¹ Additionally, as Jonathan Vance pointed out in *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War*, the Great War was used in the “Canadianization” process toward immigrants and French Canadians and to promote a unifying nationalist culture glorifying the deeds of Canadian soldiers on the battlefield.²²

It is important to note, however, that social history methods are beginning to seep into military history; some military historians are increasingly embracing a bottom-up approach and examining the experiences of regular soldiers at the front. Tim Cook, for example, provides the reader with an examination of Private John Becker who ‘went to ground’ during shelling, which itself points to ‘war weariness’ reflecting the cumulative effect of the physical, mental and psychological stress of combat.²³ This is in direct contrast to what one finds in Nicholson’s *Official History*; Nicholson only examines the lower echelons of the military hierarchy if the soldier won a Victoria Cross, and then only cursorily. The traditional writing of history, the

¹⁹ Ian F.W. Beckett, *The Great War (Second Edition)* (Edinburgh: Pearson Education Limited, 2007).

²⁰ Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916 – Volume I* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2007).

²¹ Desmond Morton, ‘The Canadian Military Experience in the First World War, 1914-1918’ in *The Great War, 1914-1918: Essays on the Military, Political and Social History of the First World War*, ed. By R.J.Q. Adams (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990).

²² Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1997). There is also evidence of the Colony-to-Nation thesis being employed in the archival record. See, for example, LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4803, Folder: 139, File: ‘Miscellaneous C.W.N.S. Covering Personnel and Documents.’

²³ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 435-436.

Victory Campaign narrative, Canadian exceptionalism and nationalism and the Colony-to-Nation thesis and the fact that ‘war weariness’ is very difficult to research and prove have all served to take attention away from the experiences of the common soldier and manifestations of ‘war weariness’ at the front.

Because of the propensity to embrace the Victory Campaign narrative and Canadian exceptionalism, it is crucial for historians to read between the lines, against the grain and to use anecdotal and suggestive evidence to find instances, examples and evidence of manifestations of ‘war weariness.’ Some of the primary sources examined for this study did in fact allude and make indirect references to ‘war weariness.’ Canon Frederick Scott, chief Protestant chaplain with the 1st Canadian Division, for example, wrote in his memoir *The Great War as I Saw It* that the men were “weary” and anxious about crossing the Canal du Nord.²⁴ The men were anxious about getting killed and their chances of survival, were weary because of the lack of sleep and food, the constant marching and inadequate preparations for the assault on this formidable obstacle, and were questioning whether they could pull off such a bold offensive operation. Will Bird, a combat veteran who served with the 42nd Battalion, made reference in *Ghosts Have Warm Hands* to the men refusing to go on patrols and how his men were “fed up” with doing road work on top of all their other combat duties.²⁵ These references to insubordination and indiscipline point to the growing problems associated with ‘war weariness.’

The literature of the Great War is so vast, it is therefore imperative to outline temporal, intellectual and spatial or geographical limits to this study. This thesis will examine the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign in France and Belgium, as it was the only possible time ‘war weariness’ could have been widespread in the Corps. Although there are examples and evidence of ‘war weariness’ in other armies or after the Armistice was signed, these topics fall outside the parameters and focus of this study, but are used to put ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps into context. Even though the German army was deteriorating rapidly during the final months of the war, the successes of the British Expeditionary Force and the Canadian Corps cannot be solely attributed to German ‘war weariness,’ morale problems or the tightening Allied blockade (food shortages). British historian Paddy Griffith, like other First World War historians, is comfortable attributing ‘war weariness’ to the Germans because they lost the War.²⁶ It should

²⁴ Canon Frederick George Scott, *The Great War as I Saw It* (Kingston: Legacy Books Press Classics, 2009).

²⁵ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 135.

²⁶ Paddy Griffith, ed., *British Fighting Methods in the Great War* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1996).

be understood, however, that triumphant armies can also bear signs or manifestations of ‘war weariness’ during this time period, as was the case in the French Army. It is the contention of this thesis that not only was there evidence and examples of ‘war weariness’ in the British army, ‘war weariness’ can be found in the Canadian Corps as well.

It is important to note that there were manifestations of ‘war weariness’ within the Canadian Corps, albeit after the war. During occupation duty in Germany or whilst waiting for de-mobilization, evidence in the literature suggests that the men had had enough of the war. While waiting for a ship to take them back to Halifax, many of the men felt “stranded in Britain;” on top of this, influenza was a serious concern and the men were dealing with a particularly cold winter exacerbated by a coal miners’ strike. Patience finally wore out and the men rioted and looted at Kinmel, a repatriation camp in Wales.²⁷ However, this was more a result of the carry-over effects and cumulative strain from the war itself and the unwillingness of a largely volunteer army of pre-war civilians to accept harsh military discipline in peacetime. In fact, Morton actually uses the term “war weary” to describe the Canadians after the war, especially those on occupation duty or those who were sent to Russia.²⁸ It is clear from these examples that there were manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Corps after the war, so it is reasonable to conclude that ‘war weariness’ also existed in the Corps during the Hundred Days.²⁹

Through careful examination of the existing secondary literature and the primary sources, it is clear that there were manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days but, for reasons discussed above, it is not highlighted or emphasized. ‘War weariness’ is a very interesting case in the annals of Canadian military history, simply because it appears to be a self-evident truth. After all, how could there *not* have been manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the final months of the war, with the constant offensive operations and the often-determined German rearguard actions. Indeed, it is essential to understand that the Hundred Days was unique due to its tempo and intensity. For example Tim Cook, in his important study on the men at the sharp end, argued that battle placed enormous stresses on the regular man in combat. Shell shock was acknowledged, men were literally driven mad by their experiences, constantly

²⁷ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 267. See also: Craig Leslie Mantle, ed., *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience* (Kingston and Toronto: Canadian Defence Academy Press and the Dundurn Group, 2007) and Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory*, 237.

²⁸ Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada (Fifth Edition)* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2007).

²⁹ In fact, it is reasonable to conclude that ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps had its *origins* during the Hundred Days.

seeing and doing brutal things, and sleep deprivation, fear and mental breakdowns were all detrimental factors for the men at the front.³⁰ These men were negatively affected by the war, and this compromised their morale and fighting ability. ‘War weariness,’ however, appears to only have taken root in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days as all the necessary preconditions for its onset were present and it affected a large proportion of the troops. Moreover, the constant stress and strain placed on the soldiers’ bodies and minds were aggravated by a lack of rest and time away from the front. However, during the Hundred Days the enormous casualties sustained and the nature of semi-mobile and open warfare meant there were very few opportunities for men to be taken out of the line.³¹

An examination of the literature furthermore suggests that there was evidence and examples of ‘war weariness’ in other armies as well. German historian Wilhelm Deist, for instance, argued that in the German Army by 1918 there was an increase in disciplinary problems, desertion and “surrender without resistance” due to a decline in morale and a sense of futility among the troops.³² Moreover John Keegan, the British military historian, argued that ‘war weariness’ and decreases in morale were evident in the German army by 1918.³³ Keegan is also one of the historians that adhere to the notion that the results and the outcomes speak for themselves; the German army did collapse, giving credence to the idea that there was ‘war weariness’ in the German army. In fact, many historians are comfortable portraying German troops as ‘war weary’ because the German army and nation did disintegrate. One such historian is Jack Granatstein, who argued that the German armies were exhausted and their morale had been “shaken as weariness took hold.”³⁴ It is important to understand that there was ‘war weariness’ in other comparable armies as well, even if they were victorious in the end.

One such victorious Allied nation that exhibited signs of ‘war weariness’ during the latter half of the war was Great Britain. Social and political pressures on the home front and enormous casualties at the Somme and Passchendaele undermined the combat soldiers’ morale and compromised the fighting effectiveness of the units on the battlefield. The German counterattack

³⁰ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 202

³¹ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 178.

³² Wilhelm Deist and E.J. Feuchtwanger, “The Military Collapse of the German Empire: The Reality Behind the Stab-in-the-Back Myth,” *War in History* 3, 2 (1996): 186-207.

³³ John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000). See pages 408-410.

³⁴ J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

at Cambrai in 1917 and the German Spring Offensives of March 1918 only exacerbated this growing problem, as represented by increasing cases of drunkenness, psychological breakdown, indiscipline and insubordination in the British Expeditionary Force. The British were reaching exhaustion, and the perception that the war perhaps could not be won or that it was simply not worth dying for began to seep into various British frontline units.³⁵ Another victorious Allied nation, Australia, also exhibited signs of ‘war weariness’ during the final months of the war.³⁶ The Australian Imperial Force (AIF) sustained heavy casualties and because they did not have conscription, disciplinary problems and ‘strikes’ resulted. The Australian troops could no longer effectively continue offensive operations, and they were eventually forced out of the line for rest and re-organization.³⁷ As was the case with the Canadian Corps, within the AIF the nature, pace and intensity of the final months of the war, the resultant heavy casualties, and the fact that the Australian units were composed entirely of volunteers and veterans led to a sense of ‘war weariness’ and fatalism among the troops over their prospects of survival.

As these examples make clear, all the armies on the Western Front, save the fresh Americans who had just entered the line, were running out of steam. The Canadian Corps was no different, despite what authors espousing Canadian exceptionalism might argue. As G.W.L. Nicholson, author of Canada’s *Official History of the CEF* has rightly pointed out, the major offensives during the Hundred Days put “unprecedented demands...on the stamina of the forces employed.”³⁸ The loss of stamina did indeed contribute to feelings of ‘war weariness,’ but

³⁵ See, for example, J.P. Harris, *Amiens to Armistice: The BEF in the Hundred Day’s Campaign, 8 August – 11 November 1918* (London: Brassey’s, 1998); Terry Copp et. al, *Canadian Battlefields 1915-1918* (Waterloo: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 2011); Daniel Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987); Norman Stone, *World War One: A Short History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009); Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The First World War* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2001); Angus Brown and Richard Gimblett, *In the Footsteps of the Canadian Corps: Canada’s First World War 1914-1918* (Ottawa: Magic Light Publishing, 2006); John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1978); Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002); Tim Travers, *How the War was Won: Factors that led to Victory in World War One* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2005); G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000) and David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

³⁶ Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1989) and Stone, *World War One*, 157-162; Clare Rhoden, “Another Perspective on Australian Discipline in the Great War: The Egalitarian Bargain,” *War in History* 19, 4 (2012):4450463; Nathan Wise, “‘In Military parlance I suppose we were Mutineers:’ Industrial Relations in the Australian Imperial Force during World War I” *Labour History* 101 (2011): 161-176 and Patsy Adam-Smith, *The Anzacs* (Victoria: Penguin Books, 1978).

³⁷ Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 8.

³⁸ G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Dunhamel, 1962). See page 426.

Nicholson does not tie this idea of stamina into the strength, morale or motivation of the troops. As the Nicholson example illustrates, most of the authors examining the Hundred Days do not actually use the term ‘war weariness.’ Rather, more ambiguous terms such as “tired,” “exhausted” or “worn-out” are employed. Historian Tim Travers, however, is an exception. In his *How the War was Won: Factors that led to Victory in World War One*, Travers argues that there was a sense of “war weariness” in the lower ranks because of heavy casualties and rumours and hopes that the war would soon be over did not come to fruition.³⁹

Indeed, when one engages with the literature of the Great War, one question invariably rises to the fore: how could the Canadian Corps *not* be war weary? After all, the Corps fought three Vimy-sized battles during the Hundred Days without proper preparation, rest or recuperation. Sustained offensive operations, patrols and raids left the men and units depleted and exhausted; and yet, they were still thrown into battle.⁴⁰ After the Battle of Amiens officially ended on 20 August 1918, the Canadian Corps had sustained 11,725 casualties in less than a fortnight.⁴¹ Morale, leadership and fighting strength would almost certainly have been negatively affected by these heavy losses. The Corps fought three major battles in the Hundred Days Campaign; at Amiens, Arras and the Drocourt-Quéant Line and the Canal du Nord and Cambrai. During the offensive operations to break these strong German defensive positions, the Corps sustained nearly 46,000 casualties.⁴² The heaviest losses by the Corps during the entire war were suffered during the Hundred Days, representing approximately twenty percent of all the casualties suffered in this relatively short time period.⁴³ These heavy losses definitely had a negative effect upon the Corps’ cohesion and strength, and contributed to the necessary preconditions for the onset of ‘war weariness.’ Historian Patrick Brennan points out how the heavy casualties sustained by the officers and the physical and psychological demands of combat undermined fighting effectiveness.⁴⁴ It is clear from these examples and the evidence presented that the Canadian Corps was running out of steam and the men were experiencing ‘war

³⁹ Travers, *How the War was Won*, 172.

⁴⁰ Norm Christie, *For King and Empire: The Canadians at Cambrai – September-October 1918* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997).

⁴¹ J.L. Granatstein, *Hell’s Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada’s Great War 1914-1918* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004).

⁴² Christie, *The Canadians at Cambrai*, 1.

⁴³ Morton and Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon*, 153.

⁴⁴ Patrick Brennan, “Good Men for a Hard Job: Canadian Infantry Battalion Commanders on the Western Front,” *Canadian Army Journal*, 9, 1 (2006): 9-28.

weariness.’ Because of the gaps in the literature, this needs to be examined and integrated into our existing knowledge and discussion of the Canadian Corps.

Throughout the research process, there were some limitations and challenges pertaining to the nature of the topic itself. The nature of the topic meant the inability to categorically prove that ‘war weariness’ existed, nevertheless instances, examples and evidence *pointing* to ‘war weariness’ can be provided. These limitations were not a deterrence, however, as one can still acknowledge and engage with the argument that the onset, severity and influence of ‘war weariness’ was a widespread and growing problem by the final months of the war and did compromise the mental stability, morale and combat effectiveness of those in the Corps. This thesis will argue that ‘war weariness’ existed in the Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign, was a widespread and growing problem, and it has been largely overlooked or downplayed in the historiography, as well as in the archival record. Thus this thesis will provide evidence of ‘war weariness’ in the Corps during the final months of the war, as it occurred under comparable conditions in comparable armies during the same time period. It is the contention of this thesis that the cost to the men of the successful conclusion of the war must be acknowledged and integrated into our current understanding and discussion on the Canadian Corps and their battlefield achievements.

As with any researcher, research difficulties were encountered in the search for evidence of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days. First of all, it was difficult to find evidence of ‘war weariness’ because the normal extreme manifestations of it found in other armies, such as mutiny, mass desertion, the refusal to attack, a complete breakdown of discipline and a loss of faith in the cause, were largely absent from the Corps during this time period. Secondly, the steady decline of German morale and fighting effectiveness during the final months of the war served to mask the decline in Canadian battlefield performance as well. Thirdly, it was difficult to find clear examples of ‘war weariness’ during this time period because the government and medical and military authorities of the Canadian Corps did not want to highlight the discipline problems amongst the soldiers or the inability to seize military objectives; this was not something they were keen on preserving for posterity. It was more convenient, for example, to blame the MSA men and reinforcements for the poor performance on the battlefield caused by the breakdown of fighting effectiveness and the inability or unwillingness to carry on in combat. Fourthly, problems were also encountered regarding the

records themselves. For instance, the surviving court martial records for the Canadian Corps, important for assessments of discipline and morale, are vast, unorganized, available only on microfilm and beyond the scope of an MA thesis. Moreover, it was difficult to assess the battlefield performance of all the units of the Corps categorically, again being beyond the scope of this project.⁴⁵ Finally, research and source difficulties also arose as anecdotal personal evidence and memories were more relied upon, rather than on official army and government documents. Thus, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation's series of First World War veteran interviews, *In Flanders Fields*, shall be utilized extensively, although oral history and memory can be somewhat problematic in the realm of academic history. The use of social history techniques and examining anecdotal or suggestive evidence can partially overcome these problems, and it has long been part of military history to attempt to understand the experiences of the many through the writings or words of the few.

This study is attempting to illustrate that 'war weariness' did exist in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign, as well as providing the necessary preconditions for its onset and the factors contributing to 'war weariness.' The final section of this thesis will provide some instances, examples and evidence of the manifestations of 'war weariness' during the final months of the war. To this end, this thesis has been divided up into two sections of five total chapters. Part I of this thesis, containing Chapters 1 and 2, examines the preconditions and contributing factors toward the onset and development of 'war weariness.' Chapter 1 outlines how heavy casualties and the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days contributed to the onset of 'war weariness.' Chapter 2 examines the exhaustion and mental and emotional state of the men at the front as contributing to 'war weariness.' Part II of the thesis, containing Chapters 3, 4 and 5, covers the evidence, examples and manifestations pointing to 'war weariness' during this time period. Chapter 3 will discuss the presence of 'war weariness' in other armies, the soldiers' attitude toward the Armistice and evidence of 'war weariness' in the Corps in the post-Armistice period. Chapter 4 evaluates some tangible examples and manifestations of 'war weariness,' including insubordination and indiscipline and the killing of German prisoners. The final section, Chapter 5, examines the rhetoric, words and writings of the men at the front during the final months of the war to gain insight into 'war weariness' and the soldier's attitude toward

⁴⁵ An assessment of the battlefield performance of the Corps would have meant an in-depth examination of all the 'Operational Orders' and 'After Action' reports for every combat unit in the Corps.

the war. The Conclusion chapter will tie everything together and provide some areas of further research.

There appears to be a lack of clear and direct evidence for manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the historiography of the Canadian Corps. This lack of acknowledgement of ‘war weariness’ as a factor in the Hundred Days Campaign has left a considerable gap in our understanding of the Canadian Corps and those who participated. This breach can be partially filled by using social history techniques, for example by interrogating the experiences of the common soldier and by synthesizing this with a top-down approach. This gap can also be partly filled by reading closely, between the lines and against the grain, and by looking at anecdotal or suggestive evidence that *points* to ‘war weariness,’ such as rising instances of insubordination or indiscipline and the killing of prisoners. By interrogating the source material in such a way, it appears there is ample evidence in the secondary and primary sources pointing to contributing factors (and necessary preconditions) toward ‘war weariness.’ Most notable of these factors are: heavy casualties, exhaustion, the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days and the mental and emotional state of the men at the front. Archival evidence and first-hand accounts also suggest that ‘war weariness’ existed and manifested itself in multifarious ways. Such manifestations of ‘war weariness’ include: insubordination and indiscipline, the killing of German prisoners, and the lack of excitement or jubilation among the men at the signing of the Armistice. Although it cannot be categorically proven, it is reasonable to assert that ‘war weariness,’ discipline and morale problems were present in the Canadian Corps during the final Hundred Days of the war. This acknowledgement of ‘war weariness’ as a factor affecting the men and influencing their actions, or lack thereof, is long overdue and will serve to put the experiences of the men at the sharp end and the achievements of the Corps into a more realistic, accurate and objective light.

Chapter 1

This chapter will interrogate key external factors leading to ‘war weariness,’ including both structural and environmental factors that were out of the men’s control, including: heavy casualties, which depleted the units and reinforced fatalism, and the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days Campaign, which led to ‘war weariness’ among the troops because it placed unprecedented demands upon the soldiers and compromised their morale and fighting effectiveness. Moreover, the tempo and ferocity of the final months of the war, and the resultant heavy casualties, contributed to the onset and influence of ‘war weariness’ because it became harder and harder to believe that one would survive the war.

In terms of leading to ‘war weariness,’ heavy casualties were the leading contributing factor because men became worn down from seeing their comrades and respected leaders become maimed or die so near the end of the war. By the first half of the Hundred Days the Corps was receiving few reinforcements, some in the form of Military Service Act (MSA) men, who were inexperienced, but the majority of whom were returning wounded veterans. Archival sources illustrate, for instance, how the Corps was consistently suffering more battle casualties and other decreases than reinforcements could compensate for.⁴⁶ This, of course, meant that the overall numbers in the Corps were steadily declining. Heavy casualties should be interpreted as a contributing factor toward the onset of ‘war weariness’ because they were a constant reminder to the men that they had little to no chance of survival, hence the adoption of a fatalistic attitude and a sense of hopelessness about their personal chances of making it home. Importantly for the onset of ‘war weariness,’ at no time during the war was the proportion of long-serving combat troops higher within the Corps.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ One report from the records of the 78th Canadian Infantry Battalion, for example, illustrated how the number of reinforcements was not enough to replace decreases, represented by casualties, evacuated or transferred men. The Battalion received 185 officers and 3,147 other ranks at one point, but had lost 197 officers and 3,535 other ranks (a difference of 400 men all ranks), and yet were expected to continue with offensive operations. See LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4237, Folder: 2, File: 9, ‘Historical: Records 78th C.I.BN.’ Moreover, a report written by a Staff Captain of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade of 8 October 1918 stated that the “reinforcements available at present amount to about 1/3 of the casualties received in the recent Operations.” See LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4030, Folder: 24, File: 4, ‘Reinforcements: 19-10-17 to 8-12-18.’

⁴⁷ The official historian G.W.L. Nicholson, for example, wrote that only 24,132 MSA men were actually taken on strength to units in France. This amounts to about the size of an infantry division. G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Dunhamel, 1962). See page 551 for information on the MSA.

By the Last Hundred Days the casualty rate, simply put, became unsustainable for the Canadian Corps. Between August 8th and November 11th, for example, the 3rd Canadian Division suffered 10,174 battle casualties, but only received 9,068 reinforcements during that same time period; this works out to a difference of 1,106 men, or about the nominal strength of an infantry battalion.⁴⁸ More telling perhaps is the fact that half the men in the 3rd Division became casualties in the final three months of the war.⁴⁹ The cumulative effects of heavy casualties took its toll on the men in the Corps by eroding morale and compromising unit cohesiveness, and hence undermining combat effectiveness. Heavy casualties led to ‘war weariness’ because men knew they would continue to receive orders to carry out difficult offensive operations, but would have to do so even after heavy losses; after the arrival of semi-open warfare coupled with the tempo and pace of the Hundred Days operations, it seemed clear that their chances of unscathed survival had diminished significantly. If this was not bad enough, the Corps also received insufficient replacements, crucial for maintaining offensive momentum. As historians have pointed out, many of these MSA reinforcements were depicted by the men and receiving units as “simply not up to snuff” and could not replace trusted, experienced, competent and well-liked soldiers.⁵⁰ The men at the front themselves acknowledged how combat effectiveness was compromised by the high rate of casualties, especially to junior officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs). Corporal Albert West, for example, wrote how during the Hundred Days his unit was expected to enter the fray once more, but realized that they were too few to accomplish their task. He wrote in his diary: “In Heaven’s name, surely we handful of men (and so few officers...) are not to be put thro’ the mill without more reinforcements. We need 400-500 men at

⁴⁸ It must also be understood that a full 20% of all the casualties suffered by the Canadians during the war were incurred during the final 100 days. LAC, RG 24, Volume: 1844, Folder: G.A.Q. 11-5, File: ‘General Statistics.’ Another example that emerges in the literature states that in August of 1918, the 58th Canadian Infantry Battalion suffered 474 casualties but received zero reinforcements in this time period. See Kevin R. Shackleton, *Second to None: The Fighting 58th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Toronto & Oxford: The Dundurn Group, 2002). See page 262 for the pertinent information on August casualties and reinforcements. It should also be noted that the number of wounded certainly contains men who were wounded more than once.

⁴⁹ See Bill Rawling for statistics on casualties in the Canadian Corps and a breakdown of casualties by month. Bill Rawling, *Surviving Trench Warfare: Technology and the Canadian Corps, 1914-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

⁵⁰ Mark Zuehlke, *Brave Battalion: The Remarkable Saga of the 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish) in the First World War* (Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd., 2008). It must also be emphasized that many of those being added on strength to units would have been wounded men returning from treatment in the rear. However, perhaps many of these men, though trained and experienced, would not have been fully recovered from their battle wounds or psychological breakdown.

once.”⁵¹ His indignation shows how it was all too clear to the men that heavy casualties compromised fighting efficiency and made the men fed up and lose heart with seemingly unceasing orders to attack.

The total casualties suffered by the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days amounted to 45,835 in the 96 days of fighting, between the opening of the Battle of Amiens and the signing of the Armistice.⁵² Moreover, because much of the fighting ended in mid-October with the capture of Cambrai and the majority of casualties were accumulated in the first half of the Hundred Days, this period was even more intense for the troops than it appeared. Of this number, 11,882 men were listed as fatal casualties. This does not include those that were wounded, gassed, or removed from combat due to sickness or shell shock.⁵³

The casualties suffered by the Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign represented its heaviest losses for the entire war, concentrated into this relatively short time period. The fact that the men were now attacking across open country without the advantage of pre-existing trenches and dugouts meant that they were more exposed and vulnerable when advancing. The nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days, containing semi-open warfare and attacks launched in rapid succession, led to a higher than normal casualty rate. This is perhaps counter-intuitive because although German morale and strength were waning rapidly and the Corps was advancing, heavy casualties still ensued. Allan McNab of the 21st Battalion remembered that even though the Corps was attacking and pushing the Germans back, during the final months “our casualty rate went up drastically” after the opening of the offensive at Amiens on 8 August.⁵⁴ The high casualty rate, coupled with the sustained offensive operations of the final

⁵¹ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 32, Diary of Corporal Albert West, Entry for October 9th 1918, Page 46.

⁵² Many secondary sources examine this topic. See: Shane B. Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (Westport: CT, 1997); Jack Granatstein, *Hell's Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada's Great War 1914-1918* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004); J.L. Granatstein and Dean F. Oliver, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 – Volume II* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008). However, on many days there was effectively no fighting. The Corps was, though, still ordered forward to maintain contact with the retreating Germans.

⁵³ LAC, RG 24, Volume: 1824, Folder: G.A.Q. 5-48, File: ‘Summary of Canadian Corps Operations 1914-1918.’

⁵⁴ LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume: 10, Interview with Allan McNab of the 21st Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, Page 5. The casualties suffered by the Corps in the Hundred Days constituted fully one-fifth of all Canadian casualties experienced during the entire war. See Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993). The information on casualties can be found on page 179.

months of the war, led to the onset of ‘war weariness’ amongst the troops of the Corps as they began to lose hope that they would survive to the end of the conflict.

It is worth emphasizing that heavy losses to combat leaders contributed to feelings of ‘war weariness’ because it tended to hurt individual and collective morale and combat motivation, removed trusted leadership and experience and undermined unit cohesion. At the Fresnes-Rouvroy Line in late August, for example, three days of heavy fighting cost the two divisions engaged nearly 6,000 casualties, including every single officer of the 22nd Battalion.⁵⁵ First-hand accounts also highlight the heavy losses to officers and NCOs and the detrimental effects upon the associated unit. Victor Wheeler of the 50th Battalion wrote how at the Canal du Nord, all officers of ‘D’ Company became casualties.⁵⁶ J. Sprostin of the 10th Battalion remembered that at Amiens the “casualties were heavy among the officers” and stated that “I know I was the only one left in B Coy [Company].”⁵⁷ These heavy losses to combat leaders put further pressure upon the survivors of the unit and also contributed to the belief that it was only a matter of time before the latter became casualties as well.

Historian Ian McCulloch has argued that morale “visibly sagged” in the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade with the death of a trusted and experienced leader.⁵⁸ These casualties negatively affected the units involved, because these leaders inspired confidence among the men, offered advice and gave protection and a sense of comfort to the soldiers at the front. Extrapolate the death of one well-liked leader to several officer casualties per company across the entire Canadian Corps, and it is easier to understand how this contributed to ‘war weariness.’ Deward Barnes of the 19th Battalion wrote that the heavy casualties, especially to officers, on the opening day of the Amiens offensive hurt unit cohesion, morale and effectiveness.⁵⁹ Another infantryman of the 8th Battalion, C.E. Barnes, stated that an experienced officer could not simply be replaced by a reinforcement from England. Barnes asserted that although an officer had 26 months of service in the field, he was still not able to sit out the battle at the Drocourt-Quéant Line because,

⁵⁵ John Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory: The Canadian Corps in World War I* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965) and Daniel Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography* (Toronto: Methuen, 1985) and Cook, *Shock Troops*, 474.

⁵⁶ Victor W. Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man’s Land: 50th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Alberta Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000).

⁵⁷ LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume 8, Interview with J. Sprostin of the 10th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, Page 12.

⁵⁸ Ian McCulloch, ‘Crisis in Leadership: The Seventh Brigade and the Nivelles “Mutiny,” 1918’ in *The Apathetic and Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience*, ed. by Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston and Toronto: Canadian Defence Academy Press and the Dundurn Group, 2007).

⁵⁹ Bruce Cane, ed., *It made you think of Home: The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1916-1919* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2004).

as he explained, “you can’t replace a sergeant with twenty-six months service with a conscript.”⁶⁰ This idea that the replacements were simply not good enough was rather widespread. The decline in combat effectiveness due to heavy officer and NCO casualties was also acknowledged by the military authorities. For example, a report written by the commanding officer of the 2nd Canadian Division, Major-General Henry Burstall, stated that heavy casualties, especially to officers, led to an “unavoidable loss of efficiency” in the Hundred Days.⁶¹ It was, simply put, quite difficult to replace a trusted and experienced member of ‘the team,’ and overreliance on long-serving veterans served to reinforce feelings of fatalism.

Breaking down the casualties suffered by the Corps during the final months of the war into separate battles, it is evident that each operation was just as bloody as the previous one, if not more so. Despite the extensive preparations for the all-arms attack and the element of surprise, the Battle of Amiens still resulted in heavy casualties for the Canadians. The Corps commander, Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie, wrote in his diary that between 8 and 20 August, roughly encompassing the Battle of Amiens, the Corps suffered 11,822 casualties, including 3,868 on the first day alone.⁶² Following the opening of the attack at Amiens, the infantry was described as “exhausted and spent,” and yet continued to be used the next day, as the Corps again led the attack.⁶³

Archival records illustrate that this casualty rate was unsustainable. One report stated that the casualties at Amiens for the 1st Division alone amounted to 3,391 men.⁶⁴ These staff reports also exemplified how combat formations took disproportionately heavy losses. Another report of the Amiens operations stated that casualties for the 42nd Battalion in their attack on a trench system on August 12th resulted in 148 casualties, out of an attacking force of 462.⁶⁵ This works out to a casualty rate of approximately 32%, which was clearly untenable for any sustained period of time. The men and officers taking part in these operations also remembered the heavy casualties suffered at Amiens. Private Andrew Coulter, for example, recalled the high casualty

⁶⁰ LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume 8, Interview with C.E. Barnes of the 8th Battalion, Page 16.

⁶¹ LAC, RG 9, III D, Volume: 4794, Folder: 54, File: ‘Narrative of Operations March 13th to November 11th 1918.’

⁶² Mark Osborne Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie: Diaries, Letters and Report to the Ministry, 1917-1933* (Waterloo: LCMSDS Press of Wilfrid Laurier University, 2008); G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Dunhamel, 1962); Shackleton, *58th Battalion*, 251 and Zuehlke, *16th Battalion*, 210.

⁶³ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 438.

⁶⁴ LAC, RG 24, Volume: 1844, Folder: G.A.Q. 11-5, File: ‘General Statistics.’

⁶⁵ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4154, Folder: 6, File: 6, ‘Operations - Amiens.’

rate and tough German resistance on 9 August. He wrote that “Fritz was shelling fairly lively and [we] got a number of casualties...the 6th Brigade were cut up pretty bad and dead bodies of both sides lying quite thick everywhere.”⁶⁶

Moreover, the fact that the units were taking losses even when not advancing was not lost on the men. C.B. Holmes of the 25th Battalion, for example, remembered that simply moving into position in a jumping-off trench on 9 August left his company with only one officer and twenty-nine other ranks remaining.⁶⁷ Moreover, W.E. Curtis of the 10th Battalion recounted how his trench mortar battery suffered 15 casualties moving forward on the 9th of August, despite the fact that they did no actual fighting.⁶⁸ Although these losses were considered attacking casualties, these losses occurred prior to the units actually moving beyond their forward positions. Other examples in the archival record illustrate how units could suffer quite substantial casualties even far behind the front lines.⁶⁹ Daily Casualty Summaries for the Hundred Days, for instance, demonstrate how even in sectors where there was no actual fighting, casualties still accumulated and diluted fighting strength.⁷⁰ This, of course, had been the case throughout the war, but was different during the final months of the war because of the cumulative effect upon so many long-serving troops.

Unfortunately, the rate of casualties would not improve as the Hundred Days wore on. At the Battle of Arras, which included attacks on the Drocourt-Quéant and the Fresnes-Rouvroy Lines, heavy casualties were incurred at these tough German defensive positions. Documents pertaining to the Arras operations stated that casualties were “steadily increasing” and that on 27 August alone, the Canadians suffered 52 officer and 1,139 other rank casualties. Between August 26th and September 7th, the four divisions of the Corps suffered a total of 455 officer and 9,102 other rank casualties.⁷¹ Another report listed the Corps casualties as 14,349 at Arras and the Drocourt-Quéant Line. This represented a loss of roughly 15% of all Canadian forces engaged, but was a much higher proportion for the combat soldiers taking part.⁷² These heavy casualties

⁶⁶ Canadian War Museum (hereafter CWM), George Metcalf Archival Collection (hereafter GMAC), ‘First World War Diaries of Private Andrew Robert Coulter,’ 20060105-001.

⁶⁷ LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume: 11, Interview with C.B. Holmes of the 25th Battalion, Interview 2 of 7, Page 2. It should be pointed out, however, that we do not know how many men were in Holmes’ company to begin with.

⁶⁸ LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with W.E. Curtis of the 10th Battalion, Page 8.

⁶⁹ CWM, GMAC, ‘Diary Maintained by Private Robert Colborne Miller,’ 20110042-002.

⁷⁰ LAC, RG 9 III B3, Volume: 3775, Folder: ‘Casualties,’ File: ‘Sept.-Oct. 1918.’

⁷¹ LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume: 3855, Folder: 75, File: 1, ‘Administrative.’

⁷² LAC, RG 24, Volume: 1844, Folder: GAQ 11-11B, File: ‘Strengths & Casualties in various battles of the Great War.’

were unsustainable and seriously undermined the strength and combat effectiveness of the units engaged. Deward Barnes, for example, wrote in his diary that the 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade on August 28th was “only a ghost of the formation” it was but two days previously.⁷³

The next major offensive operation undertaken by the Corps was the attack across the Canal du Nord and toward the French city of Cambrai. However, heavy casualties resulted in merely fighting toward and holding the left (or west) bank of the Canal. Frank Jameson of the 15th Battalion recalled that attacking toward the Canal resulted in heavy casualties, so much so that his unit had to be taken out of the line. As he grimly explained it: “Our ranks were pretty well depleted. I think I come [sic] out with 35 men. You see none of the original officers [from the battalion survived]. Yeh, it was tough going.”⁷⁴ Moreover, Major H.S. Hanson of the 43rd Battalion remembered in the push toward the Canal he was the only officer left in his unit, and stated that “I lost most of my men.”⁷⁵

After the bloody fight reaching the west bank of the Canal, the Corps suffered heavily simply holding onto it in the face of stubborn German opposition. A 3rd Division report on the operations between September 5th and 17th stated that “the enemy has the advantage as regards positions and that, in consequence, the battalion is suffering an undue proportion of casualties in its efforts to maintain itself on the Canal Bank.”⁷⁶ As the attack across the Canal did not commence until 27 September, this precarious situation for the units holding the west bank continued for some time.

The attack across the Canal itself, though successful, was no less bloody than the advance to it. The Corps suffered approximately 18,000 total casualties at the Canal du Nord and subsequent operations at nearby Cambrai, and contemporary accounts conform to this interpretation of heavy casualties at the Canal du Nord and Cambrai.⁷⁷ A 3rd Division report stated that between September 27th and October 10th (the day after Cambrai was captured), this division alone suffered 181 officer and 3,830 other rank casualties.⁷⁸ It is important to note here that the 3rd Division was not even involved in the bloody crossing of the Canal itself. George

⁷³ Cane, *Deward Barnes*, 245.

⁷⁴ LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume: 9, Interview with Frank Jameson of the 15th Battalion, Interview 2 of 3, Page 20.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, Volume: 13, Interview with Major H.S. Hanson of the 43rd Battalion, Page 23.

⁷⁶ LAC, RG 9 III C 1, Volume: 3856, Folder: 76, File: 6, ‘Operations – Canadian Corps: 5-9-18 to 17-9-18.’

⁷⁷ Norm Christie, *For King and Empire: The Canadians at Cambrai – September-October 1918* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997).

⁷⁸ LAC, RG 9 III, Volume: 3857, Folder: 80, File: 1, ‘3rd Canadian Division Report on Cambrai Battle – September 27th to October 10th, 1918.’

Bell of the 58th Battalion also recalled heavy casualties at Cambrai, writing that “the battalion had been pretty well shot to pieces” and added that “you took in 500 [men] and you came out under 100.”⁷⁹

After the capture of Cambrai, the Corps was involved primarily in semi-open warfare undertaking a slow pursuit of the retreating enemy. Nevertheless, when the Germans decided to make a stand at the French city of Valenciennes, heavy casualties ensued. One of the major problems facing troops in First World War, and an issue that was not fully solved by its conclusion, was the fact that the enemy defenders were able to engage with the attacking troops and inflict serious casualties before the latter even got within range of the defenders. A report by Major-General Watson of the 4th Division stated that his division suffered 1,428 casualties at Valenciennes between October 27th and November 6th.⁸⁰ Even at the end of German strength and their will to continue, they continued to inflict heavy casualties on the Corps, further reinforcing ‘war weariness’ and a sense of fatalism.

The Canadian Corps suffered heavy casualties throughout every month of the Hundred Days Campaign.⁸¹ During August 1918, for example, the 20th Battalion lost 18 officers and 563 other ranks, but received only 206 as replacements.⁸² This is particularly noteworthy as it indicates that reinforcements seldom kept pace with losses. The papers of Private Charles Couser illustrate first-hand not only the heavy casualties suffered by the Corps, but also the insufficient number of men being added on strength, to say nothing of the calibre of these replacements. He points out, for example, that his 78th Battalion arrived in France with 45 officers and 1,034 other ranks, but by November 11th 1918 the unit could muster only 31 officers and 368 other ranks.⁸³ This situation was ripe for the onset and development of ‘war weariness’ because these tired men and depleted units were asked to do more with less which further undermined their chances of survival.⁸⁴

⁷⁹ Again, these casualty rates were clearly unsustainable. See Wheeler, *50th Battalion*, 262 and LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume: 15, Interview with George Bell of the 58th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, Page 3.

⁸⁰ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4797, Folder: 84, File: ‘4th Canadian Division Report: Valenciennes Operations – Oct. 27th to Nov. 6th.’

⁸¹ G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Dunhamel, 1962). See pages 546-548.

⁸² Major D.J. Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment): Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Stone & Cox Limited, 1935).

⁸³ CWM, GMAC, ‘78th Canadian Infantry Battalion: Statement of Increases and Decreases Since Arrival of Unit in France 13-8-16 up to and including 11-11-18,’ 20080091-017.

⁸⁴ Corrigan, *Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 242.

It is also important to understand that not only did the Corps suffer heavy casualties throughout the Hundred Days, but that the infantry sustained a disproportionate amount of these casualties. The infantry units felt the effects of heavy casualties and the loss of leaders more than other units (such as the field artillery or machine gun units), but were still being tasked with the toughest jobs, such as the assault on German trenches and machine gun emplacements. In contrast to the infantry, artillerymen had at least some physical distance from the scenes of heavy fighting and had some measure of psychological safety; gunners did not, for example, have to take part in bayonet charges against the enemy.⁸⁵ A close examination of the 'Daily Casualty Summaries' reveal that casualties were also not spread evenly between divisions, or even between units within a division.⁸⁶ This disparity served to put undue strain on certain units and the soldiers within them.

Heavy casualties and a higher than normal casualty rate, compared to earlier in the war, was certainly not good for unit cohesion or morale. C.J. Albon of the 25th Battalion recalled that when attacking near Cambrai "A Company turned to the left, and ran plump into a machine gun...he lost about 25 men there in a split second, they [therefore] had to call off the attack."⁸⁷ Albon here emphasized that heavy casualties often led to poor performance on the battlefield and added further exhaustion and stress on those that did survive. Heavy casualties served as a constant reminder to the men that their chances of survival were slight, and thus was an important precondition for the onset of 'war weariness.'

During the last three months of sustained offensive operations, the Corps fought three Vimy-sized battles in as many months, the most intense period of fighting in the entire war.⁸⁸ Orders to continue advancing and fighting severely taxed the strength and endurance of the men, and led to physical and emotional exhaustion. The continued attacks and advances meant that the troops were given much less respite from combat, even when out of the line. The pace and tempo of the Hundred Days also meant that there was very little time for preparation prior to operations,

⁸⁵ Ernest G. Black, *I Want One Volunteer* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965). See pages 161-162.

⁸⁶ LAC, RG 9 III B3, Volume: 3775, Folder: 'Casualties: Sept.-Oct. 1918,' File: 'Sept. Oct. 1918 Casualties – Vol. XVI.'

⁸⁷ LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume: 11, Interview with C.J. Albon of the 25th Battalion, Interview 3 of 7, Page 7. Moreover, Frank Jameson of the 15th Battalion was also candid about this issue, and stated that the attack on Telegraph Hill left "[so] many officers killed and [so] many NCOs killed that it was hard" to carry on with the ordered attack. See *Ibid*, Volume: 9, Interview with Frank Jameson of the 15th Battalion, Interview 2 of 4, Page 17.

⁸⁸ John D. Conrad, "Canadian Corps Logistics during the Last Hundred Days, August-November 1918," *The Canadian Army Journal* 8, 2 (2005): 86.

and very little time for rest and acclimatization of reinforcements after operations. Factor in stubborn German resistance, the presence of civilians, communication, supply and logistical difficulties, inclement weather and tough terrain and it is easy to see how ‘war weariness’ set in amongst the men at the front during this time period. It seemed that all the odds were stacked against the Canadian infantryman and thus survival appeared more improbable. The nature, pace and intensity of the final months of the war were vital preconditions for the onset of ‘war weariness,’ because they served to increase the mortal dangers exposed to the men and thus decreased their chances of survival; the acknowledgment of this fact by the troops led to a fatalistic and fed-up attitude, certainly an indicator of ‘war weariness.’

During the Hundred Days the Corps was ordered to clear some of the toughest German defensive positions, such as the Hindenburg Line, in large measure because they had done no major fighting in the first half of 1918. Moreover, British historians asserted that BEF Commander-in-Chief Douglas Haig used the Corps as a “reserve of last resort” and that Haig was increasingly reliant on the Corps by the Hundred Days.⁸⁹ Additionally, Canadian historian G.W.L. Nicholson argued that because Haig and the British High Command wanted the war to be completed by 1918, he relied upon the Corps to achieve this end; in part because of its reputation for effectiveness and cohesiveness.⁹⁰ Finally, it has been argued that General Horne of the British 1st Army, whom the Canadians were under during much of the final months of the war, gave the Corps the “most crucial role[s]” during this time period.⁹¹ Although this is certainly a matter of opinion, there is no doubt that the Corps was being relied on more and more during the final offensives, if not to carry the weight of all the attacks, then to act as the spearhead for these operations in one sector of the line. Suffice it to say that the Corps faced heavy sustained fighting during the Hundred Days and that this took its toll upon the men at the front.

Contemporary accounts also support the notion that the Canadian Corps was being relied on more heavily during the final months of the war. Second-Lt. Charles Sheridan, for instance, noted how Foch was keeping up the pressure on the Germans all along the line, pushing his units

⁸⁹ Peter Hart, *1918: A Very British Victory* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2008) and John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000).

⁹⁰ Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 388

⁹¹ J.P. Harris, *Amiens to Armistice: The BEF in the Hundred Day's Campaign, 8 August – 11 November 1918* (London: Brassey's, 1998).

and men nearly to the breaking point.⁹² Furthermore K.G. Blackader, a junior officer of the 13th Battalion, commented on the unique and intense nature of the Hundred Days. He recollected that a normal year for the infantry usually consisted of “two or three times over the top in a year, and the normal special training for these things, and perhaps if you were lucky five days in courses.”⁹³ During the Hundred Days, however, the men went ‘over the top’ many more times than they were accustomed to and there were far fewer opportunities for ‘special training’ or sending men on training courses. This adopted policy of “a resolute, continuous offensive everywhere” contributed to the mental and physical exhaustion of the men, resulted in heavy casualties and served to wear down the Corps and its men and create conditions ripe for the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness.’⁹⁴

The fact that the Hundred Days ushered in a new phase of warfare not only meant the increased vulnerabilities and casualties of the infantry, but also that it contributed to feelings of uncertainty and insecurity among the Canadian troops. This new type of warfare was characterized by more mobile operations, in pursuit of the Germans, in a semi-open warfare setting. Although leaving behind the squalor of the trenches was a welcome development for most soldiers, being in the open left the men more exposed and vulnerable to German artillery, rifle and machine gun fire. W.S. Latte of the 29th Battalion admitted that the semi-open warfare of the Hundred Days was “pretty dangerous” for the attacking troops.⁹⁵

Although the Corps and its constituent units spent time in the summer of 1918 practising for semi-open warfare, the Corps had no actual experience in this type of combat.⁹⁶ As Canadian historian John Swettenham has argued, it was very difficult for the Corps to adjust to “fluid, mobile conditions after years of static warfare” in the trenches.⁹⁷ This adjustment required new tactics as well as a new mentality and attitude toward combat operations.

The Hundred Days was also difficult for the Corps to adjust to because there was no one formula that could be followed. Thus, the planners of these offensive operations could not simply

⁹² CWM, GMAC, ‘Diary of 2nd Lt. Charles Wesley Sheridan,’ 20000034-035.

⁹³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 9, Interview with K.G. Blackader of the 13th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, Page 6A.

⁹⁴ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4806, Folder: 165, File: ‘Battle of Arras - Initial Assault: 26th – 28th August.’

⁹⁵ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with Lt.-Col. W.S. Latte of the 29th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, Page 5.

⁹⁶ Paddy Griffith, ed., *British Fighting Methods of the Great War* (London: Frank Cass & Co. Ltd., 1996).

⁹⁷ John Swettenham, *Canada and the First World War* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1968).

recycle attack plans, although the Corps did continue with bite-and-hold tactics consistently.⁹⁸ The final months of the war saw all manner of fighting and gave the Corps opportunities to engage in different types of combat. The Hundred Days were characterized by traditional set-piece battles, including attacks across open country, raids and patrols, pursuit operations and attacks across ravines, railway lines and everything in between. During much of this time period the Corps was in open country, which provided little to no shelter (such as trenches) and left the attackers open and exposed to the defender's machine guns to a degree not experienced in trench warfare conditions.

Another aspect of the Hundred Days, fighting within the vicinity of villages, towns or cities, also pushed the men to the very limits of their strength and endurance. The Germans were able to fortify brick and stone buildings and set-up interlocking fields of fire, making any approach by the infantry deadly. These assaults on urban areas, such as at Valenciennes, were particularly tough on the infantry and the Corps was forced to overcome strong defensive positions and "fortress-like villages" on the road to Cambrai.⁹⁹ George Bell of the 58th Battalion remembered that the operation against Cambrai was "a frontal attack...and we were really butchered."¹⁰⁰ The heavy casualties suffered by the Corps caused by constant fighting led to 'war weariness' and the sagging of spirits for long-serving soldiers when the end of the war was in sight; nobody wanted to die in a war that was won, but not quite over.

The nature, pace and intensity of the final months of the war also contributed to the onset of 'war weariness' because it increased the chances that attacking troops would be killed. The Hundred Days saw the Corps attacking in difficult terrain, and many veterans discussed how this was made even worse by German actions to further slow down the Corps. German demolition crews, for example, became quite adept at blowing levies, dykes and canals to flood large areas in front of the attacking troops. Gunner Robert Miller, for instance, complained in his diary in October of 1918 that the country had been "badly flooded" which prevented the artillery from keeping pace with the infantry.¹⁰¹ Infantry attacking in the open without the necessary artillery

⁹⁸ G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000).

⁹⁹ J. Castell Hopkins, *Canada at War, 1914-1918: A Record of Heroism and Achievement* (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review, 1919).

¹⁰⁰ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 15, Interview with George Bell of the 58th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, Page 4.

¹⁰¹ CWM, GMAC, 'Diary Maintained by Private Robert Colborne Miller,' 20110042-002. Another veteran, Colonel R. Shankland of the 43rd Battalion, also remembered the going was tough at the end of the Hundred Days because

barrage would certainly have increased their casualties. Gordon Hamilton of the 58th Battalion also shed light on the Hundred Days and the difficulties it presented. He recalled in a post-war interview that the “Canal du Nord and Cambrai was quite nasty...we had quite heavy casualties there...he [the Germans] put up quite a resistance there and also it was the general terrain...was relatively easy to defend, the type of place that could be defended.”¹⁰² It is clear, then, that not only were the Germans putting up strong rearguard and machine gun positions to slow down the Corps, they also made the advance of the Canadians as difficult, laborious and costly as possible.

The nature, tempo and ferocity of the Hundred Days also led to the onset and development of ‘war weariness’ because the men seemed to be always on the move, leaving them with little to no respite and leading to physical and mental exhaustion among the troops. Several first-hand accounts pertaining to this time period, for instance, contain references to the long and tiring marches. Arthur Goodmurphy of the 28th Battalion remembered that during the final months of the war “we seemed to be always in action or moving into action, or a position.”¹⁰³ The historian for the 58th Battalion provided a clear example of one of these long, exhausting marches. He wrote that in one single night, the Battalion had to march 25 kilometres in the dark over rough roads.¹⁰⁴ These sustained offensive operations gave the men no break from combat and added to their feeling of being locked in a struggle over which they had absolutely no control. Although physical exhaustion is not the same as ‘war weariness,’ it was a contributing factor toward its onset because it undermined the fighting efficiency of the attacking troops and thus increased their chances of becoming a casualty.

These continual advances and long marches were sanctioned by the British High Command and Corps leadership as part of the overall strategy for defeating the Germans. For example, a report on the advance to Mons issued by the 1st British Army to the Canadian Corps stated that: “Formations in the line, on completion of any day’s operations, were immediately to make preparations for the resumption of the advance on the following day without waiting for definite orders on the subject... [the advance was] to be continued, regardless of any delay on the

the Germans had successfully flooded large areas surrounding the city of Valenciennes. See LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 13, Interview with Colonel R. Shankland of the 43rd Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, Page 10.

¹⁰² LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 15, Interview with Gordon Hamilton of the 58th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, Page 8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid*, Volume: 12, Interview with: Arthur B. Goodmurphy of the 28th Battalion, Interview 3 of 5, Page 5.

¹⁰⁴ Shackleton, *The Fighting 58th Battalion*, 240.

part of troops on either flank.”¹⁰⁵ These orders to prepare advanced jumping-off positions meant that the infantry at the front was given very little time to rest and recuperate after a long day spent either advancing, fighting, or often both. Of course troops had been physically exhausted and pushed to the breaking point earlier in the war, but the difference now was that the soldiers had to take part in three massive battles in as many months, and the cumulative effect of the whole war on the men’s state of mind. This was especially true because in the autumn of 1918, more men in the Corps were veterans than ever before.¹⁰⁶

The pace and tempo of the Hundred Days also meant that units in the field were given very little opportunity to properly prepare, train, do rehearsals or undertake adequate reconnaissance for upcoming offensives. This was the case even though from the High Command and through the battalion level of command it was acknowledged that proper preparation was crucial for effective advances and attacks.¹⁰⁷ However, proper preparation proved increasingly difficult due to the pace of operations during the final months of the war.

Some concrete examples will help clarify this point. Very little preparation time for upcoming offensive operations meant that, in one case, no new aerial photographs were available to help the officers and staff planning the attack.¹⁰⁸ Furthermore, much of the Arras campaign was “hurriedly and haphazardly planned,” leading to confusion and unnecessary casualties.¹⁰⁹ Additionally, historian Patrick Brennan argued that these “rushed preparations” led to disastrous attacks and hurt morale.¹¹⁰ These hasty preparations also compromised aspects of the attack that the infantry had grown reliant upon, such as effective artillery support. The inability to do proper reconnaissance of the battlefield and the launching of artillery bombardments without the proper pre-arrangement procedures meant that the infantry “would pay dearly.”¹¹¹ First-hand accounts also referred to these hasty preparations and the detrimental effect they had on the attacking

¹⁰⁵ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4795, Folder: 58, File: ‘Final Draft for Operations in the Spring: Cambrai and Advance to Mons - 1918.’

¹⁰⁶ This was the case because after mid-1916, voluntary enlistments in Canada had largely dried up, many slightly wounded men were sent back to the front and the fact that MSA men did not appear in strength with the Corps until after the Battle of Cambrai in mid-October 1918.

¹⁰⁷ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4201, Folder: 13, File: 4, ‘Tactical Training.’

¹⁰⁸ Hart, *1918*, 353.

¹⁰⁹ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 498.

¹¹⁰ Patrick Brennan, “Major-General Sir David Watson: A Critical Appraisal of Canadian Generalship in the Great War,” in *Great War Commanders*, ed. by Andrew B. Godefroy (Kingston: Canadian Defence Academy Press, 2010).

¹¹¹ Harris, *Amiens*, 92 and Daniel Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987). See page 148 in Dancocks.

troops. H.R.N. Clyne of the 19th Battalion, for example, remembered that “there was no time to organize artillery support” for the attack on the Canal de la Sensée.¹¹²

Many of the men taking part in these offensive operations noted in their letters and diaries the lack of preparation time. Will Bird wrote in his memoir that these hasty preparations led to enormous confusion, such as the issuing of incorrect maps to the men and non-commissioned officers (NCOs), while Deward Barnes remembered only having a “few hours notice” before the attack at Arras.¹¹³ This would have been particularly troublesome for NCOs and officers, who had to develop complex attacks plans on such short notice and personally prepare their men for battle and calm nerves. Staff intelligence officer L.J. Younger of the 10th Battalion recalled that “I didn’t get my operational orders till the day of the attack.”¹¹⁴ As a point of comparison, most units in the Canadian Corps were given several months to prepare for the assault on Vimy Ridge.¹¹⁵ By the Hundred Days, this time was simply not available to the Corps, and most of the detrimental consequences were borne by the combat troops at the front.

The rapid advances of the Corps also compounded the difficulties of the medical services. Medical officers noted, for instance, that because the casualty clearing stations and field hospitals were so far back from the constantly-advancing front lines, this necessarily resulted in heavier casualties.¹¹⁶ Moreover, because of the open nature of much of the Hundred Days fighting, it became “virtually impossible” to evacuate the wounded properly.¹¹⁷

The swift pace of advance during the Hundred Days also caused serious problems for the maintenance of adequate artillery and machine gun support. Relatively speaking, the infantry was advancing so quickly, and because of the dearth of proper roads, it became quite difficult to keep the artillery and machine guns forward in close proximity. S. Hemphill of the 10th Battalion remembered that because of the swift advance at Amiens, the attacking troops actually out-ran their artillery support.¹¹⁸ This led to further casualties to the vulnerable infantry attacking across open fields without a life-saving barrage. Senior officers and staff also recognised the

¹¹² LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with H.R.N. Clyne of the 29th Battalion, Interview 4 of 4, Page 2.

¹¹³ Will R. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands: A Memoir of the Great War 1916-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1968) and Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 236.

¹¹⁴ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with L.J. Younger of the 10th Battalion, Page 10.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, Volume: 12, Interview with Robert Hanna of the 29th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, Page 4.

¹¹⁶ Sir Andrew Macphail, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War 1914-1919: The Medical Services* (Ottawa: F.A. Acland – Printer to the King’s Most Excellent Majesty, 1925).

¹¹⁷ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4805, Folder: 157, File: ‘Manuscript: Drocourt-Queant Line.’

¹¹⁸ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with S. Hemphill of the 10th Battalion, Page 15.

seriousness of this problem. A 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade report on the Amiens operations stated that the field artillery, let alone the heavy artillery, and even machine guns “have had a great difficulty in keeping pace with the infantry,” who often had to advance without these crucial supporting arms.¹¹⁹

The nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days moreover led to ‘war weariness’ because the men and units were spending such long periods in the line fighting or advancing. The secondary sources describe this period for the Corps as “practically unceasing successful attacks” and G.W.L. Nicholson wrote that the 3rd Division was relieved after the Battle of Cambrai only after 12 days of continuous fighting.¹²⁰ Audrey and Paul Grescoe recounted the story of how one line unit was forced to go ‘over the top’ three times in just one week, while Canon Frederick Scott wrote in his memoir how during the final advances the 1st Division was finally taken out of the line only after a month of “strenuous fighting.”¹²¹ In the words of the 10th Battalion’s J. Sprostin: “During this period in 1918 you know, we were never allowed to rest, we were never allowed to come in billets...we slept in woods...you slept anywhere, any barn anything...it was continual leap-frogging, leap all the time.”¹²²

Moreover, not only did the men in the Corps receive very little time or opportunity for rest and recuperation, they also got no respite even when out of the line altogether. After the heavy and costly fighting at Amiens, the troops were not given a genuine rest period to recover. A Fourth Army report issued to the Canadian Corps made clear that the men were expected, following any battle, to take part in labour units, such as participating in burial parties, salvage operations, repairing dugouts and wire. The units of the Corps were also expected to maintain “active patrolling” following the conclusion of an offensive operation.¹²³ Reports such as these indicate that the men were given little in terms of a rest or recovery period, unless they were granted leave, which was rare during the final months because of the heavy casualties suffered and manpower shortages.

¹¹⁹ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4105, Folder: 20, File: 5, ‘Operations: Amiens – August 1918.’ See also J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

¹²⁰ A qualifier is important here: it would not have been *all* units of the 3rd Division for 12 straight days however. See Dancocks, *Spearhead*, 4 and Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 458

¹²¹ Audrey and Paul Grescoe, ed., *The Book of War Letters: 100 Years of Private Canadian Correspondence* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2003) and Canon Frederick George Scott, *The Great War as I Saw It* (Kingston: Legacy Books Press Classics, 2009). See page 261.

¹²² LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with J. Sprostin of the 10th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, Page 2.

¹²³ LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume: 3854, Folder: 73, File: 6, ‘4th Army & Cdn. Corps: 7-8-18 to 21-8-18.’

George Hamilton of the 58th Battalion recalled in a post-war interview that “we were almost continually on the move,” even when not actually engaged in offensive operations.¹²⁴ Continually marching and advancing obviously left little time for a break for the soldiers to have a decent sleep, eat a hot meal or write letters home to loved ones. Moreover, these periods during the final months of the war without actual offensive operations still resulted in relatively heavy casualties. For example, after the breaking of the Drocourt-Quéant Line in early September, the Corps suffered a further roughly 3,000 casualties during this “supposedly quiet period.”¹²⁵

If the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days were not enough to discourage and exhaust the men, the Germans also made things as difficult as possible for the advancing Canadians, again undermining their chances of survival. Contemporary records emphasized how during the final months of the war the Germans continued to put up stubborn resistance to the end. This resistance manifested itself mostly in terms of German rear-guard machine gun posts, artillery fire and the increasing use of poison gas. These tactics added to the discomfort of the troops, decreased their chances of survival, ensured high casualty rates and therefore led to a loss of hope for personal survival and a sense of ‘war weariness.’

Canon Frederick Scott articulated that even with their strength and morale substantially diminished, the Germans were still counterattacking and causing heavy casualties at the Drocourt-Quéant Line in September.¹²⁶ Second-Lt. Charles Sheridan also noted in his diary that although the men in his unit were successful throughout the Hundred Days, they were still suffering heavy casualties as the Germans refused to give in and were continuing to offer “stubborn fighting.”¹²⁷ In a war that was won, but not yet over, many Canadian troops wondered why the Germans kept killing them. The Germans refused to give up without a fight, and a report on the ‘Arras Operations’ was typical, stating that the Drocourt-Quéant Line was strongly fortified and the ground west of it was “very strongly held numerically, and the enemy fought hard.”¹²⁸

This last point highlights how not only were the Germans fighting stubbornly, they also had strong defensive positions to fall back upon, which the Corps then had to overcome through

¹²⁴ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 15, Interview with George Hamilton of the 58th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, Page 6.

¹²⁵ Cook, *Shock*, 498.

¹²⁶ Scott, *The Great War*, 256.

¹²⁷ CWM, GMAC, ‘Diary of 2nd Lieutenant Charles Wesley Sheridan,’ 20000034-035.

¹²⁸ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4016, Folder: 31, File: 1, ‘Arras Operations – The Breaking of the Drocourt-Quéant Line.’

grim determination. Of course the Canadians had faced tough German defensive positions in the past, but the difference now was the *pace* of operations and the fact that it was mostly long-serving soldiers attacking them, contributing to the cumulative and dispiriting effect upon these troops and their morale. Among the most formidable defensive positions were the Hindenburg Line and the Canal du Nord defences. Historian Leonard Smith considered the Hindenburg Line as having “some of the best-prepared positions anywhere on the Western Front,” and Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson described it as “3 miles deep” in some places, with “protecting wire and concrete machine-gun posts... [and] incorporate[d] steep-banked canals” and other natural obstacles and features of the terrain which aided the defence.¹²⁹ A Canadian Corps report on the Drocourt-Quéant Line (part of the Hindenburg fortifications) referred to heavy barbed wire, concrete gun emplacements, deep dugouts and tunnels and interconnected reserve, support and front lines.¹³⁰ Gus Siverts of the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles remembered that at the Hindenburg Line there were tough defences incorporating “layers and layers of barbed [wire],” and the Germans had flooded the country and were relying more and more on poison gas and machine gun posts to slow down the Canadians.¹³¹

In addition to the rear-guard actions, artillery bombardments and strong defensive and machine gun positions, the Germans by the Hundred Days were increasingly reliant upon the use of poison gas as a defensive weapon. The German propensity to utilise poison gas increased Corps casualties and led to feelings of fear and uncertainty.¹³² As Victor Wheeler of the 50th Battalion wrote, gas was so ubiquitous that it could be found in shell holes and was contaminating water sources, such as wells, making men sick.¹³³ Private Andrew Coulter went so far as to conclude the Germans had poisoned wells on purpose, he and his men were so afraid that they forced some German prisoners of war to test the water first.¹³⁴ Not only did the

¹²⁹ Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory*, 215-220; Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie*, 158; Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994) and Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The First World War* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2001).

¹³⁰ LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume: 3855, Folder: 75, File: 10, ‘Canadian Corps Engineer File: 5-8-18 to 10-8-18.’

¹³¹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 17, Interview with Gus Siverts of the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, Interview 2 of 2, Page 8.

¹³² Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: UBS Press, 1999).

¹³³ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 245.

¹³⁴ CWM, GMAC, ‘First World War Diaries of Private Andrew Robert Coulter,’ 20060105-001. The fact that Canon Frederick Scott and Agar Adamson also wrote about wells being poisoned lends some credence and validity to this notion. See Scott, *The Great War*, 27 and Norm Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997).

increasing use of gas mean more casualties and discomfort and a decrease in fighting effectiveness, it also contributed to feelings of ‘war weariness’ as it further decreased the chances that soldiers would escape the war, leading to feelings of hopelessness about their own personal survival and thus the adoption of a fatalistic attitude as the response.

By the final months of the war the German demolition teams and engineers also became especially adept at sabotage and destruction to slow down the advancing Corps, systematically destroying bridges and roads, setting booby traps, mines and practicing scorched earth tactics. Indeed, under orders from the German High Command, everything of value was either taken by the retreating Germans, or destroyed so as to deny its use to the Allies.¹³⁵ Those in the Canadian Corps who took part in the Hundred Days remembered these German tactics, even decades after the fact. W.B. Frame of the 49th Battalion recalled that the destruction carried out included “cutting down orchards and burning barns.”¹³⁶ Such apparently wanton destruction (certainly to the Canadian troops) did not even cease when the Germans withdrew from urban areas with relatively substantial civilian populations. An ‘Interim Report on Canadian Corps Operations’ noted how “Cambrai was to be deliberately set on fire by the enemy” and mines and booby traps were also discovered in and around the city.¹³⁷

German booby traps also invoked feelings of fear in the Canadian troops. T.G. Caunt of the 8th Battalion, for example, remembered one that was attached to a piano inside a house, and remarked that the “piano [was] set so if you played it, the house went up” in an explosion.¹³⁸ Even civilian homes in France and Belgium did not escape this German sabotage. A soldier of the 1st Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles (CMRs) remembered booby traps appeared to be everywhere the Canadians went. He stated in a post-war interview that “everything was traps...we never touched nothing. We never went near bridges unless we scouted out and saw if anything was wrong.”¹³⁹ Furthermore the Canadian soldiers, notorious souvenir hunters, had to quickly learn to be apprehensive about any items left behind by the Germans, who began to place

¹³⁵ Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory*, 229.

¹³⁶ LAC RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 14, Interview with W.B. Frame of the 49th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, Page 11. See also Swettenham, *Canada and the First World War*, 37 and D.J. Goodspeed, *The Road Past Vimy: The Canadian Corps 1914-1918* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969). See page 170 in Goodspeed.

¹³⁷ LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume: 3873, Folder: 120, File: 10, ‘Interim Report on Canadian Corps Operations.’ See also Patrick Michael Ryan, “Supplying the Material Battle: Combined Logistics in the Canadian Corps, 1915-1918,” (MA Thesis, Carleton University, Canada, 2005).

¹³⁸ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with T.G. Caunt of the 8th Battalion, Page 10.

¹³⁹ *Ibid*, Volume: 17, Interview with Mr. Thom of the 1st Battalion of the CMRs, Interview 2 of 2, Page 7.

booby traps and explosives on them to kill or maim any curious Allied soldiers.¹⁴⁰ This is important to emphasize because these booby-traps, in tandem with the artillery and machine guns, contributed to the sense of doom (or fatalism) felt by the troops about their prospects for survival– the feeling that they would die before the war ended.

Moreover, Canadian engineering documents stated that the Germans were flooding large areas of the countryside and laying thousands of mines and booby traps.¹⁴¹ A Canadian Corps report should have the last word on the matter of German sabotage. This ‘Interim Report’ on operations at Cambrai stated that “the wholesale destruction of roads and railways [meant] that the reconstruction of communications would be very slow and that it would be difficult to keep our troops supplied.”¹⁴² These supply problems further taxed the already overburdened troops and increased the likelihood of casualties, as physical exhaustion had the ability to compromise the emotional and psychological well being of the soldiers.

There were also other factors out of the men’s control related to the final months of the war which created further difficulties for the troops and contributed to the onset and development of ‘war weariness.’ The presence of civilians in the path of the Canadian advance, especially in the latter half of the Hundred Days, created additional problems for the Corps and its troops. It further cut into the already diminished provisions, especially the rations, fresh water and medical supplies of the soldiers. Although most Canadians relished the role of liberators and were happy to share their rations with hungry civilians, having to give up a large portion of their food and clean water, which were both scarce at this point, definitely imposed further hardships upon the men and certainly contributed to the men’s exhaustion and compromised their fighting effectiveness.¹⁴³ Moreover, the presence of civilians compromised the Corps’ ability to engage the Germans. Artillery bombardments, for example, were limited in scope and area lest civilians got caught in the crossfire during attacks in less than suitable places for military operations. Private Robert Miller, as an artilleryman, complained that having civilians in the combat area definitely made things more difficult for him and his battery.¹⁴⁴ What is more, the inability to

¹⁴⁰ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4105, Folder: 18, File: 3, ‘Mine and Mining: 31-1-16 to 25-11-18.’

¹⁴¹ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4808, Folder: 185, File: ‘Copies of Letters, Reports, etc.’ Another engineering report from the Canal du Nord stated that the Germans left huge craters in the roads to slow the advance of the Canadians and the horse transport they depended on, and that “in one sector alone, on the West of the Canal, a party of Canadian Engineers removed over 200 tank mines.”

¹⁴² LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume: 3873, Folder: 120, File: 10, ‘Interim Report.’

¹⁴³ Humphries, *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 301-303.

¹⁴⁴ CWM, GMAC, ‘Diary Maintained by Private Robert Colborne Miller,’ 20110042-002.

provide adequate artillery support for the attacking infantrymen would have necessarily compromised their abilities to seize battlefield objectives and left them more exposed and vulnerable to enemy fire, thus increasing casualties. These problems of the final months of the war, including the presence of civilians and German tactics of scorched earth and the widespread use of mines and booby traps, only added to the anger and discomfort of the attacking troops, decreased their chances of survival and ensured high casualty rates. Heavy casualties and the German rejection to give in led to the understandable loss of hope for personal survival amongst the men of the Corps, which thus led to 'war weariness' and the adoption of a fatalistic attitude.

These hardships imposed upon the men of the Corps due to the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days Campaign certainly undermined their morale and fighting effectiveness. Moreover, the nature, tempo and ferocity of the final months of the war contributed to the onset and influence of 'war weariness' because the troops of the Corps came to believe that they were going to be maimed or die in the war – there was simply no hope; hence the onset of 'war weariness' as a loss of spirit and state of mind. 'War weariness' is a psychological issue pertaining to the soldiers' state of mind, leading to a sense that they were personally doomed in this war. The final months of the war provided the necessary preconditions for the onset of 'war weariness,' most notably heavy casualties and sustained fighting, that shook the long-serving soldiers' faith that even defeating the Germans time and again would be enough to get them home. It was only during the sustained fighting of the Hundred Days and the cumulative effect upon veterans that 'war weariness' began to manifest itself in the Canadian Corps. The heavy casualties and unique and depressing nature of the final months of the war served to finally convince long-serving soldiers that there was no hope for their personal survival, hence the onset and influence of 'war weariness' amongst the men of the Corps.

Historian Tim Cook, in his seminal *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting in the Great War 1917-1918*, provided a good overview of some of the difficulties and problems encountered by the Canadian Corps in the final months of the war:

The Canadians in the Hundred Days suffered shocking levels of casualties, forcing the fighting units to engage in battle after battle at less than full strength, with inexperienced new recruits, and with worn-out soldiers who had fought through the previous brutal

engagements at Arras and Amiens. It was always one more push – and each time with fewer and fewer men.¹⁴⁵

It is only fair to let a veteran have the last word on this issue. George Bell of the 72nd Battalion wrote in his diary how after Amiens, he realized that “from now on we will be continually on the go – no more stagnant trench warfare.”¹⁴⁶ If only he had known what new difficulties and obstacles had to be overcome after leaving behind this ‘stagnant trench warfare,’ perhaps Bell would have been more apprehensive about it.

¹⁴⁵ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 543.

¹⁴⁶ LAC, MG 30 E, Volume: 113, ‘Back to Blighty,’ George V. Bell Diary, Page 134.

Chapter 2

This chapter will examine the stresses and strains of the Hundred Days and how the men responded to the cumulative pressure, heavy casualties and sustained offensive operations. These reactions of the men, both conscious and otherwise, created the necessary preconditions for the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness,’ or a sense of doom over personal survival and reflected emotional and psychological exhaustion that undermined their abilities to carry on. It must be understood that during the final months of the war the men of the Corps continued to fight *despite* the growing problem of ‘war weariness.’ The two contributing factors examined in this chapter for the onset of ‘war weariness’ are exhaustion, and the mental and emotional state of the men at the front. It is important to distinguish here between physical exhaustion, concerning the body, and ‘war weariness’ as a mental and emotional state of mind. Moreover, it should be emphasized that although physical exhaustion is not the same as ‘war weariness,’ it was a contributing factor toward this as it could make an emotional state worse, exacerbated the troops’ mental and emotional struggles and it further undermined the troops’ chances of survival, hence the loss of heart amongst the soldiers of the Corps.

It must be understood that at this point in the war, after years of bitter attritional struggle against a well-trained, highly motivated and stubborn enemy, the men were both tired *from* fighting, but also tired *of* fighting. The former represented physical exhaustion, whereas the latter characterized ‘war weariness.’ The mental exhaustion of the men made them fed up with the war and led to the adoption of a fatalistic attitude; they just wanted to escape with their lives and finally return home. At the very least, the men wanted sufficient opportunities to rest and recuperate after offensive actions. The soldiers were also mentally exhausted because they were granted little time to give their minds a rest, were awake long hours and were coping with the cumulative stress and strain of the war coupled with intense emotional pressure.

The men at the front during this time period were often described, both by contemporaries and in subsequent writings, as “tired,” “exhausted” or “worn out.” Although the Canadian medical and military authorities did not want to emphasize this, it became clear that the men were getting fed up with the war and army life because they were emotionally exhausted, had received insufficient replacements, and were asked to do more with less. The soldiers, simply put, were being pushed to the very limits of their endurance, strength and courage. It is important to stress here that there was a direct link between emotional and psychological

exhaustion and worn out troops on the one hand, and their combat motivation and effectiveness on the other.¹⁴⁷

The men at the front were exhausted mentally and physically primarily because of the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days Campaign. Unlike other periods in the war, these offensive operations undertaken by the Corps were completed in rapid succession, leaving little time for adequate preparation before, and recuperation, after battles. The men were exhausted, in large measure because they were going without proper sleep or food for days on end. By the final months of the war, this started to become evident. Even when they were given an opportunity for more than a few hours of sleep, this was often interrupted by the realities of war; explosions, gas alarms, sentry duty or stand-to orders all disrupted this valuable requirement. As historian G.D. Sheffield wrote in his monograph on officer-man relations, morale and discipline, “at the front, most soldiers were permanently tired...[and] sleep was a rare and precious commodity.”¹⁴⁸ Of course soldiers had been exhausted earlier in the war, but the Last Hundred Days were different because the men were unable to adequately recover due to the tempo and ferocity of operations.

Canon Frederick Scott remembered in the final months of the war going three days without sleep; and when he and his unit finally did get a chance to sleep, they were afforded only two to three hours per night.¹⁴⁹ Another veteran of the Hundred Days, Deward Barnes, wrote in his journal that “[I] had my first sleep since Sunday. This is Thursday.”¹⁵⁰ Moreover, Private Andrew Coulter complained in his diary how he and his men had gone without sleep for 36 straight hours at Amiens; when they finally got a chance to lay down and rest, constant night bombing by the Germans interrupted it.¹⁵¹ Finally, artilleryman Ernest Black mentioned in his memoir the importance of sleep in maintaining morale and keeping the men going. He quoted a

¹⁴⁷ Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

¹⁴⁸ G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000). Although Sheffield was talking primarily about life in trenches, opportunities for sleep were even less during the semi-open warfare of the Hundred Days.

¹⁴⁹ Canon Frederick George Scott, *The Great War as I saw It* (Kingston: Legacy Books Press Classics, 2009).

¹⁵⁰ Bruce Cane, ed., *It made you think of Home: The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1916-1919* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2004). Barnes also wrote that when he and his unit were given a chance to sleep, they were only allowed “three to four hours sleep a night.” See page 235 for this quote. See also Lieutenant-General E.L.M. Burns, *General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars* (Toronto/Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin Company Limited, 1970).

¹⁵¹ Canadian War Museum (hereafter CWM), George Metcalf Archival Collection (hereafter GMAC), ‘First World War Diaries of Private Andrew Robert Coulter,’ 20060105-001.

comrade as saying “how could a man be expected to fight a war if he couldn’t get any sleep?”¹⁵² This continued lack of sleep certainly began to take its toll on the Canadians at the front, and coupled with fierce German resistance led to the onset of ‘war weariness’ because it further eroded the chances of survival for the common infantryman at the front.

Eventually, the exhaustion of the men compromised their ability to be effective and alert soldiers. L.J. Younger of the 10th Battalion, for example, remembered being so fatigued that the constant artillery shelling failed to bother him.¹⁵³ Additionally, Arthur Goodmurphy of the 18th Battalion recalled that after 8 August he slept through an enemy aeroplane bombing raid.¹⁵⁴ The officers in charge of these exhausted men also began to acknowledge the problems this caused. A report on the Arras operation, for instance, noted how “the troops were beginning to feel the strain, as a result of the long period in which they had had no good night’s rest.”¹⁵⁵ The report continued that by the 28th of August, the men of the 4th and 5th Brigades were “considerably tired, having been without any appreciable amount of rest since the 16th of the month.”¹⁵⁶ Thus, according to this report, the men had been without sufficient sleep for nearly two weeks and yet, the officer commanding these troops was ordered to continue the advance with these very soldiers. The exhaustion of the soldiers was nothing new, but the offensive operations of the final months of the war launched in rapid succession strained the troops like never before and negatively impacted the mental and emotional well-being of the men.

The men were also becoming exhausted because the High Command was asking everything of these tired troops and depleted units.¹⁵⁷ These “exhausted” men and “depleted” battalions were thrown against the Germans during the final months of the war time and again.¹⁵⁸ Even the Corps Commander Arthur Currie admitted as much, and wrote in his papers that the “Corps was exhausted but kept up the pursuit” of the Germans in the final phase of the war. Although Currie no doubt ordered the advance to continue and received some of the blame and

¹⁵² Ernest G. Black, *I Want One Volunteer* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965). See pages 87 to 90.

¹⁵³ Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with L.J. Younger of the 10th Battalion, Page 18.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, Volume: 12, Interview with Arthur B. Goodmurphy of the 28th Battalion, Interview 2 of 3, Page 10.

¹⁵⁵ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4795, Folder: 58, File: ‘Final Draft for Operations in the Spring: Cambrai and Advance to Mons. 1918.’

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ Daniel Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987) and G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Dunhamel, 1962).

¹⁵⁸ Norm Christie, *For King and Empire: The Canadians at Cambrai – September-October 1918* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997).

ire of the troops, he himself had received orders to continue to push the Germans back. The Allies finally had the ‘Hun on the Run’ and would not stop for any reason, perhaps save outright mutiny. In this final phase of the war the troops at the front began to sense that they would probably have to fight until their death, hence the adoption of fatalism which is a key aspect of ‘war weariness.’

Because of the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days, the rest periods that were normally given to the men following offensive operations were largely denied to the Corps. This, of course, meant that the men were engaged in nearly constant marching and fighting. A junior officer of the 3rd Battalion had this to say about the exhaustion of the men: “the men were so dog-tired, you see they had a night moving into the line, a days [sic] heavy fighting, another night in the line, another night moving out and then one night’s sleep.”¹⁵⁹ Not only did the men in the Corps have to experience long periods in the firing line, cancellations or delays to reliefs of units at the front also contributed to the exhaustion of the men, notwithstanding the fact that they needed “a good rest”.¹⁶⁰ Even though the Corps was “tired and depleted in numbers” because of these sustained offensive operations, it was still ordered forward to maintain pressure on the Germans, in some cases leaving units in the line for weeks on end, as with the 1st Division after the “hard-fought battle” at the Canal du Nord.¹⁶¹ Again, it must be reiterated that physical exhaustion is not the same thing as ‘war weariness,’ but was a contributing factor and precondition because it wore down the powers of mental and emotional resistance in the men and created conditions ripe for the onset of a condition such as ‘war weariness.’

Constant marching with heavy equipment and frequent attacking led to muscular pain and the physical exhaustion of the men. These constant exertions put enormous strain on the human body, especially when they were going long periods without sufficient sleep, food or water. Proper rest was required for the men to be able to deal with the fatigue to the muscular and nervous system.¹⁶² Will Bird, for example, wrote of being “weak from hunger” near the end of the war, and Charles Stevens of the 20th Battalion stated that “your muscles are not toned to

¹⁵⁹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume 7, Interview with Colonel Mason of the 3rd Battalion, Page 2.

¹⁶⁰ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume 4052, Folder: 22, File: 6, ‘Operations: Drocourt-Quéant Line – 26-8-18 to 9-9-18.’

¹⁶¹ LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume 3873, Folder: 120, File: 10, ‘Operations: Interim Report on Cdn. Corps.’

¹⁶² Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 – Volume II* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008).

stand long wearisome marches;” physical and mental exhaustion were the result.¹⁶³ Long marches with heavy packs, sustained combat operations and the lack of clean drinking water all contributed to the enormous strain placed on both bodies and minds.¹⁶⁴

The historiography pertaining to the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days abounds with references to exhausted men, employing various euphemisms and indirect references to this.¹⁶⁵ These tired men, who were in depleted units, were asked to do more but with less. Historian Tim Cook also acknowledged the idea how men were tired *from* fighting (physically exhausted), but also tired *of* fighting (experiencing ‘war weariness’). In the Hundred Days, Cook referred to men in the Corps as “weary warriors...tired of fighting,” highlighting both physical exhaustion and mental ‘war weariness.’¹⁶⁶ The final months of the war, with its sustained offensive operations and the detrimental and cumulative effect upon long-serving soldiers led to mental, emotional and psychological exhaustion and a sense among the men that they would not survive. Other references to bodily fatigue include a description of the 72nd Battalion as containing “bone-tired” men who were “half dead from exhaustion” and yet, were still required to carry on with offensive operations.¹⁶⁷ The physical exhaustion of the troops served to exacerbate the emotional and mental strain of the front line soldiers and undermined their chances of survival.

References to the exhaustion of the men appear in the archival record as well. Operational orders, for instance, often acknowledged the exhaustion of the troops but still ordered them to continue. One such order from the headquarters of the 1st Division stated that “troops exhausted by a long march should not be thrown in to attack a strongly held and fortified

¹⁶³ Will R. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands: A Memoir of the Great War 1916-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1968) and LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume 10, Interview with Charles Stevens of the 20th Battalion, Interview 3 of 4, Page 11.

¹⁶⁴ Victor W. Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man’s Land: 50th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Alberta Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000); Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967).

¹⁶⁵ The Corps and its constituent units have been described as “battered,” “exhausted” and “battered and nearly broken” during this period of sustained offensive operations. See Norm Christie, *For King and Empire: The Canadians at Amiens – August 8th to 16th, 1918* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1999); J.L. Granatstein, *Hell’s Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada’s Great War 1914-1918* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004); Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada (Fifth Edition)* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2007); Norm Christie, *For King and Empire: The Canadians at Arras – August-September 1918* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997) and Cook, *Shock Troops*, 551. See also Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 431.

¹⁶⁶ Tim Cook, *No Place to Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

¹⁶⁷ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 473.

system of trenches...[but] it is essential that the infantry should relieve the Cavalry on this line as soon as possible.”¹⁶⁸ Thus, despite their exhaustion, the 1st Division was ordered into the line to relieve the also-exhausted and depleted cavalry; even holding the line meant no respite for the infantry.

The officers planning these offensive operations began to recognize that this exhaustion might compromise the performance of the men on the battlefield. An officer of the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade, for example, reported that “when the attack was launched, the Brigade was already tired after holding the line for several days in exposed positions.” This made it difficult for the planning staff to prepare the required reliefs and patrols, and work was given to men “already over-tired” which would have been tough tasks even for fresh troops.¹⁶⁹ The problem with this, of course, was that the men at the front were tired both after and *before* the launching of offensive operations, as evidenced by numerous reports and ‘Lessons Learned’ documents.¹⁷⁰ This period afforded the men at the front little opportunity for rest, relaxation or recuperation; indeed, one report issued by the 2nd Division stated that between mid-July and mid-October, the division was granted only 11 days’ rest in total.¹⁷¹ Thus the physical exhaustion of the long-serving soldiers contributed to the worsening of the men’s state of mind and spirit at the front.

Perhaps the strongest evidence for the tremendous exhaustion that plagued the Corps at this time period was the fact that many men referred to themselves as both mentally and physically exhausted. Marching long distances was tiring for the men, who were already low on sleep and proper sustenance.¹⁷² Because of the pace of the Hundred Days, they were required to continually move forward so as to maintain contact with the retreating Germans. Captain Ian Sinclair of the 13th Battalion remembered all the exhausting marching he did during his four years in France.¹⁷³ This marching was often undertaken for hours on end and for several kilometres at a time. S. Hemphill of the 10th Battalion, for instance, remembered marching “from

¹⁶⁸ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4015, Folder: 30, File: 4, ‘Operations: Amiens – August 1918.’ See also LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4789, Folder: 4, File: ‘Canadian Corps-General Staff War Diary: Volume XXXVIII October 1918.’

¹⁶⁹ LAC, RG 9 III D, Volume: 4794, Folder: 53, File: ‘Narrative of Operations Arras-Cambrai: Canadian Infantry Brigades.’

¹⁷⁰ See, for example, a report for the Battle of Arras which stated that one unit was unable to advance very much, suffered heavy casualties and concluded that “our troops were tired when they started.” LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4806, Folder: 165, File: ‘Battle of Arras: Initial Assault – 26th to 28th August.’

¹⁷¹ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4138, Folder: 4, File: 4, ‘Discipline: 26-12-15 to 26-10-18.’ See also LAC, RG 9 III D, Volume: 4794, Folder: 54, File: ‘Narrative of Operations 2nd Cdn. Div. - Mar. 13th to Nov. 11th 1918.’

¹⁷² CWM, GMAC, ‘First World War Diaries of Private Andrew Robert Coulter,’ 20060105-001.

¹⁷³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 9, Interview with Colonel Ian Sinclair of the 13th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, Page 2.

four o'clock in the morning till three o'clock in the afternoon."¹⁷⁴ Another infantryman of the 10th Battalion, Vie Armstrong, remembered his unit had to march over 30 kilometres just to reach Amiens; Corporal Albert West wrote in his diary in late September that he was "pretty weary" after having to march over 20 kilometres in just one day.¹⁷⁵ These long and exhausting marches invoked the ire of not only the other ranks, but also of the non-commissioned officers and junior officers themselves. S.J. Car of the 10th Battalion remembered the march to Amiens was particularly exhausting. He stated in a post-war interview that "we marched all that night [and] even the officers were cursing from fatigue and the length of time" spent marching.¹⁷⁶ Finally, a soldier of the 26th Battalion recalled that after the attack at Arras "I collapsed, exhausted." He continued, writing that: "I tried to get a drink out of a petrol tin but I couldn't lift it."¹⁷⁷ It is clear to see how men might have longed for the end of the war and questioned whether they could carry on in combat because they were so exhausted and fed up with being perpetually fatigued.

Exhaustion, it must be understood, had both a physical aspect, pertaining to the body and an emotional, psychological and mental aspect, pertaining to the mind. The latter is what is of primary interest for this thesis, as it is this psychological and emotional exhaustion that is 'war weariness.' Physical fatigue set in because of long marches with heavy equipment and the near-constant advances. Emotional exhaustion became apparent as the nervous system of the men was over-worked, running at high levels of stress for long periods at a time. The men could simply not stand indefinitely the constant and cumulative stress and strain of semi-open warfare. Even the bravest man with a solid service record could only endure so much, and when the troops began to reach their psychological limit, they began to experience 'war weariness.'¹⁷⁸ It was not so much a question of biology or physical strength, but one of psychology. Exhaustion negatively affected the Corps because it left the men tired and the units depleted and compromised the emotional, psychological and mental well-being of the men; the men were given insufficient time to rest and recuperate, but were ordered forward nonetheless.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁴LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with S. Hemphill of the 10th Battalion, Page 14.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid*, Interview with Vie Armstrong of the 10th Battalion, Page 6 and LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 32, Diary of Corporal Albert West, Entry for September 29th and 30th, Pages 44-45.

¹⁷⁶ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with S.J. Car of the 10th Battalion, Page 19.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid*, Volume: 11, Interview with Ingram of the 26th Battalion, Interview 5, Page 10.

¹⁷⁸ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 9.

¹⁷⁹ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4805, Folder: 157, File: 'Manuscript: Drocourt-Quéant Line.'

This last point is important to emphasize because the exhaustion of the men compromised their striking power and often contributed to poor performance on the battlefield. G.W.L. Nicholson, for example, wrote that at the Fresnes-Rouvroy Line the 4th Brigade was unable to overcome uncut wire and machine guns because they were “mentally and physically worn out not only from fighting but from a serious shortage of sleep during the preceding eight days.”¹⁸⁰ Nicholson here pointed out how the mental exhaustion of the troops (“mentally...worn out”) undermined their ability to seize battlefield objectives. The High Command was simply asking too much of the fatigued men and depleted units in the field. One officer of the French Army noted the diminished striking power of the infantry, and explained that “their problem is weariness, very great weariness, the inevitable consequence of prolonged combat and privation.”¹⁸¹ A Canadian report on the Canal du Nord stated that “the tremendous exertions and considerable casualties consequent upon the four days almost continuous fighting, had made heavy inroads on the freshness and efficiency of all arms, and it was questionable whether an immediate decision could be forced.”¹⁸² This report makes clear that not only was exhaustion commonplace, it now also began compromising the men’s ability to seize objectives.

However, and perhaps most importantly, the physical and emotional exhaustion negatively impacted the men’s mental state. Constant fatigue sapped morale and made many men weary of the stressful and seemingly-endless war.¹⁸³ Exhaustion hurt the morale and motivation of the men and was a contributing factor toward ‘war weariness’ as the men felt they could not appeal to anyone to mitigate their suffering, and would have to carry on until their death or disfigurement. One British officer, a Lieutenant G.N. Kirkwood, informed his superiors that his men were “too emotionally and physically exhausted to carry out a raid” but he was

¹⁸⁰ Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 431. Moreover, Desmond Morton referred to flanking units at Amiens as “battle-weary,” suggesting that they were suffering from more than just physical exhaustion. Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 175. Finally, the historian of the 20th Battalion wrote that some sections near Mons did not reach their objectives because they were “unable to face the intense fire from the Bois la Haut.” Major D.J. Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment): Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Stone & Cox Limited, 1935), 278.

¹⁸¹ Smith, *Mutiny and Obedience*, 235. Officers often acknowledged the undermined offensive power of the infantry in their reports and journals.

¹⁸² LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume: 3873, Folder: 120, File: 10, ‘Operations: Interim Report on Cdn. Corps.’

¹⁸³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with H.R.N. Clyne of the 29th Battalion, Interview 4 of 4, Page 1. After Cambrai Clyne and his unit expected, and deserved, a “good sleep;” however, his unit was called upon to attack the Canal de la Sensee near Valenciennes without this much-needed sleep. Clyne explained that he and his men were “tired, we were weary.”

subsequently disgraced and dismissed from the service.¹⁸⁴ Without the ability of these vital intermediaries to sway the military authorities, the policy of continuing to push the Germans back would be maintained until the very end of the war, and the sustained offensive operations provided the necessary preconditions for the onset of ‘war weariness.’

Moreover, mental or emotional exhaustion was one of the main contributing factors to men breaking down in combat. There was simply no real respite for the men at the front. As a British medical officer rightfully argued, the “absence of a close period, when men safe for the moment could rest and build up reserve [of energy, strength, etcetera]. It ended inevitably in the breaking of men...many too were broken for good...There was no rest, no moment’s peace...there was no such thing as one moment’s complete security.”¹⁸⁵ This insecurity served to wear down the resistance of the men over time. And although ‘war weariness’ and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD or shell shock) are both psychological issues pertaining to soldiers in combat, only ‘war weariness’ affected the many, whereas PTSD affected a smaller number and thus will not be analysed in this thesis.¹⁸⁶

This section will provide some examples of the physical and mental exhaustion among the men in the Canadian Corps. Will Bird of the 42nd Battalion, for instance, wrote in his memoir that after fighting at Arras the men were staggering, they “dragged one foot after the other on the endless way back to Arras” and slept the rest of that day and the entire night through.¹⁸⁷ Another exhausted soldier, a private Foster, admitted that “I was so tired after the battle [at the Drocourt-Quéant Line] I slept 3 days in a deep dugout.”¹⁸⁸ S.J. Car of the 10th Battalion recalled that he was so tired during this last period of the war that he could sleep anywhere or anytime, even if his unit stopped for just five minutes during a route march.¹⁸⁹ Another veteran of the 10th Battalion, L.J. Younger, remembered being so tired that even the noise and concussion of high explosive shelling ceased to bother him; Arthur B. Goodmurphy of the 28th Battalion actually

¹⁸⁴ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999).

¹⁸⁵ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 69-70. Although Moran was talking about “no moment’s peace” in the trenches, the unceasing nature of combat in the Hundred Days Campaign took an even greater toll on the men.

¹⁸⁶ See Appendix II for the similarities and differences between PTSD and ‘war weariness.’

¹⁸⁷ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 124.

¹⁸⁸ Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 116.

¹⁸⁹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with S.J. Car of the 10th Battalion, Page 2.

slept right through a German bomber raid.¹⁹⁰ To sleep through the drone of aeroplane engines, anti-aircraft fire and the explosion of bombs meant these men were tired indeed.

Another piece of evidence illustrating this exhaustion was the number of men who had not been granted leave from the front, even if they had been on the continent for over a year. 2nd Division documents for August 1918, for instance, stated that by August 10th 1918 there were 4,100 men who had been “in the country” (France) over 18 months without leave.¹⁹¹ Moreover, the conditions and requirements that had to be met in order to get a request for leave granted further illustrate how difficult it was for an officer and a non-commissioned officer to get leave, let alone an other rank.

By the final months of the war, the mental and emotional state of the soldiers at the front should be understood as one of ‘war weariness,’ and these internal responses to the cumulative pressure, stresses and strains of combat began to influence the men and their actions. These long periods of dealing with intense emotions wore down the men and decreased their ability to carry on. As a medical officer argued, cumulative fatigue, the loss of sleep and witnessing friends die undermined the men’s will-power and the “intense emotional shock” associated with combat served over time to strip men of their self-control and increased their self-preservation instinct.¹⁹² Dealing with long, intense periods as nervous, bitter, fed up, afraid, frustrated or angry gave way to feelings of revenge, desperation, fatalism, helplessness and hopelessness which can be interpreted as indicators of ‘war weariness.’ Even the strongest man and best soldier could only be pushed so far. Many of the ‘old soldiers’ by the end of the war became discouraged and depressed, in part because they were fed up after rumours and promises of a rapid German collapse went unfilled. The war was won, but not yet over, and this contributed to the men being fed up and ‘war weary.’

For the sake of this chapter, it must be understood that successful warfare is not just about army discipline and drill, weapons or strength of arms; there are more intangible factors that either encouraged, through various means, or discouraged men to fight. Importantly, combat motivation and morale is not just about the orders or objectives of military leaders, but also the feasibility of attaining these objectives with the resources at hand. If an order came across as

¹⁹⁰ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Interview with L.J. Younger of the 10th Battalion, Page 18. See also LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with Arthur B. Goodmurphy of the 28th Battalion, Interview 2 of 3, Page 10.

¹⁹¹ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4088, Folder: 17, File: 1, ‘Leave: 26-9-17 to 30-8-18.’

¹⁹² Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 21-22.

suicidal, for instance, the infantry taking part might be less than enthusiastic about it, compromising their performance, or might not follow the order faithfully. As historian A.B. Godefroy has argued, the combat effectiveness of the troops was directly related to their combat motivation.¹⁹³ Moreover Michael Handel, in *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought*, wrote that morale itself was just one type of moral factor. Other moral factors include the experience of leaders at the front and the motivation and behaviour of the troops in combat.¹⁹⁴ Thus, it is both the moral and material factors in war that determine the outcome of any particular engagement, and there needs to be the right balance between the two. Having outstanding weaponry and advanced technology is desirable, but if the troops wielding them have low morale or are terrified, the outcome might not be satisfactory. As historians studying conflicts in the past, we must therefore acknowledge the limits to the rational conduct of war, such as friction, chance, faulty intelligence, passions and hate, irrational political goals and the like.¹⁹⁵ Moral factors, then, are just as, if not more important than, the material factors associated with combat. However, these moral intangibles, such as the motivation or intention of troops, are difficult to interpret and analyse and are therefore often downplayed or ignored in favour of analyses concerning technology, results, tactics and firepower.¹⁹⁶ These moral factors need to be taken into account and incorporated into any investigation of the Canadian Corps, and these “intangible psychological factors” must be included in any serious study of soldiers in sustained combat.¹⁹⁷

By the final months of the war, factors pertaining to the war itself hurt morale amongst the men of the Corps. Historian Gary Sheffield defines morale as that which “pertains to efforts to enhance the effectiveness of the group in accomplishing the task in hand.”¹⁹⁸ The factors which hurt morale amongst the men were either new developments, such as the realisation that the Germans were not simply giving up, or things the men had become accustomed to or reliant upon (such as baths) that were taken from them during the Hundred Days. Many of the ‘old soldiers’ in the Corps, for example, *perceived* the replacements and MSA men as inexperienced

¹⁹³ A.B. Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour? The Story of the 25 Canadian Volunteers Executed in the Great War* (Nepean: CEF Books, 19998).

¹⁹⁴ Michael I. Handel, *Masters of War: Classical Strategic Thought (Third Edition)* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹⁹⁵ Handel, *Classical Strategic Thought*, 89. Clausewitz also emphasises the role of ‘friction’ in combat in his seminal *On War*. See Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, edited and translated by Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976).

¹⁹⁶ Handel, *Classical Strategic Thought*, 84-85.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid*, 85.

¹⁹⁸ Sheffield, *Morale and Discipline*, 180.

and poorly-motivated; whether or not this was actually the case is beside the point. Will Bird, for instance, wrote in his memoir that at Amiens his unit had no faith in their new officer and that the presence of inexperienced replacements actually hurt morale; Bird felt one of these new soldiers might get others in the unit killed, and thus was more gloomy about his own prospects for survival.¹⁹⁹ Moreover, numerous first-hand accounts make it clear that letters and parcels from home meant the world to the men at the front; these made the men feel loved and missed and provided a vital tangible connection to loved ones at home. These letters, parcels and packages from home helped maintain morale, hope and sanity, gave the men something to look forward to and provided a much-needed, albeit brief, distraction from the horrors of war.²⁰⁰ Again, the Hundred Days should be considered a unique period of the war, as the mobile warfare strained the logistical, transport and supply system of the Allied armies more than during relatively static trench warfare.

Other things that the men had grown reliant upon to bolster or help maintain morale were also largely denied to the Corps during the Hundred Days, or proved inadequate to compensate for the horrors and stresses of combat. Baths, access to estaminets and cafés, leave, proper rest and suitable medical arrangements were all crucial in maintaining morale, but were found lacking in the final months of the war.²⁰¹ Being denied leave even after 18 months in France, for example, definitely led to feelings of frustration and anger amongst the men, tried the patience of loyal, hard-working soldiers and created the necessary preconditions for the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness.’²⁰² These factors served to reinforce the perception of the men that they would not survive the war. The lack of food and clean water also made some of the men question whether they could continue on in combat. Corporal Albert West, for instance, complained in his diary about the paucity of rations, writing “six to a loaf [of bread]; what next.”²⁰³ Of course, West was not the only soldier to complain of these issues. John Harold Becker remembered feeling “weak and woozy” from the lack of food and being “absolutely

¹⁹⁹ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 98-110.

²⁰⁰ CWM, GMAC, ‘First World War Letters of Lola Passmore,’ 20110063-001-002.’ See also CWM, GMAC, ‘Letters from Private Hal B. Kirkland to his brother Mo Kirkland,’ 20100002-004.

²⁰¹ Mark Harrison, *The Medical War: British Military Medicine in the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁰² LAC, RG 9 III C4, Volume: 4335, Folder: 10, File: 18, ‘Leave: 14-8-17 to 13-11-18.’

²⁰³ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 32, ‘Diary of Corporal Albert West,’ Entry for August 28th 1918, Page 38.

exhausted” from the constant fighting and lack of proper sleep.²⁰⁴ Although complaining was endemic in the life of the soldier, the sustained offensive operations and the lack of genuine respite created factors contributing to, and the necessary preconditions for the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness.’

First-hand accounts also emphasize how relatively little things made a huge difference in terms of the morale of the men at the front. C.B. Holmes of the 25th Battalion, for instance, talked about the recuperative power of getting cleaned up and having a good night’s sleep in maintaining morale after a large battle with heavy casualties.²⁰⁵ It must be understood, however, that by the Hundred Days it became increasingly difficult to ensure frequent baths and good sleeps for the men. A report by the 3rd Division at Amiens, for example, stated that after “hard fighting,” showers for the infantry were “a great assistance in maintaining the health and spirit of the troops.”²⁰⁶ It was when the ‘spirit of the troops’ dropped precipitously that ‘war weariness’ set in amongst the men. Conversely, if the infantry felt that they were not being treated properly or had to endure long periods as dirty and uncomfortable, their morale would be negatively affected. All the normal problems facing combat troops at the front were exacerbated by the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days and thus created the necessary preconditions ripe for the onset of ‘war weariness.’

The problem of disillusionment among the men also hurt morale and was a catalyst for the onset of ‘war weariness.’ The fact that the war appeared to be won, but was clearly not yet over, certainly led to the disillusionment of a great many of the men at the front.²⁰⁷ Historian Dennis Winter wrote of the emerging issue of “the lack of a sense of purpose” among the men, and Tim Travers argued there was a sense of “war weariness” in the lower ranks because of heavy casualties and the optimism that the war would soon end did not come to fruition.²⁰⁸ The men might also have felt disillusioned or discouraged to continue because it appeared that

²⁰⁴ Norm Christie, ed., *Silhouettes of The Great War: The Memoir of John Harold Becker 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2001).

²⁰⁵ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 11, Interview with C.B. Holmes of the 25th Battalion, Interview 1 of 7, Page 13.

²⁰⁶ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4809, Folder: 189, File: ‘4th Canadian Division Report: “L.C.” Operations 3rd Battle of the Somme East of Amiens – Aug. 8th to Aug. 15th 1918.’

²⁰⁷ Norman Stone, *World War One: A Short History* (New York: Basic Books, 2009).

²⁰⁸ Tim Travers, *How the War was Won: Factors that led to Victory in World War One* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2005) and Denis Winter, *Death’s Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978).

despite whatever the Allies did, there seemed to be no military solution to the conflict.²⁰⁹ It is also clear that rest and time away from the front were crucial for the mental health, sanity and morale of the soldiers. However, because of the tempo of the Hundred Days and the resultant manpower demands, these became harder to grant. As Joanna Bourke argued, sleep deprivation, exhaustion and “ideological disillusionment” all reduced the tolerance of the men to the “psychological strain of killing” in combat.²¹⁰

Other emotions when given free rein could compromise decision-making, and ‘war weariness’ led to anger/resentment and feelings of revenge and hatred. Anger and resentment, usually directed toward the enemy but also sometimes toward the High Command or senior officers, represented ‘war weariness’ because the men became fed up with the way things were going and their prospects for personal survival. The men at the front, for instance, were prone to anger and despair at being pushed too hard by the High Command or at orders deemed unnecessary.²¹¹

More often, however, the men directed their anger against the German enemy. Many troops were “furious” at German resistance and “last-ditch fighting” so near the end of the war.²¹² Many advancing soldiers also experienced anger toward the Germans for the latter’s poor treatment of civilians.²¹³ One thing that particularly invoked the ire of the troops was that the Germans had the tendency to take the civilians’ food and livestock prior to retiring, as part of their scorched earth policies.²¹⁴ This led to further hardships among the civilian population approaching starvation conditions and forced many to evacuate their homes and become refugees. An army report on the population of civilian areas, for instance, stated that the pre-war population of the French city of Anzin was 16,000 inhabitants, but by the end of the war only 364 remained. Some, no doubt, were called up for military service and some had since died, but

²⁰⁹ Smith, *Mutiny and Obedience*, 13. It should also be noted that the Allies had agreed only to a military solution to the conflict. France, for instance, would not allow an end to the war while the Germans were still occupying much of their territory. The British were adamant that Belgium had to be liberated and her sovereignty restored.

²¹⁰ Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 252. It should be pointed out, however, that the Canadian troops appeared to remain committed to the war aims of the British Empire in 1918, perhaps allowing them to continue on in combat despite the presence of ‘war weariness.’

²¹¹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with C. E. Barnes of the 8th Battalion, page 5.

²¹² Cook, *Shock Troops*, 571.

²¹³ Robert John Renison, *A Story of Five Cities: A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days* in J. Castell Hopkins, *Canada at War, 1914-1918: A Record of Heroism and Achievement* (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review Limited, 1919).

²¹⁴ Shane B. Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (Westport: CT, 1997).

the report also stated that “the town officials were forced to accompany the enemy on their retreat,” whether by force or necessity is not clear.²¹⁵

Evidence of this mistreatment of civilians can also be found in first-hand accounts. Near Cambrai Will Bird, for example, wrote that he was furious after encountering hungry and tired refugees and was also angry at the Germans after meeting recently-released British prisoners of war, whom he described as “walking skeletons.”²¹⁶ Corporal Albert West of the 43rd Battalion wrote in his diary on November 6th that he and his men encountered the body of a young French woman who had been stabbed to death by a German officer; the reason for her death is not clear, but it is not hard to believe he was angry at such sights.²¹⁷ The mistreatment of British prisoners of war is also documented in other army reports. One described their treatment as “severe,” explaining that there were shortages of food and proper clothing, less than desirable sanitary conditions, and abundant sickness, especially dysentery.²¹⁸ If the men in the Corps learned of this mistreatment or encountered these former prisoners of war, they would certainly be angered and might be spurred to seek revenge, as happened in some instances.²¹⁹ Moreover, these actions of the Germans further contributed to the belief that the Canadian soldiers’ death or mutilation was all but guaranteed.

In terms of feelings of revenge, both primary and secondary sources acknowledge this among the men of the Corps. Tim Cook, for instance, argued that the feeling of revenge or the perception that the men had “old scores to settle” led to, in some cases, the killing of German prisoners or those attempting to surrender.²²⁰ Other historians have noted how some men in the Corps sought revenge upon the Germans, especially upon enemy machine gunners who fought so tenaciously to the very end.²²¹ Indeed, historian Jack Granatstein even argued that Canadians had

²¹⁵ LAC, RG 9 III D, Volume: 4790, Folder: 21, File: ‘Daily Reports, Appreciations and Details of Units. POW CDN. Corps: 22-10-18 to 23-11-18.’ Moreover, artilleryman Ernest Black noted in his memoir how when they passed through recently-liberated areas, only elderly civilians remained. He explained it by saying that “the young ones unfortunately had all been taken away by the retreating Germans, who left no one behind who could work in a factory.” Black later wrote near Mons that “all the males of an active age had been taken away by the retreating Germans.” Ernest G. Black, *I Want One Volunteer* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965). See pages 106 and 119.

²¹⁶ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 138.

²¹⁷ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 32, ‘Diary of Corporal Albert West,’ Entry for November 6th 1918, Page 51.

²¹⁸ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4792, Folder: 32, File: ‘Enemy Withdrawal Nov. 1918.’

²¹⁹ Revenge often took the form of killing of German prisoners or those attempting to surrender in the heat of the battle, which shall be discussed in more detail below (see Chapter 4). See also J.P. Harris, *Amiens to Armistice: The BEF in the Hundred Day’s Campaign, 8 August – 11 November 1918* (London: Brassey’s, 1998).

²²⁰ Tim Cook. “The Politics of Surrender: Canadian Soldiers and the Killing of Prisoners in the Great War,” *The Journal of Military History* 70, 3 (2006): 637-665.

²²¹ See Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 144 and Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing*, 166.

the reputation for killing prisoners “out of hand” in the heat of combat.²²² These men were often attempting to avenge the death of friends and comrades, but, these feelings of intense and powerful vengeance could not be easily quelled.²²³ This created a cycle of death, revenge and retribution only broken by the termination of the war itself. The killing of German prisoners represented a lack of discipline on the part of the Canadian troops, as the High Command wanted to interrogate these prisoners for intelligence.

Examples and evidence of men seeking revenge are also found in contemporary accounts. Victor Wheeler of the 50th Battalion, for instance, wrote in his diary that there was a feeling of “satisfaction” among some of the men to see retreating Germans shot down, in an overt act of retribution.²²⁴ The killing of German machine-gunners was particularly prevalent during the Hundred Days. A report by Lt.-Colonel McLaughlin of the 2nd Battalion stated that “most enemy M.Gs [machine guns] remained in action until entirely surrounded and most of crews killed.”²²⁵ Although McLaughlin did not say it outright, this stubborn German resistance certainly led to feelings of bitterness, revenge and even hatred of the Germans.

Some Canadian soldiers even came to despise or hate the Germans, in large measure because of the nature, pace and intensity of the final months of the war, the latter’s poor treatment of civilians and the Allied High Command’s characterization of the Germans as barbaric and ‘bloodthirsty Huns.’ A good example of the High Command’s use of propaganda to whip up negative sentiment toward the enemy was the use of the *Llandoverly Castle* incident to arouse feelings of hatred and revenge among the troops. The *Llandoverly Castle* was a British hospital ship with Canadian staff members which was torpedoed and sunk by a German U-boat on 27 June 1918. The sinking caused the death of 234 medical personnel, including 14 Canadian nursing sisters.²²⁶ This episode was widely publicized and used as propaganda to villainize the Germans and to channel feelings of hatred and revenge into martial action on the battlefield. Historian John Swettenham wrote of the “Canadian hatred for the enemy” and how the Amiens

²²² J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

²²³ Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980). Powerful feelings of revenge allowed a Private Legentil, for example, to be happy when he heard a German cry out during a raid designed to avenge the death of a trusted leader in his unit. See Smith, *Mutiny and Obedience*, 229.

²²⁴ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 250.

²²⁵ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4805, Folder: 157, File: ‘Manuscript: Drocourt-Quéant Line.’

²²⁶ Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 398.

offensive was code-named Operation L-C (for *Llandoverly Castle*) and was depicted as a chance for revenge. Similarly, a German air raid on a hospital which resulted in the deaths of medical personnel and female nurses in all probability had a similar effect.²²⁷

Feelings of sadness and sorrow amongst the troops about the ubiquity of death and prospects for personal survival of the war (fatalism or feelings of hopelessness) are other conceivable pieces of evidence pointing to ‘war weariness.’ Although not pertaining directly to the Canadian Corps, historian Leonard Smith quoted a French soldier who, after being ordered once again into the front lines on 8 November, stated that “everyone was depressed...and each of us, feeling the end near, was afraid of dying so close to the end.”²²⁸ Nobody wanted to be the last soldier to die when the Germans were at the breaking point. The horrors of combat also led to cases of “post-battle depression” after the adrenaline wore off and the men were “bitterly depressed” about having to return to the front.²²⁹ The deaths so near the end of the war have been described as “heartbreaking” for the survivors, and first-hand accounts also indicate high levels of sadness and depression.²³⁰ Victor Wheeler remembered that the sights and stench of the battlefield were “terribly depressing,” and Charles Stevens stated that it was “depressing” to see his comrades dying ingloriously in the mud.²³¹ Unfortunately, this sadness began to detrimentally affect the behaviour of some of the troops most distressed by this. One such report, for example, stated that a Private Robert Cushman was “depressed and at times wreckless [sic] of authority and discipline.”²³² As the war was not yet over, casualties continued to occur; however, because discipline could not be compromised, it appeared the men at the front were stuck between a rock and a hard place. Moreover, these heavy casualties and the constant reminder of death served to reinforce fatalism and feelings of ‘war weariness’ amongst the men at the front.

Strong emotions of the men could also be aroused by the actions, or inactions, of the High Command, which led to feelings of bitterness, frustration and demoralization, indicators

²²⁷ LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume: 3752, Folder: 3-5, File: ‘Air Service.’ Moreover, after he had seen the destruction brought upon the civilian areas of France and Belgium, Agar Adamson wrote in one letter “I have not the slightest spark of feeling, but that of hate for any German.” See Norm Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997).

²²⁸ Smith, *Mutiny and Obedience*, 243. See also Max Arthur, ed., *We Will Remember Them: Voices from the Aftermath of the Great War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2009).

²²⁹ Winter, *Soldiers of the Great War*, 169-189.

²³⁰ Cook, *Shock*, 549.

²³¹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 10, Interview with Charles Stevens of the 20th Battalion, Interview 3 of 4, Page 16 and Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 241.

²³² LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume: 3618, Folder: 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, File: ‘Diseases etc. Miscellaneous.’

pointing to ‘war weariness’ as the men were fed up and just wanted the war to end. Although the objectives of the High Command and the infantry at the front were necessarily at odds (the former wanted to win the war, requiring casualties, whilst the latter wanted to survive intact), the men still felt they were being pushed too hard or being treated unfairly. The lack of leave and the cancellation of reliefs were particularly hard to swallow. George Cruickshank of the 29th Battalion, for instance, was bitter because he was not permitted to miss any of the ‘shows’ (battles), despite the fact that he had long been ‘in country.’ He recalled in a post-war interview that “I never once got one of those breaks, and it was a sore point for some of us.”²³³ Another “sore point” for the men was when they were told that they would be relieved at the front, but then the order was either rescinded or postponed. In some cases a battalion would be ordered to replace another battalion in the line rather than be granted their own relief.²³⁴ This sense of being treated unfairly, no doubt, led to substantial frustration and a decline in morale among the men at the front who felt they deserved a decent break after unrelenting hard fighting and heavy casualties.

The nature of combat in particular during the final months of the war also aroused strong feelings among the men which over time represented the onset and development of ‘war weariness.’ Many of the men in the Corps, for example, became demoralized or discouraged as the Hundred Days wore on and the Germans failed to swiftly collapse. After the surprise and outstanding success on the first day of the Amiens operation on 8 August, the lack of equipment and supplies, including vital fresh water and ammunition, discouraged the men from advancing forward.²³⁵ Although the archival records did not usually call it as such, there is also evidence within these sources of discouraged and demoralized soldiers at this point in the war.

Akin to this demoralisation was the feeling of helplessness which was experienced by most troops at one time or another during their tenure in France. During an artillery barrage or gas attack, for example, nearly all soldiers experienced feelings of helplessness and vulnerability

²³³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with George Cruickshank of the 29th Battalion, Page 10.

²³⁴ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4799, Folder: 116, File: ‘4 Oct. – 22 Oct. 1918.’ See also Corrigan, *Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 246. In the former, there are documents and reports within of the cancellation and postponement of reliefs. There are also examples in the archival record of men becoming bitter and angry at the High Command, even when not at the front. Private Andrew Coulter, for example, felt bitter at his poor treatment in a hospital at Chérisy after being wounded. He stated that there were “no accommodations there and [I was] utterly disgusted with the treatment we got.” CWM, GMAC, ‘First World War Diaries of Private Andrew Robert Coulter,’ 20060105-001.

²³⁵ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 446.

because they could do very little in this situation to improve their lot.²³⁶ These feelings of helplessness and vulnerability in the face of the enemy served to reinforce their sense of doom about their personal survival. Although feelings of helplessness were present earlier in the war, it was certainly more acute during the final months of the war because of the more open and mobile nature of the Hundred Days (far fewer dugouts and trenches to hide in). Feelings of helplessness and vulnerability were certainly experienced by the troops during gas bombardments, and the men “dreaded” these attacks because casualties could occur even if they were wearing their small-box respirators (SBRs). The Germans were also now combining gas shells with regular high-explosive shells, making the gas much more difficult to detect and therefore leading to more uncertainty and heavier casualties and contributing to the sense of fatalism amongst the regular infantryman.²³⁷

Another strong emotion many men felt at the front was one of hopelessness or the sentiment that the soldiers could do nothing about their plight. This feeling of hopelessness led to the adoption of a fatalistic attitude, and it must be emphasized that fatalism and hopelessness were key elements of ‘war weariness.’ It is not hard to imagine how hopelessness was prevalent because the men were often in exposed positions and the outlook appeared bleak. At Arras Deward Barnes, for example, wrote of powerful feelings of helplessness amongst himself and the men in his unit because the odds were stacked against them in their impending attack upon German positions. Their artillery had failed to adequately soften up the German defences, heavy losses to officers and non-commissioned officers in previous engagements hurt unit cohesiveness, the men were in an exposed position and heavy German gas and artillery bombardments further eroded morale and inflicted additional casualties.²³⁸

Fatalism amongst the men in part reflected ‘war weariness,’ because the men who resigned themselves to fate and certain death or mutilation knew the best way to avoid this assured end was for there to be a conclusion to the war itself. The reliance upon alcohol, grim trench humour, religion and superstition were also used by soldiers to cope with the acceptance

²³⁶ Winter, *Soldiers of the Great War*, 89.

²³⁷ LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume: 3978, Folder: 9, File: 2. See also LAC, RG 9 III C4, Volume: 4335, Folder: 10, File: 2, ‘Ammunition & Grenades: 25-6-18 to 18-9-18.’ John Becker wrote in his memoir how the feeling of helplessness was particularly strong when he was unable to assist those trapped in a burning tank. There was absolutely nothing that Becker could do, save watch these Allied soldiers burn, hear their screams of terror, pain and desperation and smell their burning flesh emanating from their steel coffins. See Christie, *John Harold Becker*, 204.

²³⁸ Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 246.

that death or disfigurement was inevitable.²³⁹ Of course there were other ways for men to leave the war and avoid this cruel fate, such as by administering a self-inflicted wound (SIW), deserting or even committing suicide, but these reflected the actions of a more desperate soldier and therefore affected the few, rather than the many.

The whole premise of fatalism was the belief amongst the men that one could not avoid a shell or bullet with their name on it, so they might as well resign themselves to this fact and fate and carry on as best they could.²⁴⁰ This fatalism was adopted to deal with the terror, fear, stress, danger, uncertainty and brutality of the war as a sort of coping mechanism.²⁴¹ For the ‘old soldiers’ at the front, getting killed, wounded or gassed “seemed inescapable,” mathematically speaking. They had seen competent and experienced soldiers and friends die before them, and the longer they were ‘in country’ the more they were exposed to mortal dangers.²⁴² It is clear, then, that many engaged in front-line service or connected with combat adopted fatalistic attitudes by 1918 in an attempt to maintain their sanity and composure.²⁴³ Due to the nature, tempo and ferocity of the Hundred Days, the odds were stacked against the regular infantryman at the front and most could no longer believe that they might actually survive, hence the onset of ‘war weariness.’

Many of the men in the Corps admitted to being fatalists in first-hand accounts. W.M. Walkinshaw of the 10th Battalion, for instance, remembered in a post-war interview that “there was no doubt we were scared,” but added that they were all fatalists.²⁴⁴ Others acknowledged the danger of combat and how it was unlikely to escape completely unscathed. Allan McNab of the 21st Battalion, for example, remembered living “next door” to death constantly and that “your buddies are disappearing one after another, [and] you don’t know when your day is coming.”²⁴⁵ The concept of fatalism permeated many first-hand accounts of this time period. George Bell of

²³⁹ CWM, GMAC, ‘Lt. Charles Beresford MacQueen, CEF, WWI,’ 20070039-002.

²⁴⁰ Indeed, Canadian historian Desmond Morton in his study of the Canadian soldier in the Great War even named his monograph *When Your Number’s Up* to reflect the attitude common among the men that when it was your turn to die or get wounded, you could do absolutely nothing about it, so you just had to carry on as best you could, *When Your Number’s Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993).

²⁴¹ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 227-228 and Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 47-48.

²⁴² Mark Zuehlke, *Brave Battalion: The Remarkable Saga of the 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish) in the First World War* (Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd., 2008).

²⁴³ James McWilliams and R. James Steel, *Amiens: Dawn of Victory* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001).

²⁴⁴ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with W.M. Walkinshaw of the 10th Battalion, Page 7.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid*, Volume: 10, Interview with Allan McNab of the 21st Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, Page 6. McNab here suggested in this passage that his death or mutilation was inevitable, hence his expression “you don’t know when your day is coming.”

the 58th Battalion stated that “I think the great majority of people are fatalists” during the war, and explained it by saying that “everyone was scared stiff all the time...anybody tells you they weren’t scared, they are lying.”²⁴⁶

Another set of emotions or mental state that wore down the resistance of the men to the horrors of war and represented ‘war weariness’ were feelings of anxiety or nervousness. Many men, for example, experienced nearly constant feelings of uncertainty and uneasiness simply because of their proximity to death and the inevitable thoughts of the suffering of comrades, fear and stress which were all exacerbated by shell bursts, gas, illness, machine guns and the like.²⁴⁷ Moreover, as Desmon Morton argued in his study of the Canadian soldier, being trapped amidst an artillery or gas bombardment was “nerve-wracking,” demoralizing and certainly “terrifying.”²⁴⁸ Additionally, these feelings of nervousness and uncertainty carried over after the battles as well. The men could not simply turn their emotions on and off like a light switch. The historian of the 16th Battalion, for instance, wrote how after substantial casualties and especially heavy losses to non-commissioned officers and officers, the men were in an “uneasy state of mind and spirit” and questioned whether they could properly carry on.²⁴⁹ Spending long periods in this state of mind certainly indicated the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness;’ it appears the men at the front had simply given up on their chances of surviving the war. Nevertheless, it must be understood that these feelings had a detrimental effect upon the health and well-being of the men and began to promote certain actions, or inactions, as the case might be. This near-constant fear and uncertainty “placed a terrible mental strain on the combatants” which could not be sustained indefinitely.²⁵⁰ Moreover, things were actually worse during the final months of the war because most soldiers’ reserves had already been worn down due to the cumulative effects of months or years in combat.

Many of the men at the front admitted to experiencing these feelings of fear and anxiety, perhaps in response to their acceptance of almost certain death or mutilation. Will Bird was one such soldier who remembered a “stomach-sinking tension of nerves” when surprised by a

²⁴⁶ *Ibid*, Volume: 15, Interview with George Bell of the 58th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, Page 4.

²⁴⁷ Winter, *Soldiers of the Great War*, 133-134.

²⁴⁸ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 129-131.

²⁴⁹ Zuehlke, *16th Battalion*, 239.

²⁵⁰ Robin Glen Keirstead, “The Canadian Medical Military Experience during the Great War 1914-1918” (MA Thesis, Queen’s University, Canada, 1982).

German in a trench.²⁵¹ Prior to an attack, men often felt quite anxious, their “nerves were on edge” and were nervous and “jumpy” prior to going ‘over the top.’²⁵² In a diary entry for August 28th during the Arras operations, Albert West of the 43rd Battalion distinctly remembered his men were nervous in the face of superior numbers of Germans facing them.²⁵³ These natural reactions toward combat were particularly strong for those entering battle for the first time, nevertheless the majority of reinforcements added on strength to the Canadian Corps during the final months of the war were returning wounded soldiers, so it was the same troops attacking again and again, further contributing to their sense of hopelessness about their personal survival.

If the men experienced anxiety, nervousness and uncertainty before actual offensive operations, these feelings were also present during the battles themselves. Herbert Mowat of the 8th Battalion, for example, recalled how a comrade was overwhelmed and “consumed with anxiety about the hot reception [German machine gun fire]” they were receiving and the subsequent heavy casualties.²⁵⁴ Eventually, these powerful emotions overcame the conscious mind and compromised the ability to carry on effectively with offensive operations. This is because feelings of anxiety, fear and nervousness began influencing the actions, or inactions, of the men at the front. W.M. Walkinshaw of the 10th Battalion remembered his first time in battle “I was very nervous...I remember...flopping down and laying there till the shelling stopped.”²⁵⁵ In this situation, the self-preservation instinct of Walkinshaw overcame his rational thought, responsibility to unit, fear of punishment, his discipline and training.

However, it seems that nothing invoked the ire, fear, anxiety and nervousness of the men quite like poison gas and chemical warfare. Chemical Advisor reports stated that there were 225 gas cases admitted to the Field Ambulance for the week ending November 9th 1918.²⁵⁶ This number, of course, only included those who were taken out of the line as gas casualties; many more would have been affected and either did not know it, or did not leave the front. This report also indicates how the Germans were relying heavily upon the use of gas to slow down the advancing Canadians. The ubiquity of gas, the difficulties in maintaining gas-free zones, the precautions and the constant gas alarms led to fear, uncertainty, exhaustion and eventually ‘war

²⁵¹ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 114.

²⁵² Corrigan, *Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 270 and Christie, *John Harold Becker*, 203.

²⁵³ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 32, ‘Diary of Corporal Albert West,’ Entry for August 28th, Page 38.

²⁵⁴ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with Herbert A. Mowat of the 8th Battalion, Page 2.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid*, Interview with W.M. Walkinshaw of the 10th Battalion, Page 2.

²⁵⁶ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 3975, Folder: 1, File: 16, ‘Chemical Advisor, Canadian Corps: Casualties.’

weariness' among the men as these factors only increased their chances of becoming a casualty which they no doubt recognised after spending long periods in combat.

It must also be understood that the gas negatively affected the men both during gas bombardments and afterwards. Another report pertaining to gas stated that many men were "nervous wrecks" after experiencing gas poisoning.²⁵⁷ These gas attacks and the fear and panic they induced compromised the fighting ability of the men and their capacity to withstand hostile artillery and gas attacks. Moreover, since gas was more prevalent during the final months of the war, it is logical to assume more men became "nervous wrecks" because of it. It must also be understood that even if gas did not inflict casualties, it still resulted in fear and uncertainty among the men. Gas permeated nearly every aspect of life at the front and disrupted eating, sleeping, working and attacking; the men soon learned that there were both practical and psychological effects of the use of gas.²⁵⁸

The most common emotion or mental state experienced by the men at the front, however, was one of fear or terror. References to it abound in the literature of the Canadian Corps for this time period. Historians have argued that even seasoned soldiers were "crippled by terror" at times, and others have made reference to the "intense physical strain, [and] the horror" facing the soldiers.²⁵⁹ Gas and chemical warfare, it seems, was a powerful psychological weapon, described as a "persistent fear factor."²⁶⁰ The men were given no respite from the presence of gas and this therefore made eating, working, sleeping and even defecating difficult. The German widespread use of gas was but one more feature that undermined the soldiers' chances of survival.

This fear, it must be remembered, was universal among the men in combat. C.E. Barnes of the 8th Battalion recalled how everyone was "frightened over there" and those who said otherwise were "either crazy or never saw anything."²⁶¹ Gordon Hamilton of the 58th Battalion agreed; he stated in a post-war interview that "any man who...said he was never scared is just pretty hard to believe...but it is entirely a matter of controlling that fear."²⁶² Hamilton touches on

²⁵⁷ LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume: 3618, Folder: 25-13-6, File: 'Gas Poisoning.'

²⁵⁸ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4032, Folder: 1, File: 14, 'Defences: Work and Working Parties – 18-6-17 to 24-9-18.'

²⁵⁹ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 230 and A.M.J. Hyatt, *General Sir Arthur Currie: A Military Biography* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987).

²⁶⁰ Cook, *The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare*, 215-217 and CWM, GMAC, 'First World War Diaries of Private Andrew Robert Coulter,' 20060105-001.

²⁶¹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with C.E. Barnes of the 8th Battalion, Page 2.

²⁶² *Ibid*, Volume: 15, Interview with Gordon Hamilton of the 58th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, Page 2.

an important point here, namely, that although the onset of fear could not be controlled, the medical and military authorities were attempting to control how the men *reacted* to that fear. Army discipline, threats of punishment, encouragement of camaraderie and patriotic loyalty were all methods used to control fear from taking over. The constant fear of the troops at the front contributed to the belief that they had no chance of survival.

The cumulative effect of these intense emotions and mental states led men in the Corps to want an end to the war. They were fed up, emotionally, mentally and psychologically exhausted – they were ‘war weary.’ Many of these soldiers could not carry on much longer. The mental and physical exhaustion and the mental and emotional state of the men at the front during the Hundred Days Campaign was a contributing factor to the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness’ and created the conditions that were ripe for this very phenomenon to occur. The final months of the war were different than earlier periods of the war because of the negative and cumulative effect it had upon the troops at the front. The sustained fighting of the Hundred Days, the heavy casualties and the lack of genuine respite led to the mental, emotional and psychological exhaustion of the troops and the adoption of a fatalistic attitude and feelings of hopelessness; fatalism and hopelessness being primary indicators of the presence and influence of ‘war weariness.’ The soldiers of the Corps at this point in the war could no longer believe that they would escape with their lives, and the Allied policy of military victory over the Germans and the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days ensured ‘war weariness’ became a factor amongst the troops of the Canadian Corps during the final months of the war.

Chapter 3

In order to put our examination of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps into its proper historical context, this chapter will examine ‘war weariness’ in other armies during the war, the men’s attitude at the Armistice and ‘war weariness’ in the Corps in the post-Armistice period. This examination of ‘war weariness’ in other contexts lends credence to the contention that it was a factor among the men in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign.

The fact that ‘war weariness’ existed in other armies during the last months of the war, as well as after the Armistice, strengthens the argument that it also existed within the Canadian Corps during the final months of the war. The literature related to this time period makes it clear that ‘war weariness’ plagued most armies from late 1917 onward.²⁶³ ‘War weariness’ was definitely a factor in both the German and the Allied armies by the latter half of the war, as evidenced by the morale and discipline issues in the German forces, the British Expeditionary Force and the French army. However, the most comparable units to the Canadian Corps were the British Expeditionary Force (BEF) and the Australian Imperial Force (AIF). As ‘war weariness’ was present in other armies at this time period, it is reasonable to believe it also affected the Canadian Corps, despite arguments of Canadian exceptionalism or the Victory Campaign narrative. The presence of ‘war weariness’ needs to be acknowledged and incorporated into our assessment of the Corps and its achievements during the Hundred Days, and it can no longer be deemed justifiable to ignore this concept in our analysis. Examining ‘war weariness’ in the Corps sheds light on the morale and combat motivation of the men, and helps explain cases of insubordination and indiscipline during this time period. The absence of outright mutiny and the presence of victory does not negate the fact that ‘war weariness’ was very likely a growing problem in the Corps by the summer of 1918. Contemporary sources also indicate that ‘war weariness’ existed in the Corps at the Armistice, during the post-Armistice period, throughout the march of the 1st and 2nd Divisions to the Rhine River, the occupation duty in Germany and during the de-mobilization period. As ‘war weariness’ existed in the Corps after the conclusion of hostilities, it is logical to assume that it also affected the Corps prior to the end of war. The cessation of hostilities, the unavoidable decline in discipline and the slowness in the return of the men to Canada ignited the spark of discontent that had been festering for some time. The belief

²⁶³ See, for example, David Stevenson, *1914-1918: The History of the First World War* (London: Penguin Books, 2012).

in victory and the operational achievements of the Canadian Corps were unable to mask the presence of ‘war weariness’ amongst the combat troops of the Corps after the signing of the Armistice in November 1918. Between November 1918 and June of 1919, for example, there were thirteen cases of “riots or disturbances involving Canadian troops in England” alone; there were also discipline problems and ‘disturbances’ during the march to the Rhine and during occupation duty.²⁶⁴

The evidence available allows us to safely conclude that ‘war weariness’ was a problem in the Corps during the final months of the war, and we also have a good idea as to why this phenomenon has not been studied in this context. Reasons for the dismissal or downplaying of ‘war weariness’ during the Hundred Days include, but are not limited to, the adherence to the Colony-to-Nation thesis, heavy-lifting for nationalism, the espousal of Canadian exceptionalism and a focus on the Victory Campaign narrative. Historian Tim Cook, for example, wrote in his historiographical monograph *Clio’s Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars*, that some military historians in Canada are inclined toward embracing the Colony-to-Nation thesis, or what he calls the colony-to-nation paradigm.²⁶⁵ Moreover, Cook argues that in both popular and academic history the tone of these works “tends to range from self-congratulatory to outright cheerleading” of the Canadian forces during the war.²⁶⁶ Although Cook is sympathetic toward the colony-to-nation narrative and even asserts that Canada was “forged during the Great War,” he still calls for restraint in the writing of Canadian military history, and applauds the official historians for largely doing so in their narratives.²⁶⁷ The lack of acknowledgement or emphasis upon ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign represents a substantial gap in the historiography of the Corps, and it needs to be addressed.

To support the argument that the men of the Corps experienced ‘war weariness’ during the final months of the war, this section will examine the factors contributing to and manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in other armies by 1918. Although it is understandable that the Germans experienced ‘war weariness,’ because they did in fact lose the war, ‘war weariness’

²⁶⁴ G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Dunhamel, 1962).

²⁶⁵ Tim Cook, *Clio’s Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006). Cook also refers to this as the colony-to-nation narrative.

²⁶⁶ Cook, *Clio’s Warriors*, 250-253.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

also began manifesting itself in the Allied armies, despite the fact that they ultimately emerged victorious. This ‘war weariness’ certainly affected the larger Western Front ally of the British, the French army. ‘War weariness’ set in amongst the French because they had literally fielded millions of men for years, with the resultant heavy casualties and hardships on the home front, and had much of their industrial land occupied by the Germans. The British, with their smaller army, their emphasis on the Royal Navy and the fact that they are an island nation somewhat protected them from the horrors of war, at least initially.

The decline in morale and discipline amongst the French forces was becoming noticeable by the spring and summer of 1917. The ‘war weariness’ and heavy casualties suffered by the French army led to ‘mutinies’ which began in May of 1917. It must be understood, however, that these were more strikes than full-blown mutinies, for the simple reason that the French troops did not throw down their weapons, shoot their officers and march home. Rather, the French soldiers wanted an end to the suicidal frontal assaults ordered time and again by the French High Command. The ‘mutinies’ between May and September of 1917 were not an outright refusal on the part of the men to continue fighting, but rather a protest on how the war was being prosecuted. These disturbances and incidents represented widespread ‘war weariness’ among the French units in the field, as there were 151 incidents which involved units from over half of the total number of divisions in the French army.²⁶⁸ These ‘mutinies’ were a clear manifestation of exhaustion, ‘war weariness,’ manpower crises and the decreasing morale in the French army.²⁶⁹ One major contributing factor for the onset of ‘war weariness’ was attritional battles, at Verdun for instance, which certainly began to take its toll on the men and their combat motivation.²⁷⁰ Other contributing factors toward ‘war weariness’ in the French army were the disconnect between the High Command’s goals and orders and the reality on the ground, poor living conditions, bad food, exhaustion, failed offensive tactics and uneven leave policy.²⁷¹ Compromise and concession by the French leadership largely eased the tension at the front and the French forces, importantly for the British, remained in the war.

²⁶⁸ Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980).

²⁶⁹ Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *The First World War* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2001).

²⁷⁰ Daniel Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987).

²⁷¹ Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Nevertheless, most important to our discussion of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps was the fact that ‘war weariness’ also began affecting the BEF at this time. The Third Battle of Ypres, or Passchendaele, caused enormous morale and manpower issues for the already-overstretched British. The British army, for example, suffered approximately 275,000 casualties at Passchendaele which could not be easily replaced. In December of 1917, the British Minister for National Service noted increases in drunkenness, desertion and psychological disorders during this time period, no doubt the direct result of the ‘hard pounding’ and futility of the fighting in the Ypres salient and elsewhere.²⁷² If these heavy casualties and manpower issues were not enough, the BEF’s morale was at a “dangerously low level” after the heavy losses and squalor of Passchendaele.²⁷³ The British had become demoralized and discouraged after the sustained effort failed to achieve the breakthrough long promised and sought after.

However, the troubles were not over for the British, as these morale and manpower issues were only exacerbated by the German Spring Offensives which began in March of 1918. Many British units in the path of the German juggernaut were all but wiped out, and the British 5th Army was “shattered” in March by these German attacks.²⁷⁴ The key indicator for a precipitous decline in morale, however, was the fact that by the end of the first day of the German Spring Offensive, approximately 21,000 British soldiers were taken prisoner.²⁷⁵ It seems clear, then, that conditions were now ripe in the BEF, of which the Canadian Corps was a part, for the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness.’

Another constituent unit of the BEF and the one most comparable to the Canadian Corps during the war was the Australian Imperial Force (AIF), which also experienced manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the final year of the conflict. Like many of the other combatants on the Western Front, by 1918 the Australians had been overseas “a long time.”²⁷⁶ The Australians were reaching the point of exhaustion, and had to deal with dwindling manpower reserves and

²⁷² Robin Prior and Trevor Wilson, *Passchendaele: The Untold Story* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002). The German counterattack at Cambrai in late 1917 also hurt the morale of the BEF. See Norm Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997).

²⁷³ Tim Travers, *How the War was Won: Factors that led to Victory in World War One* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2005).

²⁷⁴ Desmond Morton, ‘The Canadian Military Experience in the First World War, 1914-1918’ in *The Great War, 1914-1918: Essays on the Military, Political and Social History of the First World War*, ed. by R.J.Q. Adams (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1990).

²⁷⁵ John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Vintage Canada, 2000). It should also be noted that many of these were unwounded prisoners. See page 400.

²⁷⁶ Patsy Adam-Smith, *The Anzacs* (Victoria: Penguin Books, 1978).

problems pertaining to discipline and morale. Moreover, because Australia did not have conscription, by the latter phases of the war it was the same long-serving veterans doing all the fighting and this, coupled with the “consistently high casualty rates” of the time, led to the onset of ‘war weariness.’²⁷⁷ Akin to the Canadian Corps, the heavy casualties and the nature, pace and intensity of the final months of the war left the Australians with “precious little time in between [offensive actions] to recover.”²⁷⁸ As the historian of the 1st Australian Division asserted, 1918 was perhaps the “toughest [year] of the war” for the division and was certainly the bloodiest.²⁷⁹

Although disciplinary problems were nothing new for the Australians throughout the course of the war, by 1918 disciplinary problems were increasing and rates were “soaring.”²⁸⁰ As was the case in the Canadian Corps, the heavy casualties and sustained offensive operations of 1918 meant the “men began to murmur,” and by July of that year dissent among the troops became noticeable.²⁸¹ However, unlike the Canadian Corps, in the Australian Imperial Force the ‘war weariness’ of the troops led to a considerable mutiny (or strike) in the field during the war itself. The Canadian Corps, on the other hand, managed to avoid the worst manifestations of ‘war weariness’ during the war and its soldiers somehow found the strength to carry on.

In the AIF, disciplinary problems became more troubling as 1918 wore on, and on 5 September 1918, for example, the 59th Australian Battalion refused to go forward into the line; it eventually took up its positions at the front, but a rescinded order for relief led to another refusal of orders on 14 September.²⁸² Unfortunately for the Australian leadership, though, this was not an isolated incident and disciplinary problems spread to other units in the field. Thus in the following week, the 1st Battalion “refused the order to return to the line” in what military

²⁷⁷ See Clare Rhoden, “Another Perspective on Australian Discipline in the Great War: The Egalitarian Bargain,” *War in History* 19, 4 (2012): 445-463 and Adam-Smith, *Anzacs*, 418.

²⁷⁸ Robert C. Stevenson, *To Win the Battle: The 1st Australian Division in the Great War, 1914-18* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). Stevenson, for example, provides the following statistics: of the 315 days of the campaigning season of 1918, the Australian 1st Division was in the line facing the enemy for 215 days; there were 9 days of attacks against the Germans; the Division also spent 54 days in training but only received 25 days of rest for the entire year.

²⁷⁹ Stevenson, *1st Australian Division*, 183-184. 1918 was also the toughest and bloodiest year for the units of the Canadian Corps as well.

²⁸⁰ For a discussion of disciplinary problems earlier in the war, consult Rhoden, “Australian Discipline in the Great War,” 448-450 and C.E.W. Bean, *The Official History of Australia in the War of 1914-1918 – Volume III: The A.I.F. in France* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson Ltd., 1939), 69-87. For “soaring” rates of disciplinary problems in 1917 and 1918 see Nathan Wise, “‘In Military parlance I suppose we were mutineers’: Industrial Relations in the Australian Imperial Force during World War I” *Labour History* 101 (2011): 161-176.

²⁸¹ Adam-Smith, *Anzacs*, 418-419.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, 419 and Wise, “I suppose we were mutineers,” 167.

authorities called a mutiny.²⁸³ These were the protest movements known as the ‘mutinies of disbandment,’ as one battalion after another slated for disbandment refused orders to do so. These mutinies over the troops’ disapproval over the disbandment of battalions in September of 1918 lasted six days and were clear indicators of disciplinary problems within the AIF.²⁸⁴

Justifications or explanations for the outbreak of these mutinies range from the exhaustion and “over-strain” of troops asked to do too much, to poor leadership, to merely a reflection of the working-class composition of the AIF.²⁸⁵ The current Australian historiographical trend appears to be moving toward recognition that these mutinies were more strikes or protests than full-blown mutinies, and how the Australian troops themselves employed “industrial-style” organizations and techniques in a carryover from civilian life.²⁸⁶

The examples presented here regarding disciplinary problems in the AIF are useful for our discussion of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps as it affected the Australians in comparable circumstances as those facing the Canadians. Simply put, the members of the AIF were experiencing ‘war weariness’ by 1918 and this precipitated one of the familiar manifestations of ‘war weariness,’ namely, the strike or mutiny. Moreover, akin to Canadian historiography of the Great War which focuses upon the operational achievements of the Canadian Corps, the Australian literature, until quite recently, tended to focus upon “combat-oriented histories” or examinations of the Anzac (or ‘Digger’) legend at the expense of studies examining questions of morale or discipline.²⁸⁷ As Canadian historians tend to downplay the presence and influence of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps, it appears because these disciplinary problems are depicted as mutinies (rather than as protests or strikes) “much of the disciplinary problems of the AIF have been ignored or covered up” by Australian historians.²⁸⁸

Moreover, the Australian literature acknowledges that the Australian commander Monash had “worked his troops to the extreme limit of their endurance,” which led to insubordination and disciplinary problems, key indicators of ‘war weariness.’²⁸⁹ Finally, and perhaps most

²⁸³ Adam-Smith, *Anzacs*, 419 and Wise, “I suppose we were mutineers,” 167.

²⁸⁴ Wise, “I suppose we were mutineers,” 168-169.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 163-164 and Adam-Smith, *Anzacs*, 418-419.

²⁸⁶ Adam-Smith, *Anzacs*, 421; Rhoden, “Australian Discipline in the Great War,” 460 and Wise, “I suppose we were mutineers,” 162.

²⁸⁷ Wise, “I suppose we were mutineers,” 161.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid*, 162. This is perhaps done because like in the Canadian context, it is believed that shedding light on the combat motivation, morale or discipline of the frontline soldiers might detract from the glory or heroism of their soldiers or compromise their outstanding operational achievements.

²⁸⁹ Adam-Smith, *Anzacs*, 422.

importantly for our discussion of 'war weariness' in the Canadian Corps, is the fact that the Australian literature emphasises the heavy casualties suffered by the AIF and the ensuing sense of fatalism adopted by the troops. The high casualty rate of this time period was not lost on the Australian soldiers themselves, and one wrote that "there won't be any dominion army left soon" and another concurred, stating that "there'll be no more AIF before long."²⁹⁰ Referring to the orders of disbandment, one Australian soldier remarked "it seemed a little 'over the odds' to keep us pegging away until we were nearly all killed, and then to join forces [with units from other battalions] so that we could go in and get finished off."²⁹¹ Thus, the Australian troops themselves recognised their slim chances of survival and their adoption of a fatalistic attitude. It seems clear, then, that the Australian historiography pertaining to the latter phases of the war acknowledges the onset, presence and influence of 'war weariness' amongst the soldiers of the AIF, even if it does not call it that.

The Canadian combat troops' attitude at the Armistice can be largely characterized as a lack of jubilation and one of grim acceptance, in direct contrast to the civilians of the victorious nations who were, on the whole, ecstatic. The soldiers of the Corps had a more muted reaction to the ending of hostilities, in large measure because many were simply too mentally and physically exhausted to take part in the celebrations, and there was psychological letdown to the abrupt end of the fighting. Firsthand accounts indicate that these men just wanted food and uninterrupted sleep, reflecting the frantic pace of operations in the final months of the war. The signing of the Armistice meant the actual fighting was over, and yet the soldiers still found themselves in uniform far from their homes and loved ones, were emotionally drained and full of recent bad memories. The troops of the Corps were somewhat bitter that they were not quickly demobilized, had to continue to endure army discipline and drill and deal with short rations and less than ideal living conditions. Moreover, with the signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918, the heavy casualties of the final months of the war sunk in and contributed to this sombre atmosphere. As church bells rang and citizens thronged the streets and public squares celebrating the end of the greatest and bloodiest war in human history to that point, for the men of the Canadian Corps, in the vanguard of the Allied offensive, their reaction to the end of hostilities was somewhat different.

²⁹⁰ Adam-Smith, *Anzacs*, 418.

²⁹¹ Wise, "I suppose we were mutineers," 169.

It must be reiterated here that the final weeks of the war were no leisure time for the Canadian Corps. The Corps leadership and Allied High Command ordered units forward every day to keep the ‘Hun on the Run’ and maintain contact with the enemy. By the first week of November, however, many of the troops saw the writing on the wall and knew that hostilities would cease in the near future. Because of the impending armistice, nobody wanted to be the last man killed in a war that was all but over. Thus, Will Bird noted that the men in his unit “argued bitterly” over the order to take Mons on the evening of 10 November, to no avail.²⁹²

Not only were the men bitter over orders to continue the advance so near the end, the fact that these advances still proved costly only served to further anger them. Many of the troops at the front stated that these final orders were unnecessary; a common line of thinking ran that if the war was to come to a close in the near future, what did it matter where their final positions were? Archival records indicate that the Corps did in fact suffer heavy casualties during the final advances. One report listed 4,912 Canadian Corps casualties between Cambrai and Mons, covering the period roughly from 11 October to 11 November.²⁹³ Another report stated that the Corps suffered 690 fatal casualties in the final month of the war (the 11 days of November).²⁹⁴ In November alone, the Corps or elements of it were engaged at Valenciennes, Mont Houy, the Battle of the Sambre and Mons.²⁹⁵ Even at the very end of the war units of the Corps were still fighting and suffering casualties. Between 8 and 11 November, for example, the 2nd and 3rd Divisions suffered 430 casualties in a war that was to conclude imminently.²⁹⁶ In fact, because the Corps continued to be ordered forward and the Germans still often put up rather tenacious resistance, many could not believe that the war was actually coming to an end. G.T. Boyd of the 8th Battalion, for instance, remembered the men could “hardly believe” an armistice was about to take place, as shelling and casualties continued right up until 11:00 am.²⁹⁷

After years of sorrow and casualties, shortages, inflation, rationing and social disruption on the home front, the fighting was finally over. Civilians, both in Europe and on the home front

²⁹² The arguments over a direct order also reflect growing insubordination and indiscipline within the units of the Canadian Corps. See Will R. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands: A Memoir of the Great War 1916-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1968).

²⁹³ LAC, RG 24, Volume: 1844, Folder: GAQ 11-11 B, File: ‘Strengths & Casualties in various battles of the Great War.’

²⁹⁴ LAC, RG 24, Volume: 1824, Folder: GAQ 5-48, File: ‘Vimy: Introduction to Memorial Register – Summary of Cdn. Corps Operations 1914-1918.’

²⁹⁵ Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 556.

²⁹⁶ LAC, RG 24, Volume: 1825, Folder: GAQ 5-58, File: ‘Mons: 7th to 11th November 1918.’

²⁹⁷ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with G.T. Boyd of the 8th Battalion, page 7.

in Canada celebrated 11 November, Armistice Day, with an outburst of euphoria and jubilation. Victor Wheeler of the 50th Battalion, who was stationed at recently-liberated Valenciennes, wrote how the Belgian civilians were “delirious with joy” at news of the Armistice.²⁹⁸ As the Corps advanced into Belgium right up until 11:00 am, the men were greeted by throngs of enthusiastic civilians and refugees, but there was little mention of any celebration by the troops themselves.²⁹⁹

The civilians in the United Kingdom also greeted the news of the Armistice with joy, relief and jubilation. Private Andrew Coulter, for instance, wrote of the excitement he encountered in Scotland when news of the Armistice arrived.³⁰⁰ Celebrations also took place all across Canada, from the downtown streets of Toronto to the village squares of small communities in New Brunswick, as the citizens of the Dominion celebrated the victory of the Empire. George Patrick of the 2nd Battalion remembered that for him the Armistice was a “little bit of an anti-climax,” but conceded that there was much celebrating in the streets of Ottawa.³⁰¹ This should be contrasted with the reaction of the men at the front. George Beveridge of the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles, for instance, was at the front when the Armistice took effect. Beveridge admitted that “there was a very faint cheer and nobody was excited like the people over in England.”³⁰² This “very faint cheer” Beveridge referred to might very well have been the merriment of nearby civilians, or that of recently-arrived MSA men, who would have been presumably joyful about the end of the war, as opposed to long-serving combat troops.

For most of the troops, though, firsthand accounts attest to a much more muted response to news of the Armistice. One account described the Armistice as anti-climactic and that in Mons after the Armistice, the men were strangely quiet.³⁰³ Moreover, Major D.J. Corrigan of the 20th Battalion wrote how at 11:00 am the men did not cheer, but rather “silently shook hands.”³⁰⁴

²⁹⁸ Victor W. Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man’s Land: 50th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Alberta Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000).

²⁹⁹ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4796, Folder: 75, File: ‘Operations: Foret De Raismes Mons Report On – Oct. 22nd to Nov. 11th, 1918.’

³⁰⁰ Canadian War Museum (hereafter CWM), George Metcalf Archival Collection (hereafter GMAC), ‘First World War Diaries of Private Andrew Robert Coulter,’ 20060105 – 001.

³⁰¹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with Lt.-Col. George Patrick of the 2nd Battalion, n.p.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, Volume: 17, Interview with George Beveridge of the 2nd CMRs, page 11.

³⁰³ Robert John Renison, *A Story of Five Cities: A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days* in J. Castell Hopkins, *Canada at War, 1914-1918: A Record of Heroism and Achievement* (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review Limited, 1919).

³⁰⁴ Major D.J. Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment): Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Stone & Cox Limited, 1935).

Corrigall added that the men were more interested in getting some sleep. An officer of the 3rd Battalion remembered that when the Armistice was announced “I don’t think anyone got wildly excited about it.”³⁰⁵ E. Parsons of the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles remembered that he felt “not particularly elated, everybody seemed to be calm and collected,” but added that the civilians in Mons were celebrating.³⁰⁶

The celebration of the troops at the front was surprisingly muted, in part because of the mental and emotional exhaustion and ‘war weariness’ of most of these soldiers. The official historian of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, Colonel G.W.L. Nicholson, wrote of “the Canadian soldiers who had fought so hard and long to end the war [and] accepted the news of the Armistice with the impassive, seemingly unconcerned silence that is the outward sign of deep feeling or emotional exhaustion.”³⁰⁷ Moreover, combat veteran Victor Wheeler wrote that the exhausted infantrymen experienced “emotional unresponsiveness to the cessation of hostilities,” in part because the men were tired and “inexplicably drained.”³⁰⁸ Another veteran remembered that among the troops the news of the Armistice aroused less emotion or joy than a “lively crap game,” and that “we were drained of all emotion.”³⁰⁹ A.E. Rintoul of the 29th Battalion stated that there was some cheering, but “our fellows were not any too enthusiastic about it.”³¹⁰

It is apparent from contemporary accounts that many in the Corps were not jubilant in response to the news of the Armistice, but were rather more sombre and reflective. Some of these troops took the Armistice as an opportunity for “weary reflection,” unlike much of the non-military population.³¹¹ Victor Wheeler wrote that many in his unit did not celebrate, but rather slipped into “sad meditation” about the war and the loss of friends.³¹² For these men, the pain and memories of combat were far too close to the surface to allow for enthusiastic celebrations. Another veteran wrote that there was “no singing or shouting...[because the men were] still too near the horrors of war for any show of high spirits.”³¹³

³⁰⁵ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with Col. Mason of the 3rd Battalion, page 4.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid*, Volume: 17, Interview with E. Parsons of the 2nd CMRs, Interview 2 of 2, page 3.

³⁰⁷ Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 484.

³⁰⁸ Wheeler, *50th Battalion*, 285-286.

³⁰⁹ Max Arthur, ed., *We Will Remember Them: Voices from the Aftermath of the Great War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2009).

³¹⁰ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with A.E. Rintoul of the 29th Battalion, page 15.

³¹¹ Angus Brown and Richard Gimblett, *In the Footsteps of the Canadian Corps: Canada’s First World War 1914-1918* (Ottawa: Magic Light Publishing, 2006).

³¹² Wheeler, *50th Battalion*, 286.

³¹³ Arthur, *Aftermath of the Great War*, 23-27.

Indeed, firsthand accounts from the time period indicate that many men in the Corps were filled with sorrow and were mourning the loss of fallen comrades. Canon Frederick Scott, a chaplain with the 1st Division, wrote how with the news of the Armistice he did not feel like rejoicing. Rather, he remembered pain and sorrow, writing poetically about the “wound in the world’s heart, [and] the empty houses” caused by the brutality that is warfare.³¹⁴ Many of the soldiers in the Corps not only sat quietly after learning of the Armistice, but took it as an opportunity to carry out important tasks. One Sergeant, for example, recalled how the men in his unit just wanted to write home and have a memorial or funeral service for fallen comrades.³¹⁵ Thus, many men in the Corps saw the Armistice not as a chance to rejoice, but rather as an opportunity to mourn those whose lives had been cut short. Clearly, many troops at the front felt that the war was a pyrrhic victory and that the price had been paid too highly in flesh and blood.³¹⁶

This sentiment that there was little to celebrate at the Armistice was echoed by other veterans of the Corps as well. A.E. Rintoul of the 29th Battalion, for instance, stated in a post-war interview that on 11 November “we had nothing to celebrate.”³¹⁷ G.A.C. Biddle of the 31st Battalion, who was recovering in a hospital when news of the Armistice arrived, stated that when he heard the news “I went into my room and wept when I thought of all the fellows I left behind over there. I couldn’t see anything about an Armistice to...rejoice about.”³¹⁸ Biddle could simply not understand how others were so cheerful and euphoric. D.A. Smith of the 5th Battalion remembered several officers sitting gloomily around a fire with their heads down. Smith admitted that at first, he felt happy, because “this is the day we have been waiting for for years.” However, Smith soon felt just like the brooding officers, and stated that “the whole thing was inflated.”³¹⁹

Another common reaction to the news of the Armistice was a feeling of relief amongst the troops at the front, which reflected the widespread belief that they would not survive to see the end of the war. Most men of the Corps were simply relieved that they would not have to

³¹⁴ Canon Frederick George Scott, *The Great War as I Saw It* (Kingston: Legacy Books Press Classics, 2009).

³¹⁵ Arthur, *Aftermath of the Great War*, 3-14.

³¹⁶ *Ibid*, 23-27.

³¹⁷ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with A.E. Rintoul of the 29th Battalion, page 15.

³¹⁸ *Ibid*, Interview with G.A.C. Biddle of the 31st Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 17.

³¹⁹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with D.A. Smith of the 5th Battalion, page 13.

continue with offensive operations and risk life and limb.³²⁰ One veteran remarked that the Armistice brought a “sudden relief from mental and nervous tension, after four and a half years” of brutal warfare.³²¹ A Mason of the 3rd Battalion stated that when the Armistice was announced he was relieved and thought “gosh it’s over and I’m still alive.”³²² Like most other soldiers of the Corps, after seeing so much death and suffering Mason was just happy to escape with his life. Kirk Loucks of the 31st Battalion, moreover, remembered that on Armistice Day there was a feeling of “intense relief” amongst the men.³²³ Finally, Joe Hine of the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles recalled at the Armistice that men were relieved the fighting was over, but also saddened when “we began to think about the fellows who had just got it” so near the end. Hine went on to state that “as far as I was concerned there was no cheering, just a sense of relief” at news of the Armistice.³²⁴

In fact, when news of the Armistice reached the men and units at the front, many soldiers simply thought of their most basic needs, such as food, water and sleep. This impulse illustrates the mental and physical exhaustion of the men caused by the pace and intensity of the Hundred Days. When units of the Corps reached the Belgian city of Mons, many of these Canadian troops were so exhausted that they simply laid down on the cobblestones in the main square.³²⁵ Another veteran of the Corps wrote that “there was little jollification; everyone was too tired...I found no one who took any joy in the victory.”³²⁶ Will Bird wrote in his diary how when he heard of the signing of the Armistice, all he wanted to do was eat and then sleep. Bird was able to resist the kisses and congratulations of the citizens of Mons, ate some food and then went to sleep.³²⁷ Major C. Smellie of the 8th Battalion also recalled that when news of the Armistice reached his unit, “immediately [after] I heard that I went into my billet and went to bed.”³²⁸ Finally, C.

³²⁰ Arthur, *Aftermath of the Great War*, 20-23.

³²¹ Lieutenant-General E.L.M. Burns, *General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars* (Toronto/Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1970).

³²² Again, this reflects Mason’s pre-Armistice belief that he would not survive to see the end of the war. See LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with Colonel Mason of the 3rd Battalion, page 4.

³²³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with Kirk Loucks of the 31st Battalion, page 16.

³²⁴ *Ibid*, Volume: 17, Interview with Joe Hine of the 2nd Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 6-7.

³²⁵ This is captured in a famous photograph taken on 11 November. See Ian McCulloch, ‘Crisis in Leadership: The Seventh Brigade and the Nivelles “Mutiny,” 1918’ in *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience*, ed. by Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston and Toronto: Canadian Defence Academy Press and the Dundurn Group, 2007).

³²⁶ Sandra Gwyn, *Tapestry of War: A Private View of Canadians in the Great War* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., 1992).

³²⁷ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 152-153.

³²⁸ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with Major C. Smellie of the 8th Battalion, page 14.

Howard of the 20th Battalion remembered being woken up with news of the Armistice, but his response to the soldier was “go away and leave me alone. I want to sleep.”³²⁹

Although the Armistice of 11 November brought an end to the actual fighting on the Western Front, it did not bring about an end to the war itself. Some Canadian troops were still fighting a separate, yet related, conflict in Russia and the other soldiers in the Corps realized that they were still members of the British Army, were still subject to army discipline and duty and were still a long way from home. It is important to highlight here how the men of the Corps were ‘war weary’ and this manifested in the soldiers being fed up with army life and being so far from home and loved ones, even after the cessation of hostilities. In fact, elements and manifestations of ‘war weariness’ could now show through, since the end of the war meant the needs of combat no longer suppressed these feelings; essentially, the end of the war allowed for aspects of ‘war weariness’ to become more obvious. Although the men were no longer being gassed, shelled or shot at, they were still in the army and were thus still fed up with the war and with the soldiering life.

It would be safe to assume that the majority of the men in the Corps at this time just wanted to go home. N. Nicholson of the 16th Battalion, for example, was recovering from shrapnel wounds in a hospital and longed to return home. He stated that “I was informed about [the Armistice]...but I wasn’t interested at all. All I thought was well some day I will be going home.”³³⁰ Nicholson expressed in this passage the widespread sentiment that the men had had enough of army life and just wanted to return home and resume their civilian lives. Moreover, some Canadian soldiers, although not members of Canadian Corps itself, were still in combat roles in other parts of the world. T.S. Morrissey of the 13th Battalion, for instance, was in Siberia when he heard the news of the Armistice. He remembered that “it was a pretty gloomy armistice for us. We were stuck out there and didn’t know how long we were going to be out there.” Morrissey later mentioned that “I find that November 11 is very sad.”³³¹ Although Morrissey’s statement is more indicative of the experiences of the few, it serves to put into perspective the experiences of the many.

It is also interesting to compare and contrast the reaction of ‘war weary’ Canadian Corps troops with relatively fresh and recently-arrived, and thus not ‘war weary,’ soldiers in their

³²⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume: 10, Interview with C. Howard of the 20th Battalion, page 22.

³³⁰ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 9, Interview with N. Nicholson of the 16th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 13.

³³¹ *Ibid.*, Interview with Lt.-Col. T.S. Morrissey of the 13th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, page 7-11.

reaction to the Armistice. Frank Jameson of the 15th Battalion, for example, contrasted the reaction of American soldiers he encountered with that of the Canadians. Jameson stated that the former were “raising merry hop. They were certainly going to town.” He remarked that the American troops were riding around in vehicles, shouting triumphantly and hanging off of chandeliers. Jameson contrasted this behaviour with the more sober reactions of the Canadians, and admitted that “we didn’t take part in any of their carry on or celebrations.”³³² For the ‘war weary’ Canadian troops, the pain and memories of the war were still fresh in their minds, discouraging any wild jubilant behaviour.

However, it is important here that we also acknowledge the ‘official’ version of the Armistice as depicted by the High Command and Corps leadership. A report on operations for the 2nd Division, for instance, stated that despite heavy casualties, by the end of the Hundred Days “the morale of the Division was never higher and the cessation of hostilities found all units still ready and anxious to continue the offensive.”³³³ Although some troops, especially recently-arrived replacements (or Military Service Act men), may have been comfortable with continuing the offensive, it is difficult to believe the above statement as several firsthand accounts indicate that many men were certainly fed up and ‘war weary’ and wanted nothing more than to go home as soon as possible. It is important as historians that we are careful not to privilege one version of events over another, and we must recognize the nuanced aspects of any particular interpretation of events.

Thus, it must be acknowledged that some soldiers did indeed want to finish off the Germans now that the Allies finally had the ‘Hun on the Run.’ Bert Warren of the 20th Battalion, for instance, remembered thinking “why if we have got them on the run do we have to stop right now?”³³⁴ Moreover, Kirk Loucks of the 31st Battalion recalled on Armistice Day there was a feeling of “intense relief,” but that it was also mixed with regret because there was “the feeling that the job was not quite finished.”³³⁵ Although this attitude was reflected in the ‘official’ interpretation of the Armistice, we need a more careful understanding of the men’s reaction to

³³² Although there would have been little contact between Canadian and American soldiers in November of 1918, unless they were in England, there appears to be no reason to doubt the validity of Jameson’s statement. See LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 9, Interview with Frank Jameson of the 15th Battalion, Interview 3 of 3, page 1.

³³³ LAC, RG 9 III D, Volume: 4794, Folder: 54, File: ‘2nd Canadian Division: Narrative of Operations – From March 13th to Nov. 11th 1918.’

³³⁴ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 10, Interview with Bert Warren of the 20th Battalion, Interview 3 of 3, page 5.

³³⁵ *Ibid*, Volume: 12, Interview with Kirk Loucks of the 31st Battalion, page 16.

the cessation of hostilities as not all soldiers of the Corps reacted to the announcement of the Armistice with one voice. The important thing to remember here is that we as historians must decide which version or interpretation of events seems most credible for most of the men in the Corps, especially in light of all the evidence presented regarding the difficulties of the final months of the war and the accounts of the soldiers themselves.

The historical record and firsthand accounts make it clear that while most of the men in the Corps were exhausted, likely 'war weary' and wanted to return home quickly, there is evidence of some celebrating and wanting to finish off the Germans while there was still a chance to do so. One report, for instance, noted that "great excitement prevailed among the civilians and military population of Somain."³³⁶ Thus, it is not as though all soldiers in all units of the Corps did not celebrate, as some clearly did, but that jubilation at the news of the Armistice cannot be said for all units across the board. Many men of the Corps, this chapter has attempted to prove, were simply too tired or fed up to celebrate. Other men took the Armistice as an opportunity to write letters to loved ones or mourn the loss of fallen comrades. We therefore need a more complex interpretation of the Armistice and the soldiers' reactions and attitudes toward it, rather than an uncritical acceptance of the 'official' version of events which stated that morale in the Corps remained high and the troops wanted to continue the offensive. If we cannot reconcile these two perspectives, we can at the very least acknowledge both viewpoints and everything in between, and incorporate them into our current debate, discussion and understanding of the Canadian Corps and its achievements in the Hundred Days. Finally, we also must keep in mind that memory is informed and influenced by other events taking place after the fact. Thus, those who argued for a continuation of the offensive and for a drive on to Berlin (in interviews conducted in the 1960s, for example) were perhaps incorporating the perspective of 1939-1945 into their understanding of the conclusion of the First War.

This final section will outline some of the disciplinary problems and disturbances of the Canadian Corps in the post-Armistice period, prior to full de-mobilization, including the march to the Rhine and occupation duty in Germany itself.³³⁷ One of the most noteworthy incidents

³³⁶ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4798, Folder: 91, File: 'War Diary: 1st Battalion C.M.G.C – Sep. 1918 to Dec. 1918.'

³³⁷ For a good overview of these riots, disturbances and incidents involving Canadian troops in the post-Armistice period, see Desmond Morton, "'Kicking and Complaining': Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-19," *The Canadian Historical Review* 61, 3 (1980): 334-360.

involving Canadian troops in the post-Armistice period was the so-called Nivelles ‘Mutiny.’ Again, this was more a strike than a full-blown mutiny because the soldiers were not outright refusing to follow all orders, but were indignant over and objecting to certain orders interpreted as unfair or unnecessary. The ‘mutiny’ was carried out by units from the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade at Nivelles in Belgium in December of 1918, and thus, the grievances of the war were still fresh in the minds of the troops. Heavy losses and the high turnover rate in the 7th Brigade during the war itself resulted in a feeling amongst the men that they could not trust their new commanding officer, Brigadier-General J.A. Clark. The loss of trusted leaders also resulted in a considerable decline in morale and made it difficult for subsequent leaders to instil confidence and loyalty in their men. The spark that set off the ‘mutiny’ was an order for the Brigade to march with full packs, although the lingering effects of the grievances and resentment from the last stages of the war certainly played a prominent role.³³⁸ On 14 December 1918, a protest meeting of approximately 600 troops of the Brigade soon got out of hand; the soldiers broke into areas where prisoners were being held to release them and marched in protest and shouted their demands. The men complained that long marches with full packs were unwarranted and the wet weather and poor accommodations only added fuel to the fire. In the end, the military authorities were able to quell the disturbance and eight soldiers of the 7th Brigade were charged with mutiny and many were given jail sentences.³³⁹

As H.S. Cooper of the 3rd Battalion remembered, discipline started to slip during the demobilization period and he stated that “everybody wanted to get home in a hurry;” no one was thrilled about having to remain in Europe.³⁴⁰ W.B. Frame of the 49th Battalion, who was stationed at Nivelles during the ‘mutiny,’ sheds more light on this disturbance and its causes. He stated in a post-war interview that after the Armistice, when it became clear that transport home to Canada was delayed, there was much complaining. He also remembered, regarding the Nivelles situation, that the men had to live in poor accommodations (for example “the roof leaked”) and despite the fact that there appeared to be lorries available, men still had to march with full packs. Moreover, Frame remembered that the men did not want to go to the Rhine, and stated that “I had been in France for three years and the army for four and I didn’t want to go to

³³⁸ McCulloch, ‘The Nivelles “Mutiny,”’ 376.

³³⁹ Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 225-226.

³⁴⁰ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with Colonel H.S. Cooper of the 3rd Battalion, page 23.

the Rhine. I wanted to get to hell home out of there.”³⁴¹ Frame, of course, was not alone in expressing this sentiment. If these route marches with full packs were not bad enough, the supply problems and transport shortages became “more and more serious;” some units even had to do these long and exhausting route marches without first getting their daily rations.³⁴² It is no wonder, then, that the men were ‘war weary.’ Of course the men were ‘war weary’ prior to the end of the war, however the circumstances of peace merely made it unbearable to suppress and that much more noticeable.

Aside from the Nivelles ‘mutiny,’ there were other disturbances and incidents involving the Canadian troops in the post-Armistice period. This spirit of discontent and the disciplinary problems rooted in the ‘war weariness’ of the members of the British Expeditionary Force began to influence the Canadian troops who were stationed in England prior to transport back to Canada. There were, indeed, discipline problems in the British army in this period prior to full de-mobilization. There is evidence of strikes and protests in England, units refusing orders, especially to go on patrols, and a general attitude of “we’ll soldier no more.”³⁴³ After all, these were mostly civilians in uniform in a war that had been concluded. Whether the Canadian troops stationed in England were inspired by these British soldiers or not is difficult to ascertain, but nevertheless there were thirteen ‘disturbances’ involving Canadian troops stationed in England between November 1918 and June of 1919.

One such disturbance took place at Witley Camp on 13 April 1919. In this particular incident, hundreds of men from the 26th Battalion “protested the quality and quantity of food that was being served” to them.³⁴⁴ These men were protesting their treatment by the military authorities and felt that they deserved better after putting their lives on the line for months or even years. The camp at Witley appeared to be quite a volatile place, as another riot in June of 1919 left parts of the camp destroyed.³⁴⁵ Charles Stafford of the 116th Battalion provided some insight into these incidents. He stated that these riots were caused by impatient men, bureaucratic inefficiency, poor organization and clerical errors on the part of the military authorities.³⁴⁶ In

³⁴¹ *Ibid*, Volume: 14, Interview with W.B. Frame of the 49th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 15-16.

³⁴² LAC, RG 9 III C1, Volume: 3873, Folder: 120, File: 10, ‘Operations: Interim Report on Cdn. Corps.’

³⁴³ G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000).

³⁴⁴ Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 229.

³⁴⁵ John Swettenham, *Canada and the First World War* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1968).

³⁴⁶ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 17, Interview with Charles Stafford of the 116th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 11.

addition, an officer report on the disturbances at Witley Camp stated that “the nominal reason for the riots has been the announcement that ships were not available for getting the men home as rapidly as they wished.” The report went on to mention the “tedium of camp life,” the lack of entertainment, boredom and monotony, and concluded that “the wonder is that the rows are not more frequent and more damaging.”³⁴⁷ If even officers took such a sympathetic attitude toward these disturbances, the men must have been ‘war weary’ indeed.

Another such incident in England occurred at Epsom. In June of 1919, Canadian troops stationed near Epsom stormed a police station and the unrest resulted in the deaths of six and the wounding of 30.³⁴⁸ T.E. Ireland of the 10th Battalion remembered this disturbance at Epsom, and stated that the troops attacked the police station in order to free a comrade of theirs, who happened to be drunk.³⁴⁹ Ireland here pointed out how there were increasing instances of drunkenness and the detrimental effects of relatively easy access to alcohol for restless troops who had recently emerged from the horrors of war. Another veteran, H.S. Cooper of the 3rd Battalion, mentioned how some of the problems were due to the fact that the men were impatient, restless and simply had too much time on their hands.³⁵⁰ Unfortunately, this time was not always spent in the best manner.

These impatient, restless and bored troops also rioted at Ripon Camp in England in the post-Armistice period. After waiting long periods for ships back to Canada, and after repeated delays and postponements, Major J.C. Matheson of the 10th Battalion recalled that “these fellows finally blew up and blew the camp up,” but added that “I didn’t blame them a bit.”³⁵¹ The increasing numbers and rates of absentees and deserters, increasing instances of disturbances, indiscipline and drunkenness also illustrate the manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the post-Armistice period.³⁵²

Perhaps the most famous (or infamous) disturbance involving Canadian troops in the post-Armistice period was the riot at Kinnel Park. This particular incident is well-documented in

³⁴⁷ LAC, RG 9 III B2, Volume: 3471, Folder: 10-4-12 Vol. 2, File: ‘Other Ranks: Discipline – August 6th 1915 to June 30th 1919.’

³⁴⁸ John Swettenham, *To Seize the Victory: The Canadian Corps in World War I* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965) and Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993).

³⁴⁹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with T.E. Ireland of the 10th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 1-2.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid*, Volume: 7, Interview with Colonel H.S. Cooper of the 3rd Battalion, page 6.

³⁵¹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with Major J.C. Matheson of the 10th Battalion, page 6-7.

³⁵² LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 26, Volume: 2165, Folder: A-3-26, File: Vol. 4, ‘Absentees and Deserters’ and LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 26/27, Volume: 2221, Folder: C-2-27, File: ‘General Courts Martial: 3rd Can Inf Bn.’

the historiography concerning the Canadian Corps. Factors that contributed to this spirit of discontent were a particularly cold winter in England, coal shortages, the influenza epidemic, poor living conditions and food which all made the men impatient and uncomfortable. According to one secondary source, “under the circumstances, trouble was inevitable” and it was only a matter of time before the discontent boiled over.³⁵³ Further delays of transport back to Canada and the cumulative discontent finally “burst into violent riots” at Kinmel in Northern Wales.³⁵⁴ On the 5th and 6th of March 1919, hundreds or even thousands of Canadian soldiers rioted, ransacked and fought with each other. In the end, five soldiers were dead and a further 23, at least, were wounded.³⁵⁵ Due to the substantial damage, the deaths and the negative coverage by the British press, the Canadian military authorities were forced to take action. Thus, 51 “alleged instigators” were tried by courts martial for mutiny, although none were sentenced with execution.³⁵⁶

Furthermore, the causes of these riots, incidents and disturbances must be understood, as does the fact that indiscipline and these disturbances represent clear ‘war weariness’ in the Corps in the post-Armistice period. Aside from the aforementioned reasons for this discontent (influenza and delays in de-mobilization and transport back to Canada), other causes of these incidents included boredom, poor pay, inclement weather and especially the postponement and shortage of transport ships back to Halifax, Saint John and Montreal. These were clear causes of the agitation, discontent and disturbances.³⁵⁷ Moreover, problems arose and discipline was compromised because the war was over and the men were “no longer animated and held by a great purpose.”³⁵⁸ The men were fed up with army life and strict discipline now that the war was over, and were less willing to follow orders perceived as unnecessary or unfair. The end of the war allowed the problems of ‘war weariness,’ caused by the nature, tempo and ferocity of the final months of the war, to rise to the fore.

Disciplinary problems and ‘war weariness’ were also experienced by the Corps during its march to the Rhine River. The war was over, and yet the 1st and 2nd Canadian Divisions were

³⁵³ Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 228.

³⁵⁴ Desmond Morton, *A Military History of Canada (Fifth Edition)* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2007).

³⁵⁵ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 267.

³⁵⁶ Chris Madsen, *Another Kind of Justice: Canadian Military Law from Confederation to Somalia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

³⁵⁷ Norm Christie, *For King and Empire: The Canadians at Cambrai – September-October 1918* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997).

³⁵⁸ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4024, Folder: 4, File: 9, ‘Discipline: 16-6-16 to 27-3-19.’

ordered to advance into Germany to take up positions for occupation duty, as per the terms of the Armistice. It must be emphasized here that a lot of these troops were volunteers and pre-war civilians who just wanted to return home; many of these soldiers had been fighting for months or even years. There certainly was much grumbling and complaining, and several soldiers stated that they were not real soldiers and that they just wanted to return home where they belonged. Many of those slated for occupation duty did not want to march to the Rhine, and some men even refused to go on parade.³⁵⁹ George Cruickshank of the 29th Battalion remembered this insubordination regarding orders. He recalled in a post-war interview that the march into Germany was tough going, and it was “the only time in my experience, I mean that the troops actually refused to obey orders.”³⁶⁰ Cruickshank explained that the boots of the men were worn down and the food was lousy, further contributing to this discontent among the men.³⁶¹

Supply, transport and logistical difficulties caused further disgruntlement among the men and did absolutely nothing to alleviate feelings of ‘war weariness.’ These supply problems became particularly problematic and apparent during the march to the Rhine. As the troops moved forward toward the German frontier, it became increasingly difficult to get supplies, such as food and water, forward because there were large areas without any roads or railways at all.³⁶² Moreover, T.G. Caunt of the 8th Battalion even remembered that “we didn’t have food coming for several days,” no doubt contributing to this fed up attitude.³⁶³ J.B. Bridges of the 28th Battalion concurred, and stated that during the march into Germany their “rations [were] very short.”³⁶⁴ The High Command and leadership of the Corps eventually came to acknowledge this. One report of the post-Armistice period stated that the supply and transport difficulties were compounded by the fact that the units of the Corps were spread out, the “lack of transport, lack of means of communication, lateness of trains” and the like.³⁶⁵

The discipline problems and manifestations of ‘war weariness’ were also evident in the Corps during its occupation of Germany itself. Indeed, those on occupation duty who were

³⁵⁹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 14, Interview with C.P. Keeler of the 49th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 12.

³⁶⁰ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with George Cruickshank of the 29th Battalion, page 16.

³⁶¹ *Ibid.*

³⁶² German scorched earth tactics had been particularly effective in front of the German border. See LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with T.G. Caunt of the 8th Battalion, page 13.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*, page 14.

³⁶⁴ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with J.B. Bridges of the 28th Battalion, page 9.

³⁶⁵ LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4790, Folder: 16, File: ‘General Report Covering Work of Labour Units with Cdn. Corps in France.’

forced to continue to soldier have been described as “war-weary;” these men just wanted to return to Canada.³⁶⁶ In the words of Ian Sinclair of the 13th Battalion, the “fighting was over and they [the men of the Corps] were all itching to get back” home after being away from their loved ones for so long.³⁶⁷ As Second-Lieutenant Charles Sheridan suggested in his diary, he was none too happy about having to spend “Xmas in Germany” with the army of occupation.³⁶⁸ The dream of being part of a victorious army marching into vanquished enemy territory was quickly replaced by the dream of a swift return to civilian life in Canada.

The discontent and ‘war weariness’ of the Corps was expressed in other ways as well. A report by a Staff Captain of the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade, for example, stated that contrary to explicit orders, some units refused to send out patrols in this post-Armistice period.³⁶⁹ The men had simply had enough of the war and just wanted to be de-mobilized and returned home with all haste. Whilst in Germany on occupation duty, the poor weather combined with the restlessness of the men led to some incidents. Several officers noted how the men were becoming hard to control, some were causing trouble (for example “shooting lights”) and were drinking and fighting to the point where inns and estaminets had to be closed down.³⁷⁰ Officers further up the chain of the Canadian military hierarchy also took note of this. The general officer commanding the 1st Division, for example, stated that due to these incidents, Cologne itself had to be placed out of bounds for the Canadian troops because of “disorderly conduct.” This report cited accounts that “rioting and anarchy by Canadians prevailed at night,” there were armed and aggressive roving bands of men, “tills have been robbed, restaurants broken up” and “other acts of lawlessness.”³⁷¹ How true these reports were is beside the point, the High Command only needed a *perception* that this might be the case in order to take action.

The presence of ‘war weariness’ in other armies, both Allied and enemy at the time, the men’s attitude toward the Armistice and evidence and manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Corps in the post-Armistice period all lend credence to the idea that ‘war weariness’ must have existed in the Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign as well. In fact, it was during the final months of the war that ‘war weariness’ began to take root in the Canadian Corps, as there was

³⁶⁶ Morton, *A Military History of Canada*, 165.

³⁶⁷ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 9, Interview with Colonel Ian Sinclair of the 13th Battalion, page 4.

³⁶⁸ CWM, GMAC, ‘Diary of 2nd Lieutenant Charles Wesley Sheridan,’ 20000034 – 035.

³⁶⁹ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4024, Folder: 4, File: 8, ‘Discipline: 2-5-16 to 31-12-18.’

³⁷⁰ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with Major J.C. Matheson of the 10th Battalion, page 5.

³⁷¹ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4024, Folder: 4, File: 9, ‘Discipline: 16-6-16 to 27-3-19.’

nothing to constrain it anymore and the need for discipline in combat was gone. 'War weariness' in the Corps simply reached the boiling point after the Armistice was signed, and manifested itself in these riots and disturbances initiated by the impatient Canadian troops. During the war itself the needs of winning, which the majority of soldiers in the Corps still believed in, served to moderate some of the worst effects of 'war weariness;' however, with the cessation of hostilities and the requirement for victory accomplished, 'war weariness' could no longer be suppressed. If 'war weariness' existed during the post-Armistice and de-mobilization period, it must have had its origins toward the end of the war itself.

Chapter 4

The manifestations, effects or symptoms of ‘war weariness’ include insubordination and indiscipline which are represented, in part, by the killing of German prisoners or those attempting to surrender in the heat of battle. This chapter will address manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign by examining indiscipline, insubordination, and the killing of German prisoners of war.

Insubordination and indiscipline represented ‘war weariness’ because these soldiers who were insubordinate or showed signs of indiscipline were fed up and less able or willing to follow orders as diligently so near the end. The nature, pace and intensity of the final months of the war was a direct contributor to the onset and influence of ‘war weariness’ amongst the soldiers of the Corps, and there is evidence based on the archival record that insubordination and indiscipline were some of the most widespread manifestations of ‘war weariness.’³⁷² An early indicator of indiscipline and the onset of ‘war weariness’ was increased levels of drunkenness among the troops or officers at the front. The over-reliance on alcohol represented a coping mechanism for the soldiers, and a way for the men to deal with the horrors, stress and strain of continued offensive operations and of combat in general. Moreover, the refusal or reluctance to follow direct orders from superior ranks represented how men at the front were becoming fed up with the near-constant action of the Hundred Days without proper preparation or recuperation time. Furthermore, the cowering in shell holes, often a reflection of shell-shock but also perhaps suggestive of ‘war weariness’ or fatalism, going to ground or the inability to gain battlefield objectives reflected heavy casualties (the men were asked to do more with less) and the desire of the men to not expose themselves needlessly so near the end of the war. After all, by the latter half of the Hundred Days the Allies had the ‘Hun on the Run.’ It should also be noted what the

³⁷² Documents and reports pertaining to ‘Absentees and Deserters’ for the 1st Canadian Command Depot for instance, stated that the number of absentees appeared to spike during periods of sustained offensive combat (such as in late August and early September 1918). The 1st Canadian Command Depot also listed 12 men absent on October 11th 1918. See LAC, RG 9 III B1, Series 25, Volume: 2141, Folder: A-4-25, File: Volumes 2 and 3. Instances of troops falling back and withdrawing, perhaps an indicator of insubordination, are also found in contemporary firsthand accounts. Major D.J. Corrigan of the 20th Battalion, for example, remembers that troops were forced to withdraw because they had advanced beyond their artillery support and had faced stiff German resistance. See Major D.J. Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment): Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Stone & Cox Limited, 1935). Victor Wheeler of the 50th Battalion mentioned in his memoir how attacking units retired without orders to do so. See Victor W. Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man’s Land: 50th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Alberta Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000). See pages 237-239.

differences between insubordination and indiscipline are. In the former, men were insubordinate when they acted in a manner contrary to their position in the military hierarchy. Insubordinate acts included refusing orders or talking back to a superior officer. Indiscipline, on the other hand, represented a breakdown of army authority or restraint and led to actions contrary to the well-functioning of the army. Acts of indiscipline included looting, theft and drunkenness.

This section will examine some aspects of insubordination pertinent to our discussion of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign. It must be understood that ‘war weariness’ and this fed up attitude undermined morale and discipline and resulted in acts of insubordination. The traditional response of the High Command and Corps leadership to insubordination was the administering of a field general court martial. Commanding officers in the field often used these courts martial, or the threat of them, to curb disciplinary problems such as drunkenness, theft or acts of insubordination.³⁷³ In the view of the Corps leadership, allowing such acts of insubordination or indiscipline to continue would erode the authority the officers and non-commissioned officers had over their subordinates. It must be understood that a precipitous decline in morale was directly related to an increase in disciplinary problems. This is evidenced by the fact that after the German breakthrough in March of 1918 and the resultant decline in morale and discipline, there was an increase in drunkenness, looting and surrendering in the British Expeditionary Force.³⁷⁴

In his memoir, John Becker admitted that he had disobeyed a direct order because he was “fed up” with the war.³⁷⁵ These were his own words, and this was a clear reference to ‘war weariness.’ Moreover, George Bell of the 1st Battalion wrote how this ‘fed up’ attitude was becoming rather problematic as the war continued and was reaching a critical point. In his diary Bell wrote:

³⁷³ Chris Madsen, *Another Kind of Justice: Canadian Military Law from Confederation to Somalia* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 1999).

³⁷⁴ Tim Travers, *How the War was Won: Factors that led to Victory in World War One* (Barnsley: Pen & Sword Military Classics, 2005). Another indicator that morale had declined during this time period was that the spirits of the troops were low and soldier singing all but ceased. Allen McNab of the 21st Battalion recalled how the morale of the British troops was quite low in the spring of 1918. He stated that: “there seemed to be a depression in the British Army. You hardly heard any singing for those few months...everybody was fed up to the teeth, [and wondering] whether this thing ever would end.” This is again a clear reference to ‘war weariness.’ See LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 10, Interview with Allen McNab of the 21st Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, page 13.

³⁷⁵ Becker slept in a restaurant during the Hundred Days rather than in a barn as he was ordered by his commanding officer to do so. Norm Christie, ed., *Silhouettes of The Great War: The Memoir of John Harold Becker 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2001).

This ‘fed up’ condition was becoming serious, threatening to undermine the morale of the whole army. Malingering was becoming too common, not only among those who are naturally shirkers, but among those who had been good soldiers. They had seen so much death, bloodshed and suffering that they were sick of it all.³⁷⁶

As Bell identified, malingering and shirking were examples of insubordination. Bell here made a clear reference to ‘war weariness’ as previously good soldiers had reached the limits of their strength, courage and endurance and were therefore at the breaking point.

Akin to desertion, acts of insubordination were taken rather seriously by the military authorities and the soldiers knew the punishments associated with it and the consequences of their actions. One report on ‘Reinforcements,’ for example, emphasized how every new man to France, whether an officer, non-commissioned officer or other rank, be “made acquainted with all orders and instructions” regarding discipline. The report stated that men must be aware of the “increased gravity of offences on active service, such as drunkenness; of refusing or neglecting to obey orders; and absence when warned for duty.”³⁷⁷ Thus, the soldiers at the front were well aware of these crimes and the punishments associated with them; and yet, cases of drunkenness and desertion still occurred, representing in part the attempt at a mental and physical escape from the horrors of war.

Examples of ignoring, refusing or neglecting orders, disobedience or defying superiors can be found in both the primary and secondary sources related to this time period.³⁷⁸ Some soldiers, for example, were so shell-shocked or fed up with the war that they “shirked their duty” and were unable or unwilling to follow the orders of a superior officer.³⁷⁹ Although shell shock and PTSD are not the same as ‘war weariness,’ the psychological breakdown of the men and the wearing down of their mental reserves certainly contributed to ‘war weariness.’ Moreover Chris Madsen, in his monograph on Canadian military law, outlined how in the Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry Regiment alone there were instances throughout the war of striking

³⁷⁶ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 113, ‘Back to Blighty,’ George V. Bell Diary, page 113.

³⁷⁷ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4119, Folder: 4, File: 9, ‘Reinforcements: 20-11-15 to 10-5-16.’

³⁷⁸ It should be emphasised that as this is not a comparative study with earlier time periods, it is exceedingly difficult to prove whether these problems were *increasing* or not. However, the constant advancing, pushing the Germans back and the prospect of victory should have mitigated against these disciplinary problems; the fact that these problems pertaining to indiscipline and insubordination continued to occur despite the fact that the Allies were finally winning perhaps points to another cause of these problems, namely, the onset of ‘war weariness.’

³⁷⁹ Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 – Volume II* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008).

superior ranks, acts of insubordination, escaping prison, drunkenness, desertion, absence without leave, assault, disobedience, theft and self-inflicted wounds.³⁸⁰ Madsen makes it clear that these problems continued right up until the signing of the Armistice, and thus did not cease once the Canadian Corps began pushing the Germans back in the final months of the war.

Will Bird of the 42nd Battalion also provided examples of ignoring or refusing to obey orders during the final months of the war. In one instance, Bird and his unit were ordered to “stand to” during an artillery barrage, but he and a friend stayed right where they were. In another situation, Bird and his men were ordered to go on patrol, but, he admitted, “we did no patrolling.” In a final example, on the outskirts of Cambrai, Bird wrote that a sergeant’s order to do parade “was ignored.”³⁸¹ Although these examples might appear trivial, in the view of the Corps leadership and High Command to allow acts of insubordination to continue would unravel the entire edifice of military discipline and authority. This disobedience of orders was also apparent closer to the Armistice. R. Ferrie of the 31st Battalion, for instance, remembered on 11 November receiving orders to advance, but he thought “we will just stay where we are as long as we can, what is the sense of getting up there and getting shot?”³⁸² This quote also illustrates the deadly nature of the final months of the war, the heavy casualties which ensued and the unwillingness of soldiers to advance and attack so near the end of the war.

However, sometimes this refusal to obey orders was sanctioned by officers or non-commissioned officers closer to the front and the actual fighting. In one such instance during the Hundred Days, G.S. Rutherford of the 52nd Battalion told his company commanders not to carry out an attack ordered by the brigadier. Rutherford reasoned that the men should not follow through with this attack because it was poorly planned and his men would be attacking directly into a neighbouring division’s artillery barrage. Rutherford, of course, knew that he was disobeying a direct order, but he justified it by saying that “I may be courtmartialled [sic] for this

³⁸⁰ Madsen, *Canadian Military Law*, 46, taken from Princess Patricia’s Canadian Light Infantry Regiment, LAC, file 30 (6)-3, Register of Courts Martial, March ’15 to Jan. ’19. See also Ian McCulloch, ‘Crisis in Leadership: The Seventh Brigade and the Nivelles “Mutiny,” 1918 in *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience*, ed. by Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston and Toronto: Canadian Defence Academy Press and the Dundurn Group, 2007).

³⁸¹ Will Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands: A Memoir of the Great War 1916-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1968). Private Andrew Coulter also mentioned in his diary that during the Last Hundred Days he and comrade were “fed up” with all the marching and delays in transportation, so they went off on their own to find their unit, in a clear act of insubordination. CWM, GMAC, ‘First World War Diaries of Private Andrew Robert Coulter,’ 20060105-001.

³⁸² LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with R. Ferrie of the 31st Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 14.

but I don't want a lot of my friends to be killed so I'll take a chance."³⁸³ In this passage Rutherford is clearly highlighting the camaraderie he felt with his men and the paternal approach he espoused as an officer, as well as the acknowledgement of high casualty rates at the time.

It would be helpful here to provide some more specific examples of disobedience, defying superior officers or refusing, neglecting or ignoring orders. Examples abound in the literature, for instance, of troops 'going to ground' when they were supposed to be advancing. The historian for the 8th Battalion, for example, recounted the story of a Major Jucksch who, while attacking at the Drocourt-Quéant Line, went to ground, citing hunger and thirst for his inability or unwillingness to continue.³⁸⁴ Jucksch felt he could simply go no further in his present state. Moreover, an example from the history of the 16th Battalion states that while attacking on 8 August at Amiens, the advancing troops went to ground and took cover after some platoon commanders were killed.³⁸⁵ This example indicates the importance of leadership in maintaining offensive momentum during an attack and how the high casualty rate among officers and non-commissioned officers was a direct contributing factor toward the belief among the men that they would not survive the war.

Examples of going to ground during attacks can also be found in firsthand accounts, such as in the writings of Victor Wheeler and John Becker.³⁸⁶ For Victor Wheeler, during an attack upon a German-held chateau at the Drocourt-Quéant Line in September 1918, he and three comrades "sprawled flat in a shell hole" rather than continuing their attack. Wheeler then made a clear reference to his fatalistic attitude as he wrote that "seconds became minutes and minutes

³⁸³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 15, Interview with Captain G.S. Rutherford of the 52nd Battalion, Interview 5 of 5, page 7.

³⁸⁴ Kevin R. Shackleton, *Second to None: The Fighting 58th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Toronto & Oxford: The Dundurn Group, 2002).

³⁸⁵ Mark Zuehlke, *Brave Battalion: The Remarkable Saga of the 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish) in the First World War* (Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd., 2008). Other references in the literature and secondary sources of the Canadian Corps of troops going to ground while they were supposed to be attacking indicates that it was relatively widespread during this time period. See Cook, *Shock Troops*, 435; Daniel Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987), pages 71 and 100 and Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), page 249.

³⁸⁶ Victor W. Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion in No Man's Land: The 50th Canadian Infantry Battalion (Alberta Regiment) Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2000). For other first-hand accounts of soldiers going to ground rather than attacking, see Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 120; Bruce Cane, ed., *It Made you Think of Home: The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1916-1919* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group), page 245 and Lieutenant-General E.L.M. Burns, *General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars* (Toronto/Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited). See page 79.

seemed like hours as each of us thought the next one would have our Number on it!”³⁸⁷ In the latter case, John Becker wrote that he was embarrassed he went to ground and took cover during an attack. He explained that “I was genuinely ashamed of myself for flattening out as I was familiar enough with shelling to know by the sound...[that it] would not be close.” Becker went on to write that “I realized then that my nerves were going and I wouldn’t be much good in action if I kept at it many weeks longer.”³⁸⁸ Becker here is himself admitting that he was worn out and likely shell-shocked, and questioned whether he would survive the war and wanted to leave the line because his battlefield performance and endurance were compromised.

Another example of insubordination was the refusal to leave cover when ordered to attack. As historian Tim Cook pointed out, “some [troops] were unable to find the courage to leave the relative safety of their craters,” shell holes or dugouts.³⁸⁹ Indeed, some soldiers even needed to be threatened with being shot before leaving these areas of cover.³⁹⁰ Fear was ubiquitous during the final months of the war, and some troops were simply unable to deal with this primal emotion. In periods of intense fighting, such as during the Hundred Days, some soldiers refused to go ‘over the top’ except at gunpoint; moreover, malingering was “commonly observed” during these periods of sustained combat.³⁹¹

Evidence of men hiding in shell holes when they were supposed to be attacking are also found in firsthand accounts.³⁹² A Mr. Lunt of the 4th Battalion, for instance, remembered a man in his unit, during a heavy shelling, who went into a dugout and refused to emerge. Lunt recalls that this particular soldier stated “he didn’t want any part of the war.”³⁹³ These men, no doubt, knew that what they were doing was contrary to orders to advance and that they could be charged with cowardice.

³⁸⁷ Wheeler, *The 50th Battalion*, 255-256.

³⁸⁸ Christie, *John Harold Becker*, 203.

³⁸⁹ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 521 and Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 229 and 538.

³⁹⁰ A.B. Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour? The Story of the 25 Canadian Volunteers Executed in the Great War* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1998).

³⁹¹ Joanna Bourke, *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth-Century Warfare* (London: Granta Books, 1999). In another case, Deward Barnes was forced to threaten to shoot some new men in his unit because they refused to leave cover and carry out ordered work parties. See Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 245.

³⁹² Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 150 and Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 261-262. For other examples and first-hand accounts of men taking shelter rather than attacking as per orders, see Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 120 and 150; Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 245 and LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 13, Interview with Major H.S. Hanson of the 43rd Battalion, page 13.

³⁹³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with Mr. Lunt of the 4th Battalion, Interview 9 of 12, page 1.

Insubordination could also entail digging in and taking cover rather than advancing as per orders.³⁹⁴ Will Bird wrote of going to ground and taking cover instead of continuing the attack. In this particular instance, Bird and his unit took cover while attacking a German trench position near Arras, and waited for a neighbouring unit to take out the nearby Germans.³⁹⁵ E.L.M. Burns, furthermore, recounted in his memoir the story of troops taking cover during the Hundred Days, even though they were given direct orders to continue the attack. The soldiers in this situation were taking part in a poorly-planned and coordinated attack, and Burns remarked that “an attack without enough time for reconnaissance and preparation will usually fail.”³⁹⁶ The final months of the war were notorious for allowing very little time for planning, reconnaissance and preparation for attacks, and yet, the Corps continued to gain its objectives, no doubt contributing to the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness.’ Some factors that sustained the men and allowed them to carry on in combat were the intense feelings of camaraderie between the men and excellent staff work. The fact that the Canadians continued to advance and attack was nothing short of remarkable, but the enormous casualties that resulted in the gaining of these objectives further reinforced ‘war weariness’ and fatalism amongst the men as their chances of survival appeared slim. Burns’ example also illustrates how the men in the Corps he personally saw were not willing or able to follow orders as closely or risk life and limb so near the end. S.J. Car of the 10th Battalion, for instance, remembered troops hesitating and “flopping” to the ground during shelling.³⁹⁷

Finally, another specific example of insubordination in combat was withdrawing or retreating rather than digging in or continuing to advance. Sometimes this took the form of fleeing in panic, rather than an orderly withdrawal to a better defensive position.³⁹⁸ As historians Desmond Morton and Jack Granatstein recounted, some Canadian soldiers fled the battlefield in

³⁹⁴ A report on the operations at the Drocourt-Quéant Line by the 12th Canadian Infantry Brigade, for example, stated that on September 2nd the attacking units could not break through the German Rearward Zone due to an uncoordinated attacking effort, the lack of tanks and a covering artillery barrage with smoke and strong German machine gun positions and artillery fire. Because of these factors, “further progress could not be made.” See LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4230, Folder: 22, File: 3, ‘Operations (Drocourt-Quéant Line): Intelligence Report by Prisoners – September 1918.’ See also Daniel Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987).

³⁹⁵ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 120.

³⁹⁶ Burns, *General Mud*, 79.

³⁹⁷ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with S.J. Car of the 10th Battalion, page 10.

³⁹⁸ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 249.

the face of a German tank attack.³⁹⁹ This acting without official orders from the commanding officer could and did happen in the heat of battle; often the survival and self-preservation instinct overwhelmed army discipline and threats of punishment.⁴⁰⁰ Deward Barnes, moreover, wrote in his diary how his unit went to ground near Cambrai in October 1918 and eventually retreated after taking heavy casualties.⁴⁰¹ As Barnes pointed out, when soldiers felt their battlefield performance was compromised or after losing trusted officers and leaders, the decision was often made that they would be unable to continue, and thus did not carry on with the attack.

Examples found in the archival record also illustrate that it was not just the infantry that felt forced to retreat at times, but other units as well. For example near Oisy, Private Robert Miller wrote in his diary how his artillery battery got caught in a heavy bombardment and were forced to retreat. As Miller put it, his battery had to “reverse” out of their current position.⁴⁰² If even artillery units were forced to retreat at times, it must have been much worse for the infantry at the front who were not burdened by heavy equipment, artillery pieces and ammunition and horse transport.

Major C. Smellie of the 8th Battalion also remembered at the Drocourt-Quéant Line there was a young officer who was running from the front in a panic and yelled “it’s too hot to stay there.”⁴⁰³ This officer was clearly disobeying orders and was setting a bad example for all the lower ranks in the vicinity. Smellie, in a post-war interview, went on to state that he got quite angry at this officer and forced him back to the front. Although whether he forced the officer back at the point a revolver or not is unclear.

³⁹⁹ Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1989).

⁴⁰⁰ A report of August 30th by a Major Mason of the 3rd Battalion, for example, stated that “A” and “C” Companies attempted to capture a German position, but did not have artillery support (were forced to rely upon Lewis guns instead). Due to heavy casualties and the fact that the position was “too strongly held,” the men retired to their original positions. See LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4805, Folder: 157, File: ‘Manuscript: Drocourt-Quéant Line.’ See also Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

⁴⁰¹ Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 261-262. Barnes also remembers conscripted reinforcements retreating, seemingly frightened and panicking. See page 264. Moreover, the ‘Narrative of Operations’ for the 5th Battalion on September 1st noted that due to heavy casualties, open flanks, strong German opposition and a counterattack, the “troops were slowly forced to withdraw to the original position.” See LAC, RG 9 III C 3, Volume: 4052, Folder: 22, File: 6, ‘Operations: Drocourt-Quéant Line – 26-8-18 to 9-9-18.’

⁴⁰² CWM, GMAC, ‘Diary Maintained by Private Robert Colborne Miller,’ 20110042 – 002.

⁴⁰³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with Major C. Smellie of the 8th Battalion, page 12. The officer was probably suffering from shell shock.

This next section will examine some instances, examples and pieces of evidence pointing to indiscipline in the Canadian Corps. Indiscipline during the final months of the war, contrary to earlier in the war, represented ‘war weariness’ because these acts occurred despite the acknowledgment of eventual victory. Especially in the latter half of the Hundred Days, the men at the front realised the war would probably be concluded victoriously but they also would almost certainly have to lay down their lives for it. The most extreme example of collective indiscipline during wartime was the mutiny or strike. Historian Gary Sheffield defined mutiny as “collective insubordination, or the combination of two or more persons to resist lawful military authority.”⁴⁰⁴ A mutiny was a collective way for the troops to show displeasure with superior officers or how the war was being fought. Although there was no mutiny in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days, there was one ‘mutiny’ in the Corps in the post-Armistice period. This ‘mutiny’ took place at Nivelles in Belgium while the troops were waiting for de-mobilization and transport back to Canada.⁴⁰⁵ However, this was more a strike (or protest) than a full-blown mutiny, and was more determined by the carry-over effects from the war itself and the unwillingness of a largely volunteer army of pre-war civilians to accept military discipline in peacetime. The fact that the Corps during this period of sustained offensive operations did not shoot their officers, drop their weapons and march from the front is a testament to their camaraderie, belief in the cause and feelings of revenge and hatred towards the enemy which kept them going through all the hardships.⁴⁰⁶ These factors, along with the influx of ‘fresh’ soldiers and the presence of victory, should be interpreted as mitigating features of the worst problems associated with ‘war weariness,’ or perhaps even as antidotes to the worst effects of ‘war weariness.’

This section will examine “insubordinate language” or talking back to superior ranks, threatening or even striking superior officers. One act that fell under the category of insubordinate language was the arguing or protesting of orders delivered by officers or non-

⁴⁰⁴ G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000).

⁴⁰⁵ Craig Leslie Mantle, ed., *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience* (Kingston and Toronto: Canadian Defence Academy Press and the Dundurn Group, 2007).

⁴⁰⁶ Many Canadian historians have used the fact the Corps was ultimately victorious during the Hundred Days as evidence or proof that ‘war weariness’ was not a problem. This thesis is attempting to illustrate, however, that this interpretation is unlikely, even unbelievable, given the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days Campaign as well as firsthand accounts of the time period. Moreover, the fact that the men carried on during this period of sustained offensive operations might also indicate that ‘war weariness’ was not very advanced in the Canadian Corps, especially when compared with the British or French.

commissioned officers. Many of the men in the Corps by the Hundred Days were fed up, worn out, 'war weary' and "bitterly unwilling to go back" to the front with no time for rest or recuperation.⁴⁰⁷ Other troops even had the audacity to argue with officers directly or insult them to their faces.⁴⁰⁸ Although grumbling and the use of insubordinate language was nothing new in the Canadian Corps, it was perhaps heightened during the final months of the war because with victory in sight, long-serving soldiers became more vocal over orders seen as unnecessary and did not want to be killed so near the end.

Will Bird of the 42nd Battalion recounted in his diary the story of his unit being pushed too hard in terms of labour duties without first having their breakfast. Bird, always looking out for the well-being of his men, stood up to the commanding officer ordering the work parties, despite the latter's threat of a court martial.⁴⁰⁹ It is important to note here that even with the re-organization of the Canadian Corps under the leadership of Arthur Currie and the addition of more pioneer, engineering and labour units, the 'poor bloody infantry' still had to take part in work parties, on top of all their actual combat duties. Although troops taking part in labour duties was not uncommon during the Great War, these obligations during the sustained fighting of the Hundred Days was perhaps too much for the soldiers at the front.

The High Command and Corps leadership took the offence of insubordinate language very seriously. A Private Walker of the 1st Battalion, for instance, had charges brought against him for "conduct to the prejudice of good order and military discipline in that he used insubordinate language to an officer."⁴¹⁰ It must be understood that from the perspective of the military authorities, any leniency toward insubordinate language had the ability to undermine order and discipline in an inherently hierarchical army structure. The High Command thus had little to no tolerance for any act of insubordination because they interpreted it as compromising discipline, and therefore military effectiveness. Finally, the aforementioned Will Bird remembered right at the end of the war that his men cursed, swore and "argued bitterly" over the

⁴⁰⁷ Denis Winter, *Death's Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978).

⁴⁰⁸ Sheffield, *Morale and Discipline*, 150. Artilleryman Ernest Black also mentioned in his memoir men who used insubordinate language toward their commanding officer under cover of darkness, as well as those tried by court martial for their insubordinate language. See Ernest G. Black, *I Want One Volunteer* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965). See pages 166-177.

⁴⁰⁹ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 129.

⁴¹⁰ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4024, Folder: 4, File: 8, 'Discipline: 2-5-16 to 31-12-18.'

order to capture the Belgian city of Mons.⁴¹¹ This, of course, was a sentiment expressed by many at the very end of the war.

Some ‘war weary’ men, fed up with the heavy casualties and their chances of survival, also went so far as to threaten or even strike a superior rank. Again, Will Bird recounted a story pertinent to this discussion. After the arrival of a new officer to his unit (14 Platoon) during the Battle of Amiens, this officer, who in the words of Bird “had spent most of the war in lecture halls and on parade grounds,” ordered Bird and his men to charge a German machine gun nest, despite the fact that it would have been “suicide to try it.” The 14 Platoon had already fought valiantly that day and the men were not having any of the officer’s ill-thought out notions of tactical assault. One soldier even pulled his Lee Enfield on the officer, threatened to shoot him and the order was quickly rescinded.⁴¹²

Another important example of indiscipline that illustrated the onset and influence of ‘war weariness’ was that of drunkenness or the over-reliance on alcohol which was used as a coping mechanism by the troops to deal with the horror, stresses and strains of sustained combat. Although rum was given to all ranks and used to calm the men and steady their nerves, problems emerged when soldiers became addicted to alcohol or over-reliant on the ‘liquid courage’ it provided. As historian Desmond Morton pointed out, the drunkenness of officers was particularly problematic, compromising morale, discipline and decision-making and even leading to the men’s loss of respect or confidence in their leaders.⁴¹³ It must be understood that drunkenness indeed had the potential to become a serious problem and certainly represented insubordination and indiscipline.⁴¹⁴ It should be emphasised that during the final months of the war with the end in sight and unceasing orders to advance and attack, breaches of military discipline continued because of the onset of fatalism amongst the troops of the Corps.

Drunkenness also seemed to become more of a problem during or immediately after intense, sustained and costly combat. Leonard Smith in his study of the French 5th Division, for

⁴¹¹ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 147.

⁴¹² Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 110. See also LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4024, Folder: 4, File: 8, ‘Discipline: 2-5-16 to 31-12-18.’ Moreover, a report sent to the 3rd Division on 24 July 1918 by the Corps Commander outlined some of the examples or instances of insubordination and poor discipline he observed. Currie complained about: problems associated with saluting, the informality between officers and other ranks, gambling, drunkenness (especially among officers), fighting among non-commissioned officers, and concluded that “there are quite a number of cases of refusing to obey an order,” subordinate ranks striking superiors, looting and stealing. See LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4198, Folder: 2, File: 9, ‘Discipline: 9-10-16 to 6-9-18.’

⁴¹³ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 109.

⁴¹⁴ Madsen, *Canadian Military Law*, 46 and McCulloch, ‘The Nivelles “Mutiny,”’ 466.

example, recognized this. Smith found that the survivors of the titanic struggle at Verdun seemed only interested in getting intoxicated.⁴¹⁵ Alcohol appeared to be a way for the troops to deal with the sorrow and stress they had experienced; the booze acted as a mental escape for the soldiers after witnessing, and perhaps engaging in, such brutality on the Western Front.⁴¹⁶

Examples of drunkenness and the use of alcohol to cope with the constant spectre of death are also found in firsthand accounts, as the men clearly wanted an end to the war and alcohol was perhaps seen as a final recourse. Deward Barnes, for instance, highlighted how the over-consumption of alcohol could compromise decision-making and therefore the health, safety, security and well-being of all the troops in the area. On 27 August 1918 Barnes wrote in his journal that “Sergeant Newell and a Private went out investigating the enemy front lines. They had had too much rum to drink.”⁴¹⁷ Moreover, the medical officer Lord Moran made it clear that extended time at the front made men more likely to turn to drink.⁴¹⁸ Moran encountered a clearly ‘war weary’ (and perhaps shell shocked) soldier who told him that he was relying more and more on alcohol just to get through the days. If this behaviour was not reckless enough, this particular NCO also stated that “I wish to God I could get hit” with a Blighty.⁴¹⁹ Some troops of the Corps also began relying more and more on alcohol to deal with the unceasing stresses and strains of combat. H.S. Cooper of the 3rd Battalion, for example, described rum as a vital “medicine.” Cooper moreover argued that alcohol allowed men to sleep, served to stave off sickness and did an awful amount of good to wet and tired soldiers.⁴²⁰ Moreover, a 58th Battalion report on 23 August 1918 mentioned how men were using alcohol to carry on, either in combat or during exhausting marches.⁴²¹

Finally, the last indicator of a decline in discipline or an increase in insubordination was the act of theft or looting.⁴²² At times, these fed up soldiers stole or looted for alcohol itself. Alcohol was used not only as a coping mechanism during war, but also to combat the monotony and boredom of the post-Armistice period. Other times men looted for souvenirs on dead bodies,

⁴¹⁵ Smith, *Mutiny and Obedience*, 165.

⁴¹⁶ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 239.

⁴¹⁷ Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 242.

⁴¹⁸ Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1967).

⁴¹⁹ Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage*, 130.

⁴²⁰ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with Col. H.S. Cooper of the 3rd Battalion, page 15.

⁴²¹ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4198, Folder: 2, File: 9, ‘Discipline: 9-10-16 to 6-9-18.’

⁴²² Artilleryman Ernest Black wrote in his memoir how “in the army the taking of government property was not considered by the troops to be theft.” See Ernest G. Black, *I Want One Volunteer* (Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1965). See page 19. See also Madsen, *Canadian Military Law*, 46.

both Allied and enemy.⁴²³ Both of these instances represented how the troops were less willing to follow orders as closely as in the past.

The archival record illustrates that the Canadian Corps leadership took charges of theft or looting quite seriously, especially in the latter half of the Hundred Days when the Corps was in close proximity to villages, towns and cities teeming with civilians.⁴²⁴ A supply officer of the 1st Division, for example, reported on 28 August 1918 that “evidence exists that the bodies of some of our dead are looted” and that “the severest disciplinary action will be taken against anyone apprehended in this act.”⁴²⁵ For the High Command, this crime did not just represent an act of indiscipline, it also illustrated a lack of respect for fallen soldiers on the glorious field of battle.

Another report on ‘Discipline’ emphasized that the troops entering Arras “are to be specially warned against theft or looting.”⁴²⁶ These reports and ‘Special Orders’ indicate that the Corps leadership felt looting would become a problem, perhaps because the troops would resort to looting and theft as a way to gain valuable souvenirs or to supplement their meagre rations. This also appears to illustrate that the men were fed up with the war and with strict army discipline and were less worried about army punishments as they felt they were going to die anyway.

In terms of more widespread looting, complaints were made against the 1st Canadian Infantry Brigade regarding looting in Arras. This particular report warned that “it is to be clearly understood by all ranks of this Brigade that any men caught in the act of looting will be shot.”⁴²⁷ The fact that men were threatened with execution proves that looting and theft were taken seriously indeed. Finally, a report of 17 October 1918 stated that “looting has taken place in

⁴²³ Ernest Black, serving with the Canadian Artillery, stated that upon coming across a pile of dead Germans “we walked among them looking for souvenirs but the infantry had had the first pick.” He goes on to write that all the watches and money were gone, but the artillerymen took shoulder straps and uniform buttons from the corpses. See Black, *I Want One Volunteer*, 52.

⁴²⁴ It should be stated that problems regarding looting and theft certainly happened earlier in the war, but seemed to be based more on dissatisfaction with how the war was going. However during the Hundred Days the Corps was composed mostly of long-serving soldiers, and thus the majority of the ‘bad apples’ had long since been removed, who should have been happy that they were finally winning. And yet, these disciplinary problems still occurred pointing to another cause of these problems, namely, the onset of ‘war weariness’ (rather than other explanatory factors for these disciplinary problems).

⁴²⁵ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4024, Folder: 4, File: 8, ‘Discipline: 2-5-16 to 31-12-18.’

⁴²⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁷ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4024, Folder: 4, File: 9, ‘Discipline: 16-6-16 to 27-3-19.’

Arras recently in spite of orders that have been issued on the subject and of the measures taken to prevent it.”⁴²⁸

The killing of German prisoners or those attempting to surrender in the heat of battle is another piece of evidence that reflects insubordination and indiscipline so often associated with ‘war weariness.’ Furthermore, the killing of German prisoners was spurred in part by feelings of fatalism and hopelessness, fear, revenge and even hatred toward the enemy. The sense of futility among the soldiers of the Corps, and hopelessness over their prospects for survival, made the men want to quit and less bound by army orders; moreover, the men were filled with terror and were fed up, so they took their anger and bitterness out on the enemy. As with other acts of indiscipline, the killing of prisoners illustrates how by the Hundred Days the men were less able or willing to follow orders from superiors as closely as they had in the past, and were basically unwilling to follow the accepted ‘rules’ of war. The killing of prisoners should be interpreted as an overt act of indiscipline because, generally speaking, intelligence officers in the Corps wanted to interview these prisoners to gather information on the enemy’s morale, unit strengths, new weapons and the like. Thus, killing Germans prisoners was an overt act of indiscipline because they were acting contrary to orders issued by the High Command and Corps leadership. Evidence of Canadian soldiers killing German prisoners signifies how these troops were taking out their anger and bitterness on the stubborn German defenders who refused to give up and, therefore prolonged the war and increased the death toll so near the end. It was rather difficult to sympathise with the plight of an enemy who was attempting to kill you, and the men were more willing to allow their emotions drive their actions and attitude. Evidence in firsthand accounts make it clear that by this point in the war the Canadian soldiers were much less trusting of the increasingly desperate German soldiers. It should also be noted that in this section we must rely more upon secondary literature, anecdotal or suggestive evidence and firsthand accounts because the killing of prisoners was not something the Canadian Corps leadership or High Command wanted to emphasize, and is thus more absent from official reports. Moreover, it must be emphasised that with the absence of the more extreme manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps (such as mass desertion and widespread mutiny), the killing of prisoners should be interpreted as a primary indicator pointing to ‘war weariness’ as a widespread and growing problem amongst Canadian troops. Furthermore, the Corps commander Arthur Currie wrote in

⁴²⁸ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4088, Folder: 17, File: 3, ‘Looting: Arras – 17-10-18 to 21-10-18.’

his diary how the men of the Corps were bitter at the poor treatment of civilians, and made clear references to the killing of German prisoners.⁴²⁹ Currie seemed to suggest that this deplorable and unlawful act was largely inevitable under the trying circumstances of the Last Hundred Days.

In this section the killing of prisoners should be understood as the murder, in whichever way, of German soldiers either after they had surrendered or while they were in the process of surrendering in battle. It is also important here to distinguish between Germans fighting to the death, the killing of prisoners during their attempt at surrender and the murder of unarmed prisoners after their surrender. Although in all these situations the end result was the same - the death of German soldiers at the hands of Canadians - it certainly reflects different levels of rage, revenge and the discipline and control exerted by frontline officers and NCOs. The killing of German prisoners affected all units and all soldiers from privates, non-commissioned officers and officers who took part either indirectly or directly in this act, or contributed to the atmosphere whereby men sought revenge.⁴³⁰

Canadian troops during the Great War had the reputation not only to be keen on souvenir acquisition, but also on the killing of prisoners of war. Aspects of the historiography talk of Canadian soldiers having the reputation for killing German prisoners “out of hand,” but just how true was this perception?⁴³¹ The *Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* stated that the “Canadians’ hostility towards the Germans was intensified during the closing stages of the war,” and that if some troops “indulged in unnecessary killing in the heat of action [it] was regrettable but to a certain extent understandable” under the circumstances.⁴³² The relatively sympathetic attitude of Colonel Nicholson can be made more comprehensible by the fact that ‘false surrenders’ on the part of some German soldiers undermined the trust of future would-be Canadian captors. Moreover, continued stubborn resistance on the part of the German machine-gunners seems to have been a big contributor, and rumours and evidence of the killing of Canadian prisoners earlier in the war by the enemy only exacerbated the problem.

⁴²⁹ Mark Osborne Humphries, ed., *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie: Diaries, Letters, and Report to the Ministry, 1917-1933* (Waterloo: LCMSDS Press of Wilfrid Laurier University, 2008).

⁴³⁰ Tim Cook, “The Politics of Surrender: Canadian Soldiers and the Killing of Prisoners in the Great War,” *The Journal of Military History* 70, 3 (2006): 637-665.

⁴³¹ J.L. Granatstein, *Canada’s Army: Waging War and Keeping the Peace* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004).

⁴³² G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Dunhamel, 1962). See page 475.

This section will examine and outline some of the motives or reasons for the killing of German prisoners or those attempting to surrender in the heat of battle, either as a deliberate act or in response to changing conditions on the ground, such as perceptions of German treachery. As mentioned above, some of the Canadian soldiers were avid souvenir-hunters. C.E. Barnes of the 8th Battalion, for instance, remembered how a German prisoner running away was shot by a comrade of his so that the latter could take his helmet as a souvenir. Barnes explained that “he just shot him in cold blood to get that helmet.”⁴³³ The killing of German prisoners appears to be an indicator for the onset of ‘war weariness,’ because military discipline offered less of a constraint upon the soldiers’ action as they accepted that they were going to be killed anyhow.

However, a more common justification or explanation for the killing of prisoners was in response to the brutal treatment of French and Belgian civilians in occupied territories and also the poor treatment towards British and Dominion prisoners of war. In this sense, one main motivation for the killing of German prisoners was a feeling of revenge or retribution. The sinking of the *Llandoverly Castle*, for example, was used by the British government and press as propaganda to portray the Germans as barbaric and to encourage and incite martial fervour on the battlefield and home front. Troops at the front were reminded of this attack on civilians and medical personnel just prior to the opening of the Amiens offensive, and even the attack itself was code-named *Operation L-C* (for *Llandoverly Castle*).⁴³⁴

It must also be understood that after the Canadian Corps had advanced beyond the old battlefields of the Western Front, they reached the inhabited areas of northern France. In these formerly occupied areas, the men in the Corps themselves saw the deplorable living conditions of the civilians, evidence of German scorched earth tactics, as well being provided with firsthand accounts of German atrocities committed on the civilian population.⁴³⁵ These sights and stories seemed to confirm the propaganda they had been fed about German savagery. Thus, many of the Canadian troops wanted to avenge the brutalized civilians of France, and felt the need to ‘settle the score.’⁴³⁶ As the Corps continued along its axis of advance, near Valenciennes the continued

⁴³³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with C.E. Barnes of the 8th Battalion, page 3 and Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 120.

⁴³⁴ Morton and Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon*, 200.

⁴³⁵ Morton and Granatstein, for example, stated that “when they [the Canadian soldiers] saw what German occupation had meant for the French, they were angry too. Civilians were hungry; their homes and cities had been pillaged, and mines and factories had been systematically destroyed.” See Morton and Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon*, 231.

⁴³⁶ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 555.

encounter with civilians and their ill-treatment only “added to the attackers’ rage;” even Currie, the Corps Commander, noted the decreased chances of the Corps taking as many prisoners as usual.⁴³⁷ Currie himself admitted that having the men encounter the deplorable state of the civilians made them bitter, hard to control and contributed to the killing of German prisoners in combat.⁴³⁸

Gus Siverts of the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles remembered near the end of the war, around 8 November, the murder of nine civilians by the retreating Germans led a Canadian stretcher-bearer to go to houses where remaining Germans were hiding in the cellar. This young stretcher-bearer (medical orderly) told the Germans to come up the stairs one by one and “as they came up each one just got it behind the ear.”⁴³⁹ Siverts added that this soldier saw it not as killing prisoners, but just as killing Germans. The fact that this traditionally unarmed soldier would be driven to such lengths represents the depth of his feeling for revenge upon the German occupiers and a breakdown of discipline within the Corps itself.

Evidence also emerges that Canadian soldiers killed German prisoners in reaction to changing conditions on the battlefield and, specifically, in direct response to German treachery, either actual or perceived. The fact that “treacherous tactics” of the German soldiers led to the killing of prisoners is highlighted in several of the secondary sources pertaining to this time period.⁴⁴⁰ After Germans feigned surrender, and then shot on their would-be captors, the Canadians fought “with a vengeance” and were less inclined to accept the surrender of German troops.⁴⁴¹ Although taking place in the context of the British Army, historian Denis Winter recounted the story of troops killing Germans in direct response to treacherous actions.⁴⁴²

Perhaps the most infamous Canadian case relating to German treachery and the subsequent killing of German prisoners was that of Sergeant Hugh Cairns of the 46th Battalion. Cairns, in an advance near Valenciennes/Mont Houy, accepted the surrender of a large group of German soldiers; realising that they heavily outnumbered their captors, a German officer

⁴³⁷ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 560 and J.P. Harris, *Amiens to Armistice: The BEF in the Hundred Day's Campaign*, 8 August – 11 November 1918 (London: Brassey's, 1998).

⁴³⁸ Humphries, *The Selected Papers of Sir Arthur Currie*, 131-132

⁴³⁹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 17, Interview with Gus Siverts of the 2nd Battalion of the CMRs, Interview 2 of 2, page 11.

⁴⁴⁰ See, for example, D.J. Goodspeed, *The Road Past Vimy: The Canadian Corps 1914-1918* (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1969) and Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 44.

⁴⁴¹ Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916 – Volume I* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2007).

⁴⁴² Winter, *Soldiers of the Great War*, 213-214.

“treacherously pulled his pistol and shot Cairns” in the midsection.⁴⁴³ Only a handful of German soldiers survived that particular encounter, and Cairns’ comrades went on to avenge his death as “fewer enemies than surrendered survived to become prisoners” that day.⁴⁴⁴ This illustrates that not only were German soldiers killed after surrendering, many enemy troops were not even given the *opportunity* to surrender. In situations such as that pertaining to Hugh Cairns, the comrades of the fallen often went on to kill Germans who were not at all involved in the original incident. A good example of this is the case of Lieutenant A.L. McLean. While fighting at the Drocourt-Quéant Line in September of 1918, McLean and a small group charged a machine gun nest and captured the surviving German crew members. McLean was then treacherously shot dead and his livid comrades killed the remaining Germans in the area and then went on to kill others and “gave the same treatment to other groups of innocent enemy troops attempting to surrender.”⁴⁴⁵

Firsthand accounts also attest to the killing of German prisoners in response to perceived treachery. Will Bird, for example, remembered after capturing a group of Germans, some hid and re-emerged to fire on their Canadian captors. One German officer fired his weapon, put his hands up and was met with the cold steel of a Canadian bayonet.⁴⁴⁶ Another such case was recounted by Henry Newmark of the 5th Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles. Newmark told the story of a German machine-gunner who had one arm up in the air in the traditional gesture of surrender, but was still using the other to fire his weapon. Newmark observed that “that machine gunner was bayoneted a good many times after he was dead...because they didn’t like what he did.”⁴⁴⁷ Contemporary sources also attest to the fact that Canadian soldiers in some instances also killed German troops who had raised their hands in surrender at the last possible second before being overrun.⁴⁴⁸

W.P. Doolans of the 21st Battalion, moreover, remembered German treachery and the response of the Canadian troops. Due to the sheer number of German troops surrendering in the Hundred Days and the need for Canadian soldiers to continue the advance, sometimes Germans

⁴⁴³ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 563.

⁴⁴⁴ Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 192 and Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 178. See also Morton and Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon*, 232 and Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 474-475.

⁴⁴⁵ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 487; Cook, ‘The Politics of Surrender,’ 657 and Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 113.

⁴⁴⁶ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 120.

⁴⁴⁷ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 17, Interview with Henry Newmark of the 5th CMRs, Interview 2 of 2, page 12.

⁴⁴⁸ Robert John Renison, *A Story of Five Cities: A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days* in J. Castell Hopkins, *Canada at War, 1914-1918: A Record of Heroism and Achievement* (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review Limited, 1919).

were captured, disarmed and sent back to the rear without an escort. In certain instances these Germans picked up discarded weapons and opened fire on advancing Canadians.⁴⁴⁹ The Canadians soon learned to spare a man or two for escort duty to prevent this from happening. George Bell recounted the story of how he was escorting a group of German prisoners to the rear when one German Lieutenant picked up a stray bomb (grenade) in an attempt to escape. Bell wrote in his diary that he pointed his rifle at the man and certainly would have shot him if the Lieutenant had tried anything further.⁴⁵⁰

However, it can be argued that feelings of revenge, hatred or even blood-lust were the largest contributing factor to the killing of German prisoners or those attempting to surrender in the heat of combat. Revenge for the death of a comrade, friend or trusted leader, whether through treachery or otherwise, has been described as “the most powerful motive” in driving men to kill prisoners of war.⁴⁵¹ Terror, adrenaline, rage and revenge were all “factors that inhibited the acceptance of surrender” in combat and sometimes men entered action with the sole intention of getting revenge or ‘settling old scores,’ and thus were not interested in taking prisoners whatsoever.⁴⁵² German machine gun crews especially felt the wrath of vengeful Canadian troops, in part because of their effectiveness and their propensity to fight to the very last, as well as because of their long range and the fact that they attacked by ambush.

Indeed, it must be understood that some men and units were given permission, either overtly or otherwise, to be ruthless and to not take prisoners in the heat of combat. This attitude in part reflected the fact that during much of the final months of the war the Corps was engaged in intense, vicious, costly combat where “little quarter was asked or given” in these conditions.⁴⁵³ Herbert A. Mowat of the 8th Battalion, for instance, remembered at Amiens on 9 August that fleeing German soldiers were not taken prisoner but, rather, were cut down by Canadian machine gun fire, though it is not clear whether this was due to a direct order or was just the way things developed.⁴⁵⁴

⁴⁴⁹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 10, Interview with W.P. Doolans of the 21st Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 2.

⁴⁵⁰ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 113, ‘Back to Blighty,’ George V. Bell Diary, page 126.

⁴⁵¹ Bourke, *History of Killing*, 182.

⁴⁵² Cook, ‘The Politics of Surrender,’ 644-645.

⁴⁵³ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 530.

⁴⁵⁴ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with Herbert A. Mowat of the 8th Battalion, page 20.

Pertaining to the Canadian Corps, the author of the history of the 58th Battalion referred to a Major Carmichael's "take no prisoners" policy.⁴⁵⁵ How widespread this policy was in the wider Canadian Corps, however, is difficult to ascertain and perhaps may never be known. Nevertheless, Victor Wheeler of the 50th Battalion wrote near the city of Denain that machine gun crews were "given no quarter" and that "it was impossible to avoid taking so many alive," clearly indicating that they did not *want* to take the Germans alive.⁴⁵⁶ S. Bowe of the 2nd Battalion of the Canadian Mounted Rifles also remembered before an attack that his Lieutenant-Colonel told the men "the more prisoners you take, the less you're going to have to eat yourselves."⁴⁵⁷ This certainly would have been a powerful incentive not to give the Germans any quarter in battle, gave the impression that not taking prisoners was tolerated and perhaps reflected the wider feelings of the men in his unit. Finally, Deward Barnes wrote in his journal how in one instance an officer reprimanded Barnes and his men for capturing, and not killing, a German machine gun crew.⁴⁵⁸ With officers such as this, it is no wonder that the men resorted to the killing of prisoners of war. It should also be emphasised that the officers of the Corps were as likely as their subordinates to want revenge; they had lost loved ones in the war as well.⁴⁵⁹ The officers and NCOs of the Corps were themselves suffering from 'war weariness,' in large measure because officers and non-commissioned officers consistently suffered the highest casualty rates, as they were no doubt aware.⁴⁶⁰

It should also be noted here that one justification for the killing of German prisoners was for the sake of military expediency. At times it appeared to make the most sense, or was safest for the men, to kill the Germans they had captured outright rather than deal with increasing

⁴⁵⁵ Shackleton, *58th Battalion*, 250.

⁴⁵⁶ Wheeler, *50th Battalion*, 279.

⁴⁵⁷ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 17, Interview with S. Bowe of the 2nd Battalion of the CMRs, Interview 2 of 3, page 10.

⁴⁵⁸ Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 236.

⁴⁵⁹ Senior officers of the Corps, for example, had also lost brothers, family members and good friends in combat.

⁴⁶⁰ To provide but two examples of heavy casualties to officers during the Hundred Days, a 4th Canadian Infantry Brigade 'Narrative of Operations' for 8 August at Amiens stated that "many casualties occurred, particularly among officers." The report listed 26 officer casualties and 563 other rank casualties on 8 August alone. See LAC, RG 9 III C 3, Volume: 4105, Folder: 20, File: 4, 'Operations: Amiens – 4-8-18 to 10-8-18.' Moreover, a report by the 1st Canadian Division for the Canal du Nord and Cambrai operations stated that there were especially heavy casualties to officers and insufficient replacements. For example, the report stated that the 13th Battalion suffered 18 officer casualties between 27 September and 5 October, but received no officer reinforcements during this time period. This would have the inevitable effect of putting extra pressure on the survivors, further contributing to their sense of fatalism. See LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4793, Folder: 46, File: 'Narrative: 3rd C.I. Brigade – Oct. 5th to Oct. 12th 1918.'

numbers of prisoners of war. As a letter from the British soldier William Willis made clear, sometimes the attacking troops could simply not handle the volume of German prisoners. Willis wrote that “it was impossible to take prisoners so they were all shot” on the spot.⁴⁶¹ Furthermore, John Crombie, a soldier who described the execution of German prisoners as “horrificing,” also admitted that it was militarily “expedient” to do so.⁴⁶² When it came down to an option between the safety of the Canadian soldiers and the survival of all the German prisoners, it was the latter that often lost out.

If the German prisoners proved uncooperative or if there were not enough Canadian soldiers to spare to escort them back to the prisoner of war cages, sometimes Germans were shot as a result. A soldier of the 26th Battalion, for instance, remembered capturing a high-ranking senior German officer (“a general of some kind”) from an army headquarters. The German officer refused to be taken back to the Canadian lines by a lower rank, and he stated that he would rather be shot. Ingram admitted that “I shot him and he dropped to his knees and I shot him again.”⁴⁶³ Ingram was clearly in no mood to deal with the arrogance of this particular German officer.⁴⁶⁴ When German prisoners were killed because there were not enough men to escort them back, it was seen as their (the Germans’) lives, or Canadian lives. The fact that there were so many discarded weapons lying around on the battlefield made it too risky at times to send back prisoners without an escort; in these situations, the men felt there was no choice but to kill the German prisoners.

Will Bird admitted in his diary that he was guilty of killing a German soldier who “was probably trying to surrender.”⁴⁶⁵ Bird also discussed other situations whereby men in his unit killed unarmed German troops during the Hundred Days.⁴⁶⁶ Deward Barnes also recounted the story of over-running a German position where at the last minute the defenders put up their hands and yelled “mercy” and “kamerad.” Barnes wrote that not all were taken prisoner, and

⁴⁶¹ Bourke, *History of Killing*, 35.

⁴⁶² Bourke, *History of Killing*, 189.

⁴⁶³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 11, Interview with Ingram of the 26th Battalion, Interview 5 of 5, page 5.

⁴⁶⁴ In a similar case recounted by Agar Adamson, Canadian officer Adamson killed a German Major because he would not go to the rear with a lower rank. See N.M. Christie, ed., *Letters of Agar Adamson* (Nepean: CEF Books, 1997), 274 and Cook, ‘The Politics of Surrender,’ 648.

⁴⁶⁵ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 98. Bird noticed after he had killed the German that the latter was unarmed and did not look like a combat soldier, leading to his belief that the man was probably trying to surrender to Bird.

⁴⁶⁶ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 106.

admitted that “we shot them down like dogs.”⁴⁶⁷ A Private Robert Miller also mentioned in his diary how German machine gun crews were bayoneted at their positions. Although whether this was because they fought to the bitter end or was a case of killing surrendering enemy soldiers is unclear.⁴⁶⁸ S.J. Car of the 10th Battalion also recalled years after the war how at Amiens they shot at Germans who were running away with their hands up.⁴⁶⁹ Moreover, the fact that the German troops were running away is perhaps revealing about how they feared Canadian soldiers would treat them if they were captured.

Furthermore, G. Noir of the 10th Battalion remembered during one action many German prisoners streaming back toward the Canadian lines; he stated that “there was about thirty prisoners and I don’t think there was very many [at] the end at all, they shot the most of them.”⁴⁷⁰ This is another clear indication of insubordination of wider army policy because the troops knew that they were supposed to take prisoners for intelligence purposes. It is obviously impossible to know how many officers allowed the Germans to be killed rather than taken prisoner, but is something that should be kept in mind nevertheless.

John Wise of the 25th Battalion recalled seeing at Amiens a tank which was purposefully shooting German prisoners and which “killed a number of them.” At that moment a member of the tank crew opened a hatch and told Wise that they would not have to feed those Germans now. Wise described this scene as an act of unnecessary “brutality.”⁴⁷¹ This example illustrates that within the Canadian Corps there were very different perceptions on the killing of German prisoners. Finally, Major H.S. Hanson of the 43rd Battalion remembered at Amiens that an officer “shot two or three prisoners right in front of my eyes. I couldn’t stop him, he was a tough little devil.”⁴⁷²

The killing of prisoners and those attempting to surrender in the heat of battle represented insubordination and indiscipline on the part of the men, and served as an outlet for the ‘war weary’ troops, and anger and bitterness should be understood reflecting ‘war weariness.’ German

⁴⁶⁷ Cane, *Journal of Deward Barnes*, 228. We can also see here the de-humanization of the German enemy, perhaps as a manifestation of hatred, revenge and fear of the Germans, no doubt spurred by Allied propaganda and witnessing the terrible conditions for French and Belgian civilians under German occupation.

⁴⁶⁸ CWM, GMAC, ‘Diary Maintained by Private Robert Colborne Miller,’ 20110042 – 002.

⁴⁶⁹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with S.J. Car of the 10th Battalion, page 5.

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, Interview with G. Noir of the 10th Battalion, page 3.

⁴⁷¹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 11, Interview with Colonel John Wise of the 25th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 6.

⁴⁷² LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 13, Interview with Major H.S. Hanson of the 43rd Battalion, page 15.

prisoners of war were killed, in part, as an act of collective punishment toward all German troops for prolonging the war and stubbornly resisting to the end, especially the machine gun crews.

Acts of insubordination and indiscipline illustrated how the men were less able or willing to follow orders as closely so near the end, and were manifestations of 'war weariness' amongst the troops of the Corps during the final months of the war. Although acts of indiscipline and insubordination were not ideal and reflected poorly upon the officers and NCOs of the Allied armies, it appears that the High Command tolerated these acts as the men continued to fight and drive the Germans back, and presumably because they were unable to stop it. Drunkenness, in particular, represented a coping mechanism for the troops after witnessing or engaging in brutal behaviour and after being pushed to the very limits of their strength, courage and endurance. The killing of prisoners also acted as an outlet for the troops, and indicated that the men of the Corps were fed up with the stubborn German resistance so near the end and with the war in general. This was the case because the men of the Corps felt that they were certainly going to die (a sense of futility and fatalism), as the war was won but not yet over. Simply put, these men were 'war weary' and this manifested itself in multifarious ways, such as in acts of indiscipline and insubordination and the killing of German prisoners or those attempting to surrender in the heat of combat.

Chapter 5

The final manifestation of ‘war weariness’ that will be examined is the writing and words of the men in the Canadian Corps. Firsthand accounts make it clear that many of these soldiers recognized the presence and influence of ‘war weariness’ in the Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign. The rhetoric and writing of the men provide perhaps the strongest evidence we have for the onset, entrenchment and influence of ‘war weariness,’ as it comes directly from the soldiers who fought and suffered at the front. To this end, this chapter relies substantially upon the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation’s *In Flanders Fields* interview series with First World War veterans conducted in the 1960s; although time serves to dilute memory, these interviews provide the researcher with insight into how the troops *felt* at the time. Moreover, another aspect to be kept in mind is the fact that memory tends to retain feelings and emotions much more lastingly and accurately than facts or dates. While the use of memory and oral history within historical analysis is certainly controversial, researchers are sometimes forced to extrapolate the experiences of many through the writings or words of the articulate, surviving few.⁴⁷³ The troops taking part in the actual offensive operations of the final months of the war stated quite plainly or wrote that they were tired, fed up, worn out, questioned their personal survival and just wanted an end to the war and its fear, stress and sorrow. Thus, many of the men in the Canadian Corps acknowledged that they were ‘war weary’ at this point in the war, even if they did not call it that.

For a historian of the Great War, it is difficult to get at the actual experiences and perceptions of the men at the front after it is filtered by other groups. As a consequence war diaries, officer reports and High Command documents are at least one step removed from the experiences of the men at the front. Aside from after action reports written by officers in the field actually taking part in operations, much of what is handed down for posterity reflects a particular bias and interpretation of events. The Canadian Corps leadership or the British High Command did not want to emphasize, for example, this ‘fed up’ attitude or the propensity for the killing of prisoners. Therefore, we must ask ourselves if we can actually identify and get at the authentic perceptions, experiences and the mental and emotional states of the men of the Corps during the

⁴⁷³ Firsthand accounts and veteran interviews are what we have as evidence for this time period, as the Canadian medical and military authorities did not want to highlight the disciplinary problems of the men of the Corps or their unwillingness to carry on in combat so near the end. This is probably more an issue of selection and emphasis in the historical record, rather than a deliberate covering up of these issues. Moreover, there is no reason to believe that these veterans were making stories up, but is perhaps more an issue of exaggeration or hindsight influencing memory.

Hundred Days. To remedy this dilemma, we as historians can examine and interrogate contemporary writings and firsthand accounts, such as diaries, letters, memoirs and journals, aspects of soldier culture (such as soldier songs), and post-war interviews to gain insight into frontline soldiers' perceptions of combat and their attitude toward the war.⁴⁷⁴ It should also be understood, however, that these post-war interviews conducted with the surviving veterans were also filtered by nostalgia and society's perceptions, with which many veterans perhaps wanted to conform. Nevertheless, these interviews conducted after the war give the historian unique insight into how the men experienced the war.

The common infantrymen at the front were far removed from discussions of grand strategy and high politics, and could therefore only write about what entered their world-view. Because of this, soldiers provide the historian with a more personal and realistic, albeit limited, glimpse into what life was like for the men involved in this period of sustained combat. By combining the best of the traditional top-down approach with a bottom-up approach, we are able to provide the reader with a more objective and balanced view of Canadian soldiers' experience.

As outlined in the previous chapters, there were many factors creating the necessary preconditions for the onset and entrenchment of 'war weariness.' The nature, pace and intensity of Hundred Days, for example, meant the men of the Corps were engaged in a new type of warfare and were therefore more exposed during open, semi-mobile operations; heavy casualties were the result of such fighting. Although units of the Corps spent much of the late spring and early summer of 1918 training for this, it was clearly insufficient because W. Murray of the 10th Battalion remarked that "I don't think we had too much training" in that type of combat.⁴⁷⁵ The widespread use of German machine gun defences in depth and artillery fire ensured heavy casualties for the attacking troops and reinforced the fatalistic attitude adopted by Canadian soldiers. Moreover, during the Hundred Days the Germans were relying more heavily upon the indiscriminate use of poison gas in order to slow the advance of the Allies. Although the Corps had adequate gas doctrine and defensive procedures, the unprepared French civilians exposed to this poison gas contributed to the belief among Canadian troops that they were facing German monsters. It should also be emphasised that by the autumn of 1918 so many men of the Corps were long-serving veterans, who had enlisted by mid-1916 and had already served months or

⁴⁷⁴ It should be noted, of course, that these firsthand accounts and sources provide problems for the historical researcher just as more traditional or 'official' accounts do.

⁴⁷⁵ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with W. Murray of the 10th Battalion, page 13.

years at the front in tough combat conditions.⁴⁷⁶ This is an especially important point to grasp as ‘war weariness’ is a cumulative problem, and it set in amongst the men of the Corps during the final months of the war due to the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days and the fact that it was the same soldiers doing the fighting over and over again. This led to a loss of heart amongst the men, and led to the belief that they would not survive the war, hence the adoption of a fatalistic attitude and feelings of hopelessness.

Another factor contributing to the onset of ‘war weariness’ was that there was now very little time for training or reconnaissance prior to attacks and little time for rest, recuperation or the integration of replacements after operations. E.L.M. Burns, an officer in the Corps, argued that successful infantry attacks required sufficient time for reconnaissance and preparation, and after those units suffered heavy casualties they needed time to rest and re-organise their “weary infantrymen.”⁴⁷⁷ Thus it is no surprise that ‘war weariness’ set in when the men were denied these crucial periods of preparation and recovery. During the final months of the war the men of the Corps were also exposed to brutal combat and nearly continual advancing, attacking and consolidation operations; the soldiers were often attacking across open fields without the protection of trenches or dugouts, leaving them more vulnerable to enemy fire. On top of all this, supply problems and inclement weather, especially in the latter half of the Hundred Days, only further added to the misery of the soldiers and increased their chances of becoming a casualty. As F.C. Bagshaw of the 5th Battalion explained, “it was cold as hell. You can’t be brave when you’re cold.”⁴⁷⁸ Although simply being cold did not directly contribute to ‘war weariness’ amongst the troops, it added to the discomfort of the men and undermined their fighting effectiveness and therefore decreased their chances of survival. Finally, the fact that the troops were taking part in operations so close to the end of the war further increased their sense of hopelessness and injustice regarding their personal probability of survival.

⁴⁷⁶ After mid-1916 (starting in July), Canada had relatively few volunteers and the MSA men conscripted in early 1918 did not appear in large numbers in the Corps until after the Battle of the Drocourt-Quéant Line. G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa: Dunhamel, 1962). See page 546.

⁴⁷⁷ Lieutenant-General E.L.M. Burns, *General Mud: Memoirs of Two World Wars* (Toronto and Vancouver: Clarke, Irwin & Company Limited, 1970). Moreover, a ‘Lessons and Suggestions’ report by the 4th Battalion of the C.M.G.C. for the Cambrai operations stated that “After one day’s fighting...crews made up of physically and morally tired men reinforced by ‘Green’ troops, cannot be expected to act with the same dash, initiative and coolness of experience and fresh machine gunners.” See LAC, RG 9 III D2, Volume: 4797, Folder: 83, File: ‘4th Canadian Division Report: Cambrai Operations – Sept. 27th to Oct. 1st.’

⁴⁷⁸ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with F.C. Bagshaw of the 5th Battalion, page 3.

The Hundred Days also saw the Germans providing tenacious defence and stubborn fighting to delay the Canadians as much as possible. To this end, the Germans employed effective machine gun defences in unprecedented depth, poison gas in ever-greater quantities, extensive mining, booby traps and the use of scorched earth tactics. Because of continued German resistance, the units of the Corps suffered very heavy casualties. These casualties brought about a breakdown of unit cohesion, and the survivors were asked to do more with less, and had to deal with inexperienced replacements and the loss of trusted comrades and leaders. As the majority of the men in the Corps by this point in war were long-serving veterans, the cumulative and detrimental effects upon these troops served to reinforce their sense of fatalism and contributed to their loss of heart. The high rate of casualties suffered during the final months of the conflict further contributed to the perception amongst the men that they would not survive the war. Heavy casualties compromised the battlefield performance of the soldiers and encouraged the onset of ‘war weariness;’ thus, men were not as willing or able to follow orders as closely as they had in the past. ‘War weariness’ therefore compromised the men’s ability to carry on in combat, but did not eliminate this ability altogether.

Moreover, supply, transport and logistical problems made it increasingly difficult to get troops, water, food and ammunition into the front lines, and difficult to evacuate the wounded. These factors served to increase the casualties suffered by the Corps and thus aggravate the soldiers’ sense of doom about their personal survival. Traffic congestion also meant the advance of the Corps was done primarily upon the labour of the men and their legs, a common aspect of combat in the First World War, but served to further undermine the strength of the attacking soldiers.

Continual offensive operations against tough German defensive positions, and the ensuing heavy casualties, certainly contributed to the onset of ‘war weariness.’ As C.P. Keeler of the 49th Battalion remarked, the men in his unit were “mad about it [the order to take Mons], we didn’t want it...they were all grumbling to beat hell, and they knew the war was coming to an end, and there was going to be an armistice...what the hell do we have to go any further for?”⁴⁷⁹ Keeler here identified how his men were fed up and did not want to continue the advance, with the inevitable casualties, so near the end of the war. The nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days - and the resultant endless stream of casualties - contributed to the onset and

⁴⁷⁹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 14, Interview with C.P. Keeler of the 49th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 10.

development of 'war weariness' because during this time period the men of the Corps were pushed to the very limits of their strength, courage and endurance. Moreover, most of the reinforcements added on strength to the Canadian Corps prior to mid-October 1918 were wounded men returning to the front, and the majority of the soldiers at this point were long-serving veterans who were more prone to the 'war weariness,' or a sense of doom or fatalism over their survival prospects.⁴⁸⁰ Firsthand accounts indicate that the stresses and strains of war were certainly taking a heavy toll on the men at the front. T.S. Morrissey of the 13th Battalion, for instance, eloquently explained how the Last Hundred Days wore down the endurance of even the toughest and most stoic soldier:

You got awfully tired of 18 days under shell fire and mud and machine gun fire and no hot meals...we lived on bully beef and hard biscuits...there was no glamour in it at all.⁴⁸¹

It is thus no wonder that veterans of the Corps became 'war weary.'

One main manifestation of 'war weariness' was a feeling of disillusionment with the war, either its purpose or how it was being prosecuted. At this stage in the war many men of the Corps were simply growing weary of all the fighting, army discipline, tough living conditions and especially the constant spectre of death. Even the Corps Commander Arthur Currie acknowledged this sentiment in an address to the Canadian Club of Toronto in August of 1919. Regarding the desperate fighting of the Hundred Days, Currie observed that "you cannot understand how sick we all were of the war, nor our anxiety of finishing it as soon as possible, if there was any chance of success."⁴⁸² If this was the feeling of the Corps Commander, it is reasonable to believe it was much worse for the men doing the actual fighting, and dying, at the front.

⁴⁸⁰ Historian Desmond Morton described the reinforcements added on strength to depleted Canadian units in the field as a "stream of convalescents and raw trainees..." See Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 118. Moreover, E.J.A. Smart of the 43rd Battalion remembered that by the "latter stages" of the war due to heavy casualties, the army was "digging the bottom of the barrel in those days." See LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 13, Interview with E.J.A. Smart of the 43rd Battalion, page 33.

⁴⁸¹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 9, Interview with Lt.-Col. T.S. Morrissey of the 13th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, page 17.

⁴⁸² John Robert Colombo, ed., *Colombo's Canadian Quotations* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, n.d.).

Some soldiers in the British Army and Canadian Corps even came to hate the war itself and adopted an apathetic attitude toward it.⁴⁸³ However, despite their hatred or apathetic attitude, even ‘war weary’ Canadian soldiers found a way to continue. Private James Brown, for instance, wrote in a letter that “the more we see of war and its results the less a man wants to see of it and the more he feels that we have got to win and put an end to the idiotic delusion that war is a method of settling disputes.”⁴⁸⁴ This passage makes it clear that not only was Private Brown fed up and weary with *this* war, he was also weary of *all* wars in general. K.G. Blackader of the 13th Battalion also remembered that after he was wounded at the Canal du Nord “I really lost all interest in the war whatsoever. I just wanted to sit down and be allowed to rest awhile.”⁴⁸⁵ Blackader was perhaps expressing his disillusionment with the war, or possibly his time away from the front in a hospital served as a useful distraction; nevertheless, he also was communicating his exhaustion due to the tempo of the final months of the war. When George Bell of the 1st Battalion volunteered for a burial party, it gave him the chance to reflect on the cold and callous nature of the war. In his diary, Bell expressed sadness when he thought of how many of the men were killed without ever having seen a German; how many were denied the opportunity to see their families or loved ones again. While burying his mutilated comrades, Bell came face to face with the extent and brutality of the war; after burying one particular soldier, he remarked that there were “no prayers. No flowers” to commemorate his passing. Bell concluded this chapter with the words “damn this dirty, lousy, stinking bloody war.”⁴⁸⁶ This is another clear indication of his unwillingness to carry on in combat, because he did not end the chapter or include anything along the lines of ‘I will do my duty unto the end’ or ‘For King and Country.’

Another aspect of ‘war weariness’ during the Hundred Days was the adoption of a fatalistic attitude. It should be understood that fatalism represented the acknowledgment on the part of the men that there really was no way to cope with the horrors and cumulative strain of warfare, and fatalism is a key aspect of ‘war weariness.’ Fatalism was a feeling on the part of the troops that they were going to die, and could do absolutely nothing to prevent it. It is no wonder that fatalism was commonly espoused because the soldiers at the front saw, and smelt, death all

⁴⁸³ Denis Winter, *Death’s Men: Soldiers of the Great War* (London: Penguin Books Ltd., 1978).

⁴⁸⁴ Audrey and Paul Grescoe, eds., *The Book of War Letters: 100 Years of Private Canadian Correspondence* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2003).

⁴⁸⁵ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 9, Interview with K.G. Blackader of the 13th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, page 14.

⁴⁸⁶ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 113, ‘Back to Blighty,’ George V. Bell Diary, page 135.

the time. For many men at the front, it appeared to be only a matter of time before they themselves got killed or wounded.⁴⁸⁷

‘War weariness’ also had the effect of making soldiers more cautious and disinclined to take risks so near the end of the war. The perspective of the frontline soldier was that they just wanted an end to the war and to try and get out of there in one piece. Lieutenant James McRuer, for instance, wrote in his diary on 7 November that “one doesn’t feel like taking any risks,” no doubt reflecting a common sentiment at that time.⁴⁸⁸ It is apparent that nobody wanted to be the last casualty in a war that was all but over. Supporting this notion, Will Bird wrote in his memoir that “no one wanted to run into any trouble” or get killed so near the end.⁴⁸⁹ Moreover, soldiers recovering in the hospital hoped that the war would conclude before they were sent back to the front, knowing that they could be returned to combat even if they were not fully recovered. Firsthand accounts stress that these troops feared for their lives and “dreaded going back into the line,” even after a short reprieve.⁴⁹⁰

Firsthand accounts attest that soldiers in the Corps, especially those in the vanguard, argued or complained openly about orders to advance near the end of the war.⁴⁹¹ These complaints represented this fed up attitude in an act of insubordination. A good proportion of these troops were ‘war weary,’ and just wanted the war to end so they could escape with their lives, although not their psyches, intact. C.P. Keeler of the 4th Battalion, for example, remembered that the men in his unit were angry about the order to advance on Mons on 10 November when rumours of the armistice were already in the air. At the end of the day, the men discovered that they had sustained some casualties in an operations seen as pointless, and “the men were pretty mad about it.”⁴⁹² As the end of the war drew near, the men at the front worried that they might be the last one hit. W.A. Dunlop of the 116th Battalion, for instance, remembered a friend saying “wouldn’t it be Hell to be knocked off the last day?”⁴⁹³ The soldiers at the front realized that the war was ending and were none too happy about receiving orders to continue

⁴⁸⁷ Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918 – Volume II* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2008). See also Winter, *Soldiers of the Great War*, 183-186.

⁴⁸⁸ Daniel Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory: Canada and the Great War* (Edmonton: Hurtig Publishers, 1987).

⁴⁸⁹ Will R. Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands: A Memoir of the Great War 1916-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 1968).

⁴⁹⁰ Max Arthur, ed., *We Will Remember Them: Voices from the Aftermath of the Great War* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2009).

⁴⁹¹ It should be pointed out here that much of the evidence for this issue would be found in the after-action reports of units in the field, which the author was unfortunately unable to extensively look at in his research.

⁴⁹² LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 14, Interview with C.P. Keeler of the 49th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 10.

⁴⁹³ *Ibid*, Volume: 17, Interview with W.A. Dunlop of the 116th Battalion, page 10.

right up until November 11th. C. Howard of the 20th Battalion said of the Hundred Days “because we were following [the Germans] so fast there was no need to expend the lives of a lot of men to prove how good we were.”⁴⁹⁴ In Howard’s estimation, it made no sense for the Corps to remain so close to the already-retreating Germans and he did not want to see his comrades die so near the end. This, of course, was the very policy adopted by the Allied High Command to keep the ‘Hun on the Run,’ although in fairness the war was not yet over and hindsight allows us to see that the Germans were on the verge of collapse. Finally, George Cruickshank of the 29th Battalion remembered by November the men felt the war was coming to an end and therefore no one wanted to be in the line, but “you had to go” if ordered to.⁴⁹⁵ Cruickshank probably reflected the view of most soldiers in the Corps by this point in the war, namely, that the men were fed up and ‘war weary,’ but did not shirk their duty and somehow found a way to carry on in combat. The archival record clearly indicates that although there were cases of desertion and cowardice, the vast majority of men in the Corps followed orders and continued to advance, despite how bitter, fed up and emotionally exhausted they likely were.⁴⁹⁶ This does not negate the fact that ‘war weariness’ was a problem in the Corps, but is simply a testament to the courage, camaraderie and dedication of the troops at the front that most of them found the resources to carry on.

This last point is especially important, as Canadian military historians have generally used the fact that Canadian soldiers *did* in fact press on in combat during the tough conditions encountered during the final months of the war as ‘proof’ or ‘evidence’ that the Canadian Corps did not suffer from ‘war weariness.’ It is the contention of this thesis, however, that the men of the Corps continued to advance and attack during the Hundred Days *despite* their ‘war weariness.’ Factors and considerations that allowed the soldiers of the Corps to press on with combat included, but are not limited to: strong feelings of camaraderie and loyalty to unit; patriotism to the British Empire and belief in the cause; not perfect, but sufficient levels of

⁴⁹⁴ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 10, Interview with C. Howard of the 20th Battalion, page 23.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid*, Volume: 12, Interview with George Cruickshank of the 29th Battalion, page 13. This is also important because it illustrates how most Canadian soldiers still seemed to believe in the cause, even if they were personally unwilling to carry on with the sustained offensive operations of the Hundred Days.

⁴⁹⁶ Indeed, only one Canadian soldier was executed during the final months of the war (Private Norman Ling), and this was for a crime he had committed prior to the Hundred Days. See LAC, RG 24, Volume: 2538, Folder: HQS 1822, File: Vol. II.

morale; a sense that the Canadians, and their Allies, were finally winning; the influx of ‘fresh’ troops; and finally a need to ‘settle the score’ with the Germans or feelings of revenge.

‘War weariness’ also manifested itself in the aspiration among certain troops to become wounded or get a ‘Blighty,’ rather than continue on with combat. This desire is reflected in firsthand accounts and the writings and words of the men who experienced life at the front. It must be understood that instead of advancing upon a broken and routed army, the German defenders during the final months of the war were still quite dangerous; unfortunately for the Canadian soldiers at the front, the “enemy was still fighting hard” and inflicting severe casualties upon the attackers.⁴⁹⁷ Some of the ‘war weary’ troops by 1918 saw no way out of the war save to get a Blighty wound. W.V.B. Riddell of the 2nd Battalion, for instance, stated that some men at the front sought any excuse whatsoever to leave combat. He recalled in a post-war interview what “when you are really thoroughly fed up with the whole thing there, you would say, I wish I could get a blighty.”⁴⁹⁸ This is important to emphasize because Riddell here is making the direct connection between being “fed up” (or ‘war weary’) and the desire to receive a wound that would force the soldier to leave the front, at least temporarily.

Moreover, W.P. Dodds of the 13th Battalion stated that “the boys used to think themselves lucky just to get wounded” enough to leave the line and get a blanket, clean sheets, hot meals and time away from the front and the horrors of combat.⁴⁹⁹ The desire to get a Blighty in order to leave the front was no secret, and some troops discussed this openly with their comrades. At a court martial case, for example, in a statement made by Private J. Curtis of the 38th Battalion, Curtis stated that the accused man had told him “he wished he had a nice Blighty right through the ankle.”⁵⁰⁰ The fact that the court martial was charging the man for a self-inflicted wound is irrelevant. The accused soldier clearly wanted to avoid further service at the front on the eve of a major battle; the charges were brought against the soldier on 23 August, right before the Corps attack at Arras, a bloody affair indeed. The desire or intention to get a

⁴⁹⁷ Sandra Gwyn, *Tapestry of War: A Private View of Canadians in the Great War* (Toronto: Harper Collins Publishers Ltd., 1992).

⁴⁹⁸ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with W.V.B. Riddell of the 2nd Battalion, n.p.

⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, Volume: 9, Interview with W.P. Dodds of the 13th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 3.

⁵⁰⁰ LAC, RG 9 III B 1, Series 30, Volume: 2246, Folder: A-3-30 Volume 3, File: ‘Accommodation: Generally.’

Blighty, or even expressing such a wish, should thus be interpreted as a way to leave the war for a desperate and ‘war weary’ soldier.⁵⁰¹

The way that the troops at the front wrote about the war and their attitude toward it also provides insight into the state of ‘war weariness’ amongst the men of the Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign. It was relatively common, for instance, for men at the front to write or speak about how they just wanted an end to the war or their participation in it so they could return home. Private F.R. Hasse of the 49th Battalion, for example, clearly wanted to be on his way home and wrote that instead of continuing the advance, “the only road worth taking from here, is to Jasper Avenue” in Edmonton.⁵⁰² Moreover, one soldier of the Corps wrote in a letter how he had been in the trenches or on the advance for 20 months.⁵⁰³ It is thus no wonder that the men were ‘war weary,’ questioned whether they would survive the war and just wanted to return home. With the signing of the Armistice on 11 November, the men of the Corps felt even more strongly that they should be heading back to Canada. W. Murray of the 10th Battalion, for example, remembered telling his superiors quite plainly that “the armistice was on and we wanted to get home.”⁵⁰⁴ This, no doubt, was a sentiment shared by many, if not the majority, of the men in the Corps at this time.

‘War weariness’ negatively impacted the men of the Corps in other ways as well. Another manifestation of ‘war weariness’ was that it compromised the battlefield performance of the men who were asked to do too much with too little. Due to heavy casualties and the wavering of will, many soldiers of the Corps felt that they could not continue in the face of stiff German resistance and tough defensive positions.⁵⁰⁵ Being ordered to attack at Arras with severely depleted units and exhausted men, an officer of the 22nd Battalion, Major Georges Vanier, faced

⁵⁰¹ Although shell shock, or what we would today classify as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is not the same as ‘war weariness,’ it is worth clarifying this here. Although the desire to receive a Blighty could be interpreted as a manifestation of ‘war weariness,’ the actual act of administering a self-inflicted wound points more to PTSD. See Appendix II for more information on the differences and similarities between ‘war weariness’ and PTSD or shell shock.

⁵⁰² Edmonton of course being his hometown. See Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 214.

⁵⁰³ Canadian War Museum (hereafter CWM), George Metcalf Archival Collection (hereafter GMAC), ‘First World War Letters to Lola Passmore,’ 20110063 – 001-002.

⁵⁰⁴ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with W. Murray of the 10th Battalion, page 7.

⁵⁰⁵ A report on operations for the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade at the Canal du Nord and Bourlon Wood, for example, noted that despite the dogged effort of the 13th Battalion, they were unable to reach, let alone capture, their objective (the GREEN Line) due to “heavy casualties.” See LAC, RG 9 III C 3, Volume: 4016, Folder: 32, File: 4, ‘Operations: Canal du Nord (Bourlon Wood), 2nd Cdn. Inf. Brigade – 27-9-18 to 2-10-18.’

a grim task and “knew the situation was hopeless.”⁵⁰⁶ The attacking troops in this situation realised that the odds were stacked against them, and thus their courage wavered. At Arras, unlike at Amiens, there would be no chance for surprise, units entering the fray were considerably reduced in strength with exhausted men, there were supply problems, few tanks, and the men were up against dangerous German defensive positions. As things looked bleak for the attacking soldiers and death or mutilation seemed certain, this served to demoralize the men and made them want an end to the war more than ever; thus, ‘war weariness’ was taking root. Moreover, at the Canal du Nord, David Watson’s 4th Canadian Division suffered such heavy casualties that they were made “operationally ineffective.”⁵⁰⁷ This is but one example of the units of the Corps having compromised battlefield performance, reducing chances of success and increasing the probability of casualties. Fortunately for the men of the Corps, following the capture of Cambrai in October of 1918, they did not engage in as much actual fighting, but their battlefield performance would certainly have been compromised if they had quickly been thrust back into battle.

The continuing operations of the Hundred Days served to undermine the resistance powers of the men at the front over time. In light of this, many men experienced “sickening dread” when thinking of upcoming battles, representing their level of exhaustion and ‘war weariness.’⁵⁰⁸ It should also be understood that this feeling of being unable to continue in combat affected non-infantry units in the field as well. After hard fighting at Amiens, for example, Major M.A. Pope of the Canadian Engineers told his superiors “for God’s sake stop! Don’t push us any further, we’ll get smashed.”⁵⁰⁹ Other men at the front also acknowledged the limits of offensive operations and of human endurance. In the French army during a period of intense fighting, for instance, one Brigade commander told his superior, referring to his men, that “their offensive capacity is limited...[and there is] undeniable physical weariness.”⁵¹⁰ These examples illustrate

⁵⁰⁶ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 473.

⁵⁰⁷ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 528. Other examples of compromised battlefield performance can be found in the archival record as well. In one such report, entitled ‘Breaking the Drocourt-Quéant Line,’ the author notes that attacks beyond the D-Q Line were halted in large measure due to “all tanks [being] knocked out,” numerous German MG posts that were “well placed...[making a] frontal attack impossible,” enemy artillery and mortars were firing over open sights and flanking troops on the left were unable to keep pace with the advancing Canadian infantry. See LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4016, Folder: 31, File: 1, ‘Operations: Arras (1st Cdn. Div.) – 28-8-28 to 5-9-18.’

⁵⁰⁸ Winter, *Soldiers of the Great War*, 172.

⁵⁰⁹ James McWilliams and R. James Steel, *Amiens: Dawn of Victory* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2001).

⁵¹⁰ Leonard V. Smith, *Between Mutiny and Obedience: The Case of the French Fifth Infantry Division during World War I* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

that the mental and physical exhaustion of the troops undermined their fighting capacity and when this was ignored by superior officers, it created the necessary preconditions for the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness.’ Physical exhaustion, because it undermined the battlefield performance of the soldier and thus increased their chances of becoming a casualty, was but one more contributing factor to the sense among the troops that they would not survive the war.

As the history of the 20th Battalion stated, its men were “weary and depressed by the losses sustained” at the Battle of Cambrai.⁵¹¹ Orders to attack in tough situations with depleted units and exhausted men also made the troops angry at their officers and their attack plans. At the Canal du Nord, for example, J. Sprostin of the 10th Battalion remembered saying during a heavy artillery barrage “this is murder we are never going to get over that.”⁵¹² The fact that Sprostin was questioning the orders of the commanding officer and his focus on mortality represented just how fed up he was by this point in the war. With the Armistice in sight, Sprostin just wanted an end to the war and to escape in one piece.

Contemporary firsthand accounts make it clear that by this point in the war the troops at the front were fed up with being sent into attack without proper training, reconnaissance or preparation, all for the sake of maintaining pressure on the Germans. A ‘Lessons Learned’ report for the Canal du Nord/Bourlon Wood, for example, lamented the fact that there needed to be better liaison between infantry and artillery. The report also stated that the infantry should have at its disposal a section of field guns to deal with unforeseen problems and German defensive positions and that it was crucial to have more mobile field guns and mortars to support the infantry.⁵¹³ The men of the Corps were certainly discouraged when support for the attacking infantry was not seen as adequate for their purposes. Finally, Corporal Albert West of the 43rd Battalion realised the men were being pushed too far. In an entry to his diary for 9 October, for instance, West wrote that because of heavy casualties, his battalion needed more men immediately, but that “if such a disorganized mob is sent ‘over’ now I shall call it a crime.”⁵¹⁴ Not only was West critical of his commander’s orders to attack in such a state, it is also evident

⁵¹¹ Major D.J. Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment): Canadian Expeditionary Force in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Stone & Cox Limited, 1935).

⁵¹² LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with J. Sprostin of the 10th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 3A.

⁵¹³ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4016, Folder: 32, File: 4, ‘Operations: Canal du Nord (Bourlon Wood) 2nd Cdn. Inf. Brigade – 27-9-18 to 2-10-18.’

⁵¹⁴ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 32, ‘Diary of Corporal Albert West,’ entry for 9 October 1918, page 46.

that he had become sick and tired of such orders which would lead to the death of him and all of his comrades sooner or later.

The hunger, thirst and especially exhaustion of the men at the front contributed to making the troops 'war weary,' fed up and worn out and they often expressed their desire for an end to the war, or at least their participation in the war, in such terms. Simply put, the physical exhaustion of the men at the front was a contributing factor to the emotional or psychological disintegration (the breakdown of powers of resistance) of these men which should be understood as 'war weariness.' It must be understood that the men at the front grew tired of constantly being hungry, thirsty, exhausted and dirty and this was used as an explanation or justification for their inability or unwillingness to carry on in combat. Although the soldiers at the front had certainly been tired and exhausted earlier in the war, such as at the Somme, it was worse during the final months of the war because many of the troops who survived to the Hundred Days had also been at the Somme and Passchendaele. Moreover, the pace and intensity of the final months of the war allowed little to no respite for recuperation. Captain John Preston of the 85th Battalion, for example, stated at Amiens "we are dead tired."⁵¹⁵ Although physical exhaustion is not the same as 'war weariness,' it can be interpreted as a contributing factor towards the latter's onset as this exhaustion increased the likelihood of becoming a casualty and thus encouraged fatalism. Another soldier, after being awake for days, stated that "I would barter my soul for a few hours of uninterrupted slumber."⁵¹⁶ This quote gives insight into the depths of this soldier's exhaustion and it is thus no wonder the men wanted an end to the war or a good rest and felt they could not carry on with offensive operations. Again, it should be emphasized that physical exhaustion is not the same as 'war weariness;' the exhaustion of the troops compromised their combat performance, increased their chances of getting killed and therefore also increased their feelings of hopelessness about their personal survival.

At the Battle of Amiens Will Bird of the 42nd Battalion wrote in his memoir that "I felt I would collapse if I did not get anything to eat."⁵¹⁷ Even the stoic Canon Scott complained of being thirsty and tired at crucial moments prior to or during big offensive operations.⁵¹⁸ It must have been even worse for the combat troops at the front. Major D.J. Corrigan of the 20th

⁵¹⁵ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 447.

⁵¹⁶ Winter, *Soldiers of the Great War*, 101.

⁵¹⁷ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 99.

⁵¹⁸ Canon Frederick George Scott, *The Great War as I Saw It* (Kingston: Legacy Books Press Classics, 2009).

Battalion, for instance, described the men in his unit as “tired” and “very hungry,” making it difficult to continue.⁵¹⁹ Private Robert Duncan also wrote in a letter how “I was so exhausted that I was almost delirious...[when we did get a meal] we ate like wolves...the lot of us cried like babies...[and] my nerves were completely gone.”⁵²⁰ The enormous casualties and sustained offensive operations of the Hundred Days, exacerbated by spending extended periods of time as exhausted, thirsty and hungry made even the most loyal and patriotic soldier ‘war weary,’ question their chances of survival and want an end to their plight.

Moreover, after being gassed and wounded, Private Andrew Coulter was happy to be removed from the frontlines. Coulter was sent to a convalescent depot and wrote “[I] will be glad to get out and get a good feed for a change.”⁵²¹ Thus, Coulter was relieved to be removed from the front and was clearly growing weary of army life and rations. Furthermore, because of the pace of the Hundred Days and the heavy casualties, the men of the Corps were required to do more with less. W.P. Dodds of the 13th Battalion, for instance, remembered having to spend extended periods of time at his unit’s observation post and stated that “everybody was fed up of course” by that point in the war.⁵²² Men also became fed up with army life when they felt they were being given extra duties or felt they were being pushed too hard. One such soldier of the 1st Brigade stated that “I came out here to fight not to sling mud about,” referring to his duties as a labourer on top of his regular combat duties.⁵²³ During the final months of the war, even with additional labour, pioneer and engineering units added to the Corps, the infantry still had to take part in labour duties and work parties. According to firsthand accounts, many of the infantrymen felt that this was simply unfair and too much work on top of all their combat responsibilities. Again, the physical exhaustion caused by labour duties of the infantry decreased their chances of survival (hence the onset of fatalism and ‘war weariness’) as this exhaustion served to undermine the emotional and psychological reserves of the men and led to mental mistakes on the battlefield.⁵²⁴

⁵¹⁹ Corrigall, *Twentieth Canadian Battalion*, 213.

⁵²⁰ Grescoe, *War Letters*, 169.

⁵²¹ CWM, GMAC, ‘First World War Diaries of Private Andrew Robert Coulter,’ 20060105 – 001.

⁵²² LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 9, Interview with W.P. Dodds of the 13th Battalion, Interview 1 of 2, page 15.

⁵²³ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4024, Folder: 4, File: 3, ‘Defences: Work and Working Parties – 21-5-16 to 4-1-19.’

⁵²⁴ It should be understood, however, that although the physical exhaustion of the troops was a secondary threat to the men compared with heavy casualties and sustained offensive operations, it served to further entrench these feelings of hopelessness over personal survival (fatalism).

Examples of the men of the Corps being pushed too hard by superior officers can also be found in the archival record. A report by Brigadier Ormond of the 9th Canadian Infantry Brigade dated 23 August 1918, for example, stated that some men who fell out of a route march claimed that they were far too “tired” to continue. The report also stated that a Private Gibson of ‘C’ Company, 58th Battalion, complained it was extremely difficult to continue as “he had not had sufficient to eat.”⁵²⁵ Although exhaustion and hunger alone are insufficient preconditions for the onset of ‘war weariness,’ these factors combined with the enormous casualties of the final months of the war and the fact that it was long-serving veterans carrying them out made the men more realistic about their prospects of personal survival. It is thus no surprise that the men were becoming fed up with the war and ‘war weary’ because they were being pushed beyond the limits of their strength, courage and endurance.

‘War weariness’ among the troops of the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign also manifested itself in the men’s attitude, rhetoric toward and writings of the High Command and Corps leadership. One such way the men at the front showed displeasure toward their commanding officers was by characterizing continued offensive operations as murderous. One such soldier stated during the final months that “I can’t take it no more...it’s pure, bloody murder.”⁵²⁶ The troops at the front only wanted from their leaders (officers and non-commissioned officers) respect, sufficient food, a responsive “chain of command and competence on the battlefield.”⁵²⁷ If these things were lacking, the men at the front were less likely to be enthusiastic about the war and more unwilling to follow orders so closely. Thus, the troops of the 7th Canadian Infantry Brigade were filled with “rage” at their commanding officer, Brigadier-General J.A. Clark, because he ordered an attack despite a poor artillery bombardment, very little time for reconnaissance and a rushed assembly.⁵²⁸ Some of these troops were none too pleased with this order to attack, and even felt that “their lives were being thrown away on the whims of higher command.”⁵²⁹

⁵²⁵ LAC, RG 9 III C3, Volume: 4198, Folder: 2, File: 9, ‘Discipline: 9-10-16 to 6-9-18.’

⁵²⁶ Jack Granatstein, *Hell’s Corner: An Illustrated History of Canada’s Great War 1914-1918* (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre, 2004). See also Cook, *Shock Troops*, 534.

⁵²⁷ Craig Leslie Mantle, ed., *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience* (Kingston and Toronto: Canadian Defence Academy Press and the Dundurn Group, 2007).

⁵²⁸ Ian McCulloch, ‘Crisis in Leadership: The Seventh Brigade and the Nivelles “Munity,” 1918’ in *The Apathetic and the Defiant: Case Studies of Canadian Mutiny and Disobedience*, ed. by Craig Leslie Mantle (Kingston and Toronto: Canadian Defence Academy Press and the Dundurn Group, 2007).

⁵²⁹ This further reinforced the view that the men were locked in a struggle over which they had absolutely no control (sense of helplessness). See McCulloch, ‘The Nivelles “Mutiny,”’ 392. Moreover, Neville Lytton of the British 39th

It should be emphasized that some troops at the front saw high-ranking generals and staff officers as remote, callous or incompetent. Yet as historian Gary Sheffield has pointed out, most officers were not hated per se, but some were criticized for being neglectful, unfair or thoughtless toward their men.⁵³⁰ Will Bird of the 42nd Battalion wrote in his memoir how the men in his unit were angry, bitter and argued vehemently about the order to take Mons right before the signing of the Armistice. Bird remembered how some troops even stated that they should attack their own headquarters because “the officers were [even] worse enemies than any German.”⁵³¹ Bird here illustrates the level of bitterness amongst the troops at this point in the war. J.R. Cartwright of the 3rd Battalion also stated that the men at the front sought courage, confidence, fairness and consideration for his men in an officer.⁵³² When a frontline officer was lacking in these qualities, especially the latter two, this no doubt contributed to the onset and development of ‘war weariness,’ as the men did not want to continue to spend time under an unfair or incompetent leader who would increase their chances of death or disfigurement.

Sometimes, however, this contempt for the High Command and Corps leadership over seemingly unending orders to advance and attack were directed at the Corps Commander Arthur Currie himself. Evidence of this can be found in the historiography pertaining to the Canadian Corps during this time period. For example, historian Tim Cook recounted that some troops felt that Currie was sacrificing the Corps “to appease his British masters.”⁵³³ How true this characterization of Currie was is beside the point; what matters is that the *perception* of Currie as sacrificing the Corps existed and thus was a contributing factor to the onset and development of ‘war weariness.’ It is also possible to detect a “mood of growing resentment” toward the Corps leadership, and some troops even referred to Currie as a butcher.⁵³⁴ Others grumbled that Currie

Division wrote that he and his men “had the true natural antipathy to the general officer and his staff” and acknowledged that they had to carry out the orders of the general who himself experienced little danger or discomfort. In this case Lytton was clearly fed up with the rigid army hierarchy, hence his resentment toward the general behind the front lines. See Tony Ashworth, *Trench Warfare 1914-1918: The Live and Let Live System* (London: The Macmillan Press Ltd., 1980).

⁵³⁰ G.D. Sheffield, *Leadership in the Trenches: Officer-Man Relations, Morale and Discipline in the British Army in the Era of the First World War* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 2000).

⁵³¹ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 147-148

⁵³² LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with J.R. Cartwright of the 3rd Battalion, page 10.

⁵³³ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 549.

⁵³⁴ Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 129. Historian Tim Cook also titled one of his most recent monographs *The Madman and the Butcher*, referring to Sir Sam Hughes and Sir Arthur Currie respectively. The use of the term “Butcher” reflects the fact that this was a common critique of General Currie at the time.

was a glory-seeker, ordering the Corps and its units forward for his own personal reputation.⁵³⁵ The historian of the 16th Battalion, for example, stated that some men in the Battalion felt Currie was a “glory-seeker, demanding the bloodiest tasks” for the Corps and others agreed that “their lives were being thrown away” on the whims of the Corps leadership.⁵³⁶ As the Corps continued to attack during the Hundred Days despite heavy casualties, rumours began circulating that Currie was a war-monger, butcher or glory-seeker who did not have the best interests of the men in mind.⁵³⁷ Again, it is not the validity of these claims that is important but rather the *perception* of them that counts; with rumours such as these floating around the Corps it is no wonder that ‘war weariness’ set in as men did not want to spend any more time under a “butcher.” These rumours and perceptions served to reinforce the feelings of fatalism and hopelessness over their chances of personal survival.

Evidence of Currie being called a murderer or butcher can also be found in contemporary firsthand accounts. Will Bird of the 42nd Battalion, for example, recounted the story of a man in his unit who claimed he wanted to murder Currie for ordering units forward on the eve of the Armistice. This particular soldier, Jim Mills, told a comrade that “he’s going to shoot whoever arranged to have his brother killed for nothing...He’s hoping Currie comes here today. If he doesn’t, he’s going to shoot the next higher up. He says his brother was murdered.”⁵³⁸ Corporal Albert West of the 43rd Battalion, moreover, wrote in his diary on 9 October about how the men resented being pushed too far and sent into combat so near the end without adequate preparation. West wrote that:

We hear General Currie has said he will have Cambrai tho’ he lose 75% of his Corps. If so he is a fool and a murderer. Cambrai can be taken but we do not need to be slaughtered to capture it...give us properly trained reinforcements after every trip over and none of us who survive would murmur.⁵³⁹

⁵³⁵ Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys Limited, 1989).

⁵³⁶ Mark Zuehlke, *Brave Battalion: The Remarkable Saga of the 16th Battalion (Canadian Scottish) in the First World War* (Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons Canada Ltd., 2008). See also McCulloch, ‘The Nivelles “Mutiny,”’ 392.

⁵³⁷ Dancocks, *Spearhead to Victory*, 226.

⁵³⁸ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 152.

⁵³⁹ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 32, Diary of Corporal Albert West, entry for 9 October 1918, page 46.

West in this passage illustrated the feelings of ‘war weariness’ amongst the men, their sense of futility and how they were sick of being treated like lambs led to the slaughter.

Evidence pointing to a fed up attitude can also be found in soldier’s culture, such as in newspapers and songs. Will Bird of the 42nd Battalion, for example, wrote in his memoir about a popular tune sung by the troops. This song contained the lines:

*I want to go home, I want to go home,
The bullets they whistle, the cannons they roar,
I don’t want to go to the front anymore.
Take me over the sea, where Alleyman can’t get at me,
Oh, my, I’m too young to die, I want to go home.*⁵⁴⁰

The fact that this particular song was so popular and well-known indicates that the men at the front related with it and shared the sentiment it expressed. This song also seems to reflect the widespread idea among the troops that death was inevitable at the front. Moreover, the collection of Private Charles Couser provides further insight into soldier culture and the experiences of the troops at the front. Within these soldier songs, references are made to being returned to combat prematurely after being wounded, and complaints about bad weather and food. One song critiquing army life reflected the men’s longing for home, and contained the lines:

*We’re sick of digging trenches
We want to see our wenchies.*

Another song found in Courser’s collection pointing to an unwillingness to carry on with combat contained the line:

*Take me back to dear old Blighty.*⁵⁴¹

Thus these lesser factors toward the onset of ‘war weariness,’ such as physical exhaustion and poor leadership, simply served to exacerbate the primary contributing factors toward the onset of ‘war weariness,’ such as the nature, tempo and ferocity of the final months of the war, the ensuing heavy casualties and the detrimental effect upon long-serving veterans of the Corps.

⁵⁴⁰ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 125.

⁵⁴¹ CWM, GMAC, ‘Songs of the Canadian Corps (1914-1919),’ 20080091 – 019.

Finally, perhaps the strongest piece of evidence we have pointing to the presence and influence of ‘war weariness’ was that the men at the front themselves admitted as much. It is apparent from firsthand accounts of the time period that many troops in the Corps recognized that they were fed up, worn out and ‘war weary;’ of course, some soldiers were more frank about this than others. References to men being fed up and worn out, and indirect references to ‘war weariness,’ can be found in much of the secondary literature pertaining to the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign. For example Brooke Claxton, future minister of National Defence but a battery sergeant-major during the Great War, encountered a soldier who had been in France for a full four years and had clearly “had enough.” It deteriorated to the point where this soldier refused to advance any further, in a clear act of insubordination.⁵⁴²

Evidence pointing to ‘war weariness’ can also be found in firsthand accounts from the time period. Canon Frederick Scott, in typical poetic fashion, provided insight into the bitterness and ‘war weariness’ of the men and their inner turmoil at being forced to continue in combat. Just prior to the crossing of the Canal du Nord, Scott wrote:

When one...knew that our men had to carry on as usual, one realized the bitterness of the cup which they had to drink to the very dregs. Rain and darkness all round them, hardly a moment’s respite from some irksome task, the ache in the heart for home and the loved ones there, the iron discipline of the war-machine of which they formed a part, the chance of wounds and that mysterious crisis called death – these were the elements which made up the blurred vision in their souls.⁵⁴³

Scott’s words here appear to reflect the fact that the men were bitter about having to carry on in combat and how the “chance of wounds and...death” were in the forefront of soldiers’ minds by this point in the war, hence the acknowledgment of heavy casualties and the likelihood of death or mutilation.

⁵⁴² J.L. Granatstein and Dean F. Oliver, eds., *The Oxford Companion to Canadian Military History* (Don Mills: Oxford University Press, 2011). See also Gwyn, *Tapestry of War*, 481.

⁵⁴³ Scott, *The Great War as I Saw It*, 265.

By the latter half of the Hundred Days, it became apparent that many men were thoroughly “fed-up” in the opinion of contemporary observers.⁵⁴⁴ Even prior to Amiens, before the onset of nearly-continual offensive operations, John Becker admitted that “I was fed up” and that “I realized then that my nerves were going and that I wouldn’t be much good in action if I kept at it many weeks longer.”⁵⁴⁵ Becker acknowledged that he was already fed up and probably suffering from what would now be diagnosed as PTSD, and that this compromised his powers of resistance and endurance which would be further strained during the final months of the war. If some men were suffering from shell shock prior to the Hundred Days, the nature, pace and intensity of the final months of the war served as a pre-requisite to the onset and influence of ‘war weariness.’ Moreover, Deward Barnes also wrote quite plainly in his journal that “I am fed up with war.”⁵⁴⁶ R.L. Christopherson of the 5th Battalion, when he was asked in a post-war interview if he was disappointed about not getting back to France before the Armistice was signed (for he had been wounded), replied that he was “not a damn bit [disappointed], I’d had plenty. No I wasn’t disappointed at all.”⁵⁴⁷ Christopherson had clearly enjoyed his time away from the frontlines, even if it was because of a serious wound.

In terms of growing weary and terrified of continued offensive operations, Guy Mills of the 4th Battalion stated “I was getting pretty fed up and thinking that I’d sooner be going to the rear than [back] to the front.”⁵⁴⁸ Mills, understandably, felt that he deserved a rest and was sick of the pace of action during the Hundred Days. Mills also appears to have understood that the more time he spent in the line, the less likely were his chances of survival (and hence the adoption of fatalism). The words of Mills also highlight another important aspect of ‘war weariness,’ namely, that although the majority of the veterans in the Corps were suffering from this phenomenon by the final months of the war, they were still *able* to carry on in combat, although they were certainly *unwilling* to carry on. Therefore, most of the men in the Corps

⁵⁴⁴ Robert John Renison, *A Story of Five Cities: A Canadian Epic of One Hundred Days* in J. Castell Hopkins, *Canada at War, 1914-1918: A Record of Heroism and Achievement* (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review Limited, 1919).

⁵⁴⁵ Norm Christie, ed., *Silhouettes of The Great War: The Memoir of John Harold Becker 1915-1919* (Ottawa: CEF Books, 2001).

⁵⁴⁶ Bruce Cane, ed., *It made you think of Home: The Haunting Journal of Deward Barnes, Canadian Expeditionary Force 1916-1919* (Toronto: The Dundurn Group, 2004).

⁵⁴⁷ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 8, Interview with R.L. Christopherson of the 5th Battalion, page 15.

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid* 1, Volume: 7, Interview with Guy Mills of the 4th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 2.

suffering from ‘war weariness’ were able to continue on with offensive operations in spite of the fact that they were ‘war weary’ and had little to no hope for their own personal survival.

Additionally, George Bell of the 1st Battalion titled a chapter of his diary ‘Fed Up,’ certainly reflecting the sentiment of many in the Corps at this time.⁵⁴⁹ In terms of being fed up and ‘war weary,’ Bell made some explicit references to this among the men of the Corps during the final months of the war. In his chapter ‘Fed Up,’ Bell wrote that “the war is lasting too long...We’re fed up! Everybody! All fed up!”⁵⁵⁰ Bell’s use of exclamation marks indicates his emotion and his emphasis upon how the men in his unit were fed up and ‘war weary.’ Moreover, his use of the term “everybody” illustrates his perception that ‘war weariness’ did exist, as the term itself only has meaning if it affected the many, and not just a minority of the soldiers. The fact that ‘war weariness’ appeared to affect a large proportion of the soldiers in the Corps makes it a worthwhile topic for examination.

Indeed, several firsthand accounts indicate that by the time of the signing of the Armistice on 11 November, many men in the Corps were fed up and ‘war weary.’ E. Seamen of the 3rd Battalion, for instance, remembered by the cessation of hostilities “everybody was so fed up” with the war.⁵⁵¹ Gordon Hamilton of the 58th Battalion also stated that by the end of the war “I had become fed up with it, with that way of living. Then, oh being away from home and so on.”⁵⁵² Hamilton was thus fed up not only with the death and destruction associated with warfare, but also with army life and being away from his loved ones at home. With the signing of the Armistice, and as Canadian troops found themselves still in uniform and not on a troop ship back to Halifax, ‘war weariness’ lingered and rose to the fore. F.W. Kirkland of the 29th Battalion, for example, remembered that by the time of occupation duty in Germany, there was a widespread feeling amongst the men of being fed up. Kirkland stated that “I had had about enough by that time” and just wanted to return home.⁵⁵³

This chapter illustrated how the Canadian soldiers’ writings and words reflected their compromised ability to carry on with offensive operations. Moreover, the rhetoric, writings and words of the soldiers at the front also demonstrate how the men themselves recognized that they

⁵⁴⁹ LAC, MG 30, Volume: E 113, ‘Back to Blighty,’ George V. Bell Diary.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid*, page 112.

⁵⁵¹ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with E. Seamen, n.p.

⁵⁵² *Ibid*, Volume: 15, Interview with Gordon Hamilton of the 58th Battalion, Interview 2 of 2, page 11.

⁵⁵³ LAC, RG 41 B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with F.W. Kirkland of the 29th Battalion, page 8.

were 'war weary,' even if they did not actually use those words. Many accounts thus discuss being 'fed up' and sick of army life and simply wanting an end to the war as soon as possible. The heavy casualties, the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days Campaign all put forth the impression that the troops, so close to the end, might not make it out alive.

Conclusion

One of the greatest difficulties encountered in this thesis was the fact that, due to the nature of the topic itself, it was not possible to categorically prove that 'war weariness' had become a pervasive factor among soldiers of the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign. To definitively prove this, more research would be required to unearth the necessary evidence, particularly on the tactical and operational performance of all units of the Corps and on disciplinary matters. Such research, however, was beyond the scope of a Master's thesis. Nevertheless, it was still possible to identify, in both primary and secondary sources, factors contributing to and preconditions for the onset of 'war weariness,' as well as evidence of its manifestations. Both direct and indirect references were uncovered of emotional exhaustion, a sense of futility and fatalism, a 'fed up' attitude, and general 'war weariness' amongst the soldiers of the Corps during the final months of the war. Such evidence was found in operational reports, 'Lessons Learned' memoranda, after-action reports, war diaries, some courts martial records, medical documents, regimental histories, letters, diaries, memoirs, journals and post-war veteran interviews.

Ample evidence was also found in the literature that 'war weariness' had affected other Allied troops experiencing comparable battle conditions as the Canadians on the Western Front. Furthermore, no evidence examined pointed to a credible *alternative* conclusion. It is not as though Canadian military historians have denied the existence of 'war weariness' amongst the troops in the final months of the war, but rather their emphasis upon the operational achievements of the Corps has served to understate issues of morale, discipline, attitude toward the war and combat motivation. As a result, the historiography of the Last Hundred Days conveys that 'war weariness' existed but does not need to be studied in great detail as a widespread and growing phenomenon. This project, although a preliminary investigation of the problem, nevertheless highlights the importance and significance of 'war weariness' in fully explaining what the officers and men of the Canadian Corps endured during the intense fighting in the last months of the Great War. 'War weariness' as a phenomenon has been neglected far too long in Canadian military history, and this project was an attempt at remedying the deficiency.

Moreover, it now seems that adherence to the Victory Campaign narrative can no longer be sustained.⁵⁵⁴ An objective examination of the existing scholarship, the archival record and firsthand accounts make it clear that the notion that Canadian soldiers marched to victory in the final months of the war with their heads held high and with intact morale and discipline is untenable. The unquestioned successes achieved by the Corps should no longer be seen as incompatible with a candid acknowledgment of the effect heavy casualties, and how continued determined German resistance with the end of the war tantalisingly in sight created an attitude of frustration bordering on despair and fatalism amongst the soldiers, especially the very large group of long-serving veterans. It is important to understand what effects the hard-pounding of the Hundred Days had upon the combat soldier at the front, and not just look at the operational ‘Big Picture.’ Additionally, examining the Corps in a more objective light would allow for Canadian military historians to engage with the broader literature and historiography of the Great War, which have long acknowledged the existence and influence of ‘war weariness’ in their armies in the latter stages of the First World War. Finally, a more objective, sober and realistic analysis of what happened in the final months of the war will not detract from the heroism, glory or remarkable achievements of the Canadian Corps, but rather highlight the strength summoned by worn out troops.

The year 1918 was focussed upon for this project, because for the Canadian Corps all the preconditions and factors contributing to the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness’ came together in the final months of the war. The tempo and pace of offensive operations with the resultant heavy casualties led to a widespread sense of emotional exhaustion and affected long-serving troops, who by this point in the war were considerable in the Corps’ ranks, and contributed to the cumulative stresses and strains of war already endured. A sense of futility, the adoption of a fatalistic attitude and feelings of hopelessness over the prospect of being killed or maimed in a war that was won but not quite over all reflected a pervasive ‘war weariness,’ which certainly was widespread and affected the many, and not just the few, in the Canadian Corps.⁵⁵⁵

The nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days Campaign ensured that a constellation of factors and situations came together to create the necessary preconditions for

⁵⁵⁴ This is also known as the Victory Campaign paradigm or the Victory Campaign thesis.

⁵⁵⁵ E. Seaman of the 3rd Battalion, for example, remembered in a post-war interview that by 11 November 1918 “every body [sic] was so fed up” with the war. See LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume: 7, Interview with E. Seaman of the 3rd Battalion, n.p.

widespread ‘war weariness’ to take root and manifested itself in the actions, or inactions, of the troops at the front and their attitude toward the war. For Canadians, the Hundred Days were unique because of the type of combat, the tempo of operations, the ferocity of the fighting and the heavy casualties, all of which contributed to a great many soldiers reaching the tipping point. Despite the Victory Campaign narrative and arguments espoused by those embracing Canadian exceptionalism, the final months were actually the worst time of the war for the soldiers of the Canadian Corps. This can appear ironic and counterintuitive, of course, because this was precisely the moment when the Corps was most successful, constantly advancing after years of bitter stalemate. Moreover, by mid-1918 in the Canadian Corps there was no large turnover of men as the last volunteers had long since reached the front and as the reinforcements of Military Service Act men had not yet appeared in strength. Factor in all the veterans returning from the hospital or leave and it is clear that the troops who had been through the bloody battles 1917 were disproportionately present and forced to bear the arduous combat and casualties of the Hundred Days.⁵⁵⁶

Part I of this thesis, containing Chapters 1 and 2, sought to outline and examine the contributing factors toward, and necessary preconditions for, the onset and development of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days. Chapter 1 examined heavy casualties, consistent high casualty rates and the nature, pace and intensity of the final months of the war. The unique challenges and difficulties, such as the reliance on the same soldiers, terrain, logistical and supply problems, how the tempo of combat left little time for rest and recuperation and the ferocious nature of the fighting in the Hundred Days (represented in part by machine guns emplacements, poison gas, booby traps and scorched earth policies) all created conditions fertile for the onset and entrenchment of emotional exhaustion and ‘war weariness.’ The primary contributing factor for the growing problem of ‘war weariness’ examined in this chapter was heavy casualties, which were caused by the nature, tempo and ferocity of the combat.

Chapter 2 looked at the exhaustion of the soldiers and the mental and emotional state of the men at the front, highlighting how the High Command and Corps leadership were asking everything of exhausted men and depleted units, pushing the soldiers beyond their breaking point. Offensive operations were being launched in relatively quick succession and there was

⁵⁵⁶ This is one of the main reasons why ‘war weariness’ appeared to affect long-serving troops more than reinforcements and replacements.

very little time for preparation or training and also few opportunities for rest, recuperation or acclimatization for replacements following operations. Physical exhaustion is not the same as ‘war weariness,’ but was a contributing factor towards its onset as it increased the chances of becoming a casualty, and thus reinforced feelings of fatalism. This chapter emphasised how the mental and emotional state of the men at the front began to influence them and their actions. The fact that the men were more vulnerable and exposed during the semi-open warfare of the Hundred Days made them more cautious, and feelings of fear, uncertainty, bitterness, revenge and fatalism (a key indicator of ‘war weariness’) all became much more widespread during this time period.

And yet, the Canadian Corps continued to advance and attack and suffered no mutinies during the Hundred Days. According to firsthand accounts and veteran interviews, it appears that on the whole most soldiers of the Corps continued to believe in the cause and support the war effort. The men did not shoot their officers and leave the battlefield, and most soldiers obeyed their orders, however grudgingly. Moreover, strong feelings of camaraderie and loyalty - for example many men mentioned how they did not want to let their men or unit down - were present right up until the end of the war.⁵⁵⁷

The usual extreme manifestations of ‘war weariness’ found in other armies, such as mutiny, mass desertion, the widespread refusal to attack or advance, a complete breakdown of discipline or loss of faith in the cause, were all absent in the victorious Canadian Corps. This does not mean, however, that ‘war weariness’ did not exist in the Corps at this time. Thus, the pervasive idea that winning was an antidote or prevented the onset of ‘war weariness’ needs to be questioned and perhaps jettisoned; this idea that ‘war weariness’ did not affect the Corps and

⁵⁵⁷ George Cruickshank of the 29th Battalion, for instance, remembered that by November of 1918 the men thought the war was coming to an end and therefore no one wanted to be in the line; but, Cruickshank explained, “you had to go” and could not simply disobey an order. See LAC, RG 41, B III 1, Volume: 12, Interview with George Cruickshank of the 29th Battalion, page 13. Moreover, in the ‘Medical Case Sheet’ for Private L. McKenzie of the 8th Battalion, it stated that despite the fact that McKenzie was diagnosed with Trench Fever and suffered from Hysteria and Nervousness, described as “very similar to Shell Shock,” he stated that he would rather return to his comrades fighting in France than be sent back to Canada, clearly representing the power of camaraderie and loyalty to unit. See LAC, RG 9, III B2, Volume: 3618, Folder: 25-13-7 to 25-13-10, File: ‘Mental Cases.’ Finally, a report by the medical officer Major Strathy emphasized how many soldiers did not want to leave the line even if they were genuinely sick or wounded. The report suggested that due to the stigmatization of self-inflicted wounds and cowardice, many men stayed at duty even if they were sick, “for they look on it almost as a disgrace to go sick.” See LAC, RG 9, III B2, Volume: 3752, Folder: 3-2-11, File: ‘Malingering or Scrimshaking, & self-inflicted wounds, 1918.’

its soldiers appears all the more untenable considering firsthand accounts and the words and writings of the soldiers themselves.

Therefore, for this project it was exceedingly difficult to identify manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign, as the normal extreme manifestations were absent and the Corps was still advancing and winning. Moreover, the Canadian medical and military authorities did not want to highlight these disciplinary problems, and the decline of German fighting power served to mask the problems within the Canadian Corps as well. Furthermore, although beyond the scope of this study, factors such as camaraderie, the prospect of victory, an influx of ‘fresh’ troops, revenge and belief in the cause (variously defined) all served as mitigating factors to the worst problems associated with ‘war weariness’ and allowed the troops to carry on in combat. Even though in need of further research, it appears that it was these factors that allowed the men of the Corps to carry on, *despite* the onset and influence of ‘war weariness.’

In order to lay the groundwork and the foundation for the argument that ‘war weariness’ existed in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days, Chapter 3 examined the presence and influence of ‘war weariness’ in other armies. This helped make the case that ‘war weariness’ also occurred in the Canadian Corps because it also beset comparable armies in comparable conditions. Evidence pointing to ‘war weariness’ was thus discovered in the French, British and Australian historiographical contexts. Moreover, Chapter 3 examined how the men’s attitude at the Armistice also reflected ‘war weariness’ and this ‘fed up’ attitude amongst the troops. Finally, Chapter 3 outlined some evidence and examples of manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Corps in the post-Armistice period, represented by mutinies, “disturbances,” riots and disciplinary problems. Although there were genuine grievances at the time, much of the problem stemmed from the final months of the war. This Chapter sought to establish how ‘war weariness’ existed in comparable armies in comparable situations to the Canadian Corps and how feelings of ‘war weariness’ were present at the Armistice and during the de-mobilization period, so it is only rational to assume it also existed in the Corps in the final months of the war.

Chapter 4 provided the reader with some more tangible examples of manifestations of ‘war weariness’ in the Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign. To this end, the chapter was divided into two parts, examining insubordination and indiscipline and the killing of prisoners in turn. The first section of Chapter 4 was designed to emphasize how this ‘fed up’ attitude

undermined authority and contributed to problems pertaining to insubordination and indiscipline. The cumulative stress, strain and horrors of combat coupled with this 'fed up' attitude made the soldiers less able or willing to follow orders as closely so near the end of the war. Moreover, excessive feelings of fear and caution compromised battlefield performance and undermined the troops' ability to seize objectives. Finally, the reliance on alcohol simply to get through the days served to compromise men's rational decision making and their overall mental and physical health. Chapter 4 also examined the killing of German prisoners and those attempting to surrender in the heat of combat. This represented 'war weariness' because it indicates that the soldiers' emotions, rather than army discipline or orders, were beginning to dictate their actions and attitude toward the war and enemy combatants. The killing of prisoners also indicated that feelings of revenge, fear and bloodlust were becoming more prominent, and the men began to question whether they would survive the war at all (hence the focus on mortality). Chapter 4 was designed to show the reader that by the Hundred Days 'war weariness' began to set in amongst the soldiers, there was a breakdown of discipline and officers were having more difficulty in controlling their troops.

Chapter 5 of the thesis examined the rhetoric, words and writings of the men at the front. By the final months of the war, it became evident that many soldiers were using fatalism and alcohol as mental and physical coping mechanisms respectively. The words, thoughts and writings of the soldiers, preserved through diaries, letters, memoirs, journals and post-war interviews, make clear that troops were becoming disinclined to take risks so near the end of the war. Moreover many soldiers, either overtly or otherwise, expressed the desire for a Blighty wound; this was the case because although the majority of troops did not want to let their unit down or be stigmatized as a coward, they felt they could no longer continue on in combat. Many soldiers expressed the opinion that "enough was enough" and felt that they had been pushed to, and sometimes beyond, the breaking point. In the final months of the war a large proportion of these soldiers stated in words or writing that they just wanted an end to the war, or at least their participation in the war. Although some were more frank than others, many troops stated plainly that they had been pushed to the very edge of their courage, endurance, strength and even sanity.

As this thesis was not a comprehensive examination of 'war weariness' in the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign, but more a reconnaissance or foray into the topic, there are naturally some areas of further research. For example, a comparative study of 'war

weariness' in the Canadian Corps with units of the British Army or the Australian Imperial Force, its most comparable unit, could also be quite fruitful. A study such as this would allow the historian to compare and contrast the onset, development and influence of 'war weariness' in these two Dominion units, and how similar contexts and situations led to the onset of this phenomenon.

There appears to be a lack of clear and direct evidence for manifestations of 'war weariness' in the literature and historiography of the Canadian Corps. This lack of acknowledgement of 'war weariness' as a factor in the Hundred Days Campaign has left a considerable gap in our understanding of the Canadian Corps and those who participated. This breach can be partially filled by using social history techniques, for example by interrogating the experiences of the common soldier and by synthesizing this with a top-down approach. This gap can also be partly filled by reading closely, between the lines and against the grain, and by looking at anecdotal or suggestive evidence that *points* to 'war weariness,' such as rising instances of insubordination or indiscipline and the killing of prisoners. By interrogating the evidence in such a way, it appears there is ample evidence in the secondary and primary sources pointing to contributing factors (and necessary preconditions) toward the onset and influence of 'war weariness.' Most notable of these factors are: heavy casualties, exhaustion, the nature, pace and intensity of the Hundred Days and the mental and emotional state of the men at the front. Archival evidence and first-hand accounts also suggest that 'war weariness' existed and manifested itself in multifarious ways. Such manifestations of 'war weariness' included: insubordination and indiscipline, especially the killing of prisoners, and examples of the lack of excitement or jubilation among the men at the signing of the Armistice. Although it cannot be categorically proven, it is reasonable to assert that 'war weariness,' discipline and morale problems were present in the Canadian Corps during the final months of the war. This thesis, in particular, argued that 'war weariness' was a widespread and growing problem within the Corps during the Last Hundred Days. This acknowledgement of 'war weariness' as a factor affecting the men and influencing their actions, or lack thereof, is long overdue and will serve to put the experiences of the men at the front and the achievements of the Corps into a more realistic and objective light.

It is important to emphasize at this point that much of this thesis utilises negative and suggestive evidence to point to factors contributing to 'war weariness' and manifestations of

‘war weariness.’ For instance, the absence of outright mutiny in the Corps during the final months of the war does not mean that ‘war weariness’ did not affect the men, as some have maintained, but just that the men of the Corps continued on in combat *despite* the onset of ‘war weariness.’ Moreover, since evidence of ‘war weariness’ was found in every other veteran army on the Western Front, it appears that the onus is now on Canadian military historians to prove that it *was not* deeply affecting in the Canadian Corps, every bit as much as proving it was.

Indeed, acknowledging the presence and influence of ‘war weariness’ in the Canadian Corps does not detract from the glory, heroism or achievements of the Corps, but rather serves to put the story of the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign into a much more accurate light. Therefore, ‘war weariness’ and its impact on the soldiers must be incorporated into the story of the Canadian Corps and its accomplishments, despite what some historians have argued, so that the historiography pertaining to this can be placed on a much more balanced footing and can thus engage with the vast body of literature of other nations in the Great War. It is therefore crucial that we move beyond this limited and insular approach to Canadian military history during the First World War, and acknowledge that ‘war weariness’ did in fact plague the Canadian Corps and affected a large proportion of the front line soldiers. Until we do this, we are disrespecting not only the historical record but also the memories of the fallen and those who fought in the Great War who, despite suffering from ‘war weariness,’ still managed to summon the strength to press on in the terrible conditions facing the men of the Canadian Corps during the Hundred Days Campaign.

Appendix I

What is ‘War Weariness?’

‘War weariness’ can be described as a sense of fatalism among the troops at the front; the feeling or belief that it is only a matter of time before death or mutilation. ‘War weariness’ should thus be understood as a loss of hope in chances of personal survival for the soldier (hopelessness), or the feeling of being locked in a struggle over which the men had absolutely no control (helplessness). ‘War weariness’ can also be interpreted as a fed up attitude, especially in the final months of the war, toward a war that was won, but not yet over. Moreover, ‘war weariness’ is a state of mind or attitude, reflecting a loss of heart among long-serving veterans. ‘War weariness’ also reflects emotional, mental or psychological exhaustion that compromises the soldiers’ abilities to carry on in combat. ‘War weariness’ affects long-serving soldiers more than newcomers, due to the detrimental and cumulative effect of sustained combat. ‘War weariness’ leaves the soldiers at the front *unwilling* to carry on in combat, but not quite *unable* to carry on.

What are the Factors Contributing toward, or Preconditions for, the onset of ‘war weariness?’

The factors contributing to the onset and entrenchment of ‘war weariness’ examined in this thesis are: heavy casualties and high casualty rates; sustained offensive operations; extended time period ‘in country’ or at the front lines; the prospect of victory during the final months of the war; mental, emotional or psychological exhaustion and the fact that the majority of troops in the Canadian Corps in the first half of the Hundred Days Campaign were long-serving veterans.

What are the Manifestations of ‘war weariness?’

The manifestations of ‘war weariness’ examined in this thesis include: insubordination; indiscipline; the killing of German prisoners or those attempting to surrender in the heat of battle; a loss of faith in the cause; mutiny/strike/protest; negative attitude toward the war; decrease in combat motivation or morale and a widespread sense of fatalism or hopelessness among the troops at the front over their prospects for survival.

Appendix II

The Differences and Similarities between Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD or shell shock) and ‘War Weariness’

PTSD

‘War Weariness’

| | |
|---|--|
| Basically all soldiers became shell-shocked during the war; only a minority became incapacitated from PTSD | ‘War weariness’ was a widespread and growing problem in the Canadian Corps by 1918; only a minority were not ‘war weary’ by the final months of the war |
| Inability to control PTSD; shell shock was the mind and body’s natural reaction to the severe trauma of combat/warfare | ‘War weariness’ was a state of mind, caused more by the cumulative effect of warfare, rather than the trauma caused by combat itself |
| For the most part, soldiers with PTSD could not carry on very long and were soon made unfit for further combat; shell shock as debilitating | As was the case in the Canadian Corps, soldiers were able to carry on in combat <i>despite</i> the presence of ‘war weariness.’ Mitigating factors that helped the men deal with the worst effects of ‘war weariness’ included: camaraderie, loyalty to unit, presence of victory, influx of ‘fresh’ troops, belief in the cause and feelings of revenge |
| PTSD affected new and old soldiers alike | ‘War weariness’ only affected long-serving veterans who had been in uniform and combat for months or even years |
| Shell shock manifested itself in physical and/or psychological conditions | ‘War weariness’ manifested itself in the actions and attitudes of the men |
| PTSD left most men <u>unable</u> to carry on in combat | ‘War weariness’ left troops <u>unwilling</u> to carry on in combat |

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