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"Une Permission! C'est bon pour une recrue"

Discipline and Illegal Absences in the 22nd (French-Canadian) Battalion, 1915-1919

Maxime Dagenais

Despite the 22nd (French-Canadian) Battalion's extraordinary courage on the battlefields of Europe throughout the First World War, its reputation remains tarnished by the belief that it suffered from a disciplinary problem. In fact, the unit's behaviour has led to a considerable debate. Whereas several historians have argued that the battalion's thousands of infractions and five executions show a disciplinary problem, others have stated that a lack of comparison with other units of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) render these figures, and this assumption, unfounded.

The first historian to suggest a discipline problem was Desmond Morton in a 1972 article entitled "The Supreme Penalty." He noted that the men of the battalion were "conspicuously over-represented" amongst the executed soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.¹ In *Le 22e bataillon (canadien-français), 1914-1919*, Jean-Pierre Gagnon argued that the written evidence provided by the commander of the battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Tremblay, and statistics on the unit's minor and court-martial infractions confirm its poor reputation.² More than a quarter of a century after

Abstract: This article explores two issues relating to the Canadian experience during the First World War, but more specifically, to that of the 22nd (French-Canadian) Battalion (commonly referred to as the "Van Doos"). It first considers the assumption that the 22nd Battalion suffered from a disciplinary problem. By examining the disciplinary records of the other three battalions of the 5th Brigade (the brigade of which the "Van Doos were a part) and comparing them to that of the 22nd Battalion, this article conclusively demonstrates that the unit did suffer from a disciplinary problem. This article also examines the causes of the unit's disciplinary problems. Evidence suggests that poor morale was the likely cause.

Morton's article, historians continue to discuss the poor discipline of the battalion. In a master's thesis entitled "Arbitrary Justice?: A Comparative Analysis of Canadian Death Sentences Passed and Death Sentences Commuted during the First World War," Teresa Iacobelli suggests that the battalion's overall poor behaviour was an important factor in its numerous executions. She also referred to the unit as the "infamously poorly disciplined 22nd Battalion."³ In *For Freedom and Honour?: The Story of the 25 Canadian*

Volunteers Executed in the First World War, however, Andrew B. Godefroy concluded that "due to a lack of any detailed research on the issue, one cannot properly argue as to whether the number of disciplinary infractions in the 22nd Battalion was high or low when compared to other units in the CEF."⁴ Godefroy did not provide this comparison. Similarly, Patrick Bouvier, in a study entitled *Déserteurs et insoumis. Les Canadiens français et la justice militaire*, questioned the validity of the battalion's notoriety. Like Godefroy he argued that, without a comparative base, it is impossible to conclude that the number of infractions committed by French-Canadians was truly representative of their discipline.⁵ Bouvier did not provide this comparative material.

This article will reassess the 22nd Battalion's behaviour in a comparative context.⁶ Through a qualitative and quantitative analysis of the discipline of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade (22nd, 24th, 25th, and 26th Battalions) of the 2nd Canadian Division, it will demonstrate that the 22nd Battalion did, in fact, suffer from a disciplinary problem. For results to be as fair as possible, the comparison units must share an operational history similar to that of the "Van Doos," as the 22nd Battalion was familiarly known. Of



Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Tremblay (left), commanding officer of the 22nd Battalion, and his second-in-command, Major Arthur Dubuc (right), were both aware of the disciplinary problems among their men and took “drastic measures” to repair the discipline of the battalion.



the hundreds of units that comprised the CEF, only the battalions of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade meet that criterion. They not only took part in the same minor and major operations, but spent the entirety of their war alongside the 22nd Battalion. The evidence from the comparative information suggests that the 22nd Battalion suffered from poor discipline. Further evidence suggests that this poor discipline resulted from poor morale caused by the arrival of new recruits and a change in leadership.

Discipline in the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade

The Ill-disciplined “Van Doos”

On 15 October 1914, the 22nd Battalion was born after the Canadian government officially approved the creation of a French-Canadian unit. The battalion was unique in the CEF as the only combatant unit whose official language was French. The majority of its soldiers were French-speaking and officers gave their orders and instructions in French. After months of training in Saint-Jean, Quebec and Amherst, Nova Scotia, the battalion

departed for Europe aboard HMT *Saxonia* on 20 May 1915. The unit arrived in England nine days later, and began training at East Sandling camp. On 15 September 1915, these inexperienced soldiers were finally put to the test as they left their training fields and headed to France.

The most convincing evidence that justifies the 22nd Battalion’s reputation are the various accounts and comments of officers and soldiers from various battalions, brigades and divisions during and after the war. During the war the commanding officers of the battalion often complained about the unit’s disciplinary problems. These complaints also show that the battalion’s problems began after the Somme operations of 1916 and lasted well into the summer of 1917.

The Somme operations proved especially costly. Although the battalion successfully captured the village of Courcellette, it suffered many casualties and the composition of the unit was significantly altered as a result. By the end of December 1916, the battalion had received more than 500 reinforcements who constituted more than half of the membership of the battalion. The commanding officers of the battalion, Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Tremblay and

Major Arthur Dubuc, who replaced Tremblay while the latter had taken ill, first noted the poor discipline of their unit in November 1916. Tremblay was still in hospital when Dubuc paid him a visit in London. Tremblay noted their conversation in his diary: “Le nouveau bataillon a dans ces cadres un trop grand nombre d’hommes plutôt dégénérés... Enfin, Dubuc m’assure que la situation s’améliore, que graduellement le bataillon reviendra ce qu’il était.”⁷ Unfortunately, the situation did not improve and the battalion’s discipline deteriorated to the point where the commanding officer of the 2nd Canadian Division, Major-General R.E.W. Turner, got involved. In January 1917, Tremblay noted in his diary, “Il y a beaucoup d’absence sans permission au 22e et le Général Turner est anxieux que je retourne en France au plus vite.”⁸ The battalion’s poor discipline resulted in much criticism from several other brigade and divisional commanders.⁹ For example, Brigadier-General H.D.B. Ketchen, commander of the 6th Brigade, noted that “The crime of desertion from the trenches is very prevalent in this Battalion [the 22nd], and it is considered that unless examples are immediately made in such cases, that this crime will continue.”¹⁰

For the next eight months, the battalion seemed to be in crisis as Tremblay, Dubuc, and other commanders frequently complained about insubordinate behaviour. As a result, Tremblay had to use drastic measures to repair the discipline of his unit. During a meeting with the unit's officers, on 3 March 1917, he reminded them that it was their duty to "raidir la discipline," if there was any chance of fixing "l'état pitoyable du bataillon."¹¹ Tremblay used harsh penalties, such as courts-martial and executions for desertion, to restore the character that the unit had prior to Courcellette. Tremblay's measures were successful. By the summer of 1917, the situation in the "Van Doos" stabilized and improved. For example, at Private Alexandre Dumesnil's court-martial in September 1917, Dubuc noted, "The state of discipline of the Battalion is at present very good. Absences without leave are very rare."¹²

After the war, various veterans who served with and alongside the "Van Doos" also commented on the battalion's discipline. In fact, many attempted to justify or even apologize for it. In 1934, Claudius Corneloup, of the 22nd Battalion, published a novel entitled *La Coccinelle du 22e*, which was loosely based on the front-line experiences of the "Van Doos." Within its pages, he reproduced a conversation between a veteran and a young recruit. The exchange illustrates the unit's indifference towards the rules and regulations of the military. When the recruit expressed concern about being arrested by the military police for an illegal absence, the veteran responded: "C'est parce que c'est ta première escapade mon garçon!... Quand tu y seras habitué, tu diras comme l'ami Germinal: 'Je m'en fiche!'"¹³ Another soldier also cried out: "Une permission!...c'est bon pour une recrue."¹⁴

In 1962-63, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) conducted a series of interviews with First World War veterans. The men talked about the motivations for their enlistments, the campaigns in which they took part, their lives after the war, and the memories and friendships with which they returned from the front. However, when interviewing soldiers of the "Van Doos," or when referring to the unit itself with soldiers of other units, the interviewers kept asking about its rowdiness and indiscipline at the front. For example, Major Mitchell, of the 24th Battalion, noted that the Van Doos "weren't as susceptible to discipline as we [the 24th Battalion] were."¹⁵ He even recalled a humorous

provide an overview of discipline as they include every minor infraction that was punished. During the unit's three years at the front, a total of 2,475 minor infractions were punished. See Table 1 for their breakdown.

The most noticeable statistic is how frequent illegal absences were in comparison to all other infractions.²⁰ In fact, of the 2,475 infractions, 1,660 were for the crime of illegal absence, 67 percent of the total. During its first year at the front, the unit was thus punished for an average of 86.4 infractions per month, 62.6 infractions during its second year, and 52.9 during its final year. The unit's average throughout the war was 66.9 infractions per month.²¹ A more detailed examination of minor

Year	Absences	Drunkenness	Other Infractions	Total
October 1915 to September 1916	731	104	202	1,037
October 1916 to September 1917	468	87	196	751
October 1917 to November 1918	461	71	155	687
Total	1,660	262	553	2,475

anecdote about their indiscipline: "They [the Van Doos] scared the pants off the quartermaster in this Sandling Camp, I remember they chased him. There was some trouble over food. We went out there and here was the quartermaster running away and the whole gang after him."¹⁶ His fellow officer F. Portwine nevertheless added, "No, but they were good fighters, give them credit."¹⁷ A veteran of the 25th Battalion remarked, "but these Frenchmen are damn good fighters when the 22nd was a good unit."¹⁸

The statistics that were gathered from the Part II daily orders and court-martial proceedings suggest that the complaints and comments of officers and soldiers alike were well founded. The Part II daily orders

infractions also demonstrates that the transition from life in England to life at the front was quite difficult. October 1915 was the unit's most troublesome month when members were punished for a total of 151 minor infractions.²² Although the unit's initial trench tours proved be relatively uneventful compared to later ones, they nonetheless made the acquaintance of conditions that often made life unbearable in the frontlines such as frequent food and water shortages and lice infestations. The disciplinary problems continued as the men of the unit were punished for 122 and 117 minor infractions in November 1915 and December 1915.²³ By January and February 1916, the behaviour of the unit began to improve; the number of minor



This series of photos, taken in July 1916, show soldiers from the 22nd Battalion engaged in various tasks in the trenches.

Top: Here, five soldiers work to repair a muddy trench. The men are wearing helmets and most are bent over shovelling.

Middle: Two men are standing on the trench floor while the third is laying down reading in a small dugout (funkhole) in the side of the trench. The dugout has corrugated metal cover that is propped up and has a helmet and mess tin sitting on it. There is a gas alarm hanging from the wall of the trench next to the dugout and a number of Ross rifles with bayonets affixed leaning beside it.

Bottom: Two men stand on the trench floor in front of a dugout. The man on the left side of the photo is holding a Ross rifle. The second soldier is standing beside him with his arms akimbo.

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infractions dropped to 86 and 35, respectively. This change coincided with the arrival of Tremblay who replaced Colonel Frédéric-Mondelet Gaudet as commander of the battalion. During Tremblay's first period in command, the unit only went through one difficult patch in March and April 1916 when there were respectively 95 and 124 punishments for infractions. This was most likely the result of the battalion's first taste of intense combat at the St. Éloi Craters. According to the soldiers of the "Van Doos," it was one of most dangerous assignments they drew throughout the war. Joseph Henri Chaballe noted that "bien des soldats d'expérience considère la 'bataille des craters' comme l'épreuve la plus terrible à laquelle les Canadiens eurent à faire face durant la guerre, sauf peut-être à Passchendaele."²⁴ Apart from these two months, the unit was punished for only 35 infractions in February 1916, 74 in May, 49 in June, 45 in July, and 36 in August.²⁵ In September 1916, the battalion once again went through a difficult period as members were punished 103 times. This may have resulted from the unit's participation in its first major

Table 2 – Court-martial convictions of the 22nd Battalion²⁷

Infraction	Sept 1915 to Feb 1916	Mar 1916 to Sept 1916	Oct 1916 to Feb 1917	Mar 1917 to Dec 1917	Jan 1918 to 11 Nov 1918	Postwar	Total
Desertion	0	2	7	23	10	0	42
AWOL	1	5	15	25	21	9	76
Illegal absence-related infractions	0	0	5	1	7	1	14
Drunkenness	5	1	2	3	5	1	17
Insubordination	0	0	0	0	2	0	2
Theft/Fraud	0	3	2	4	6	7	22
Striking officer or other rank	0	0	1	0	2	0	3
Disobeying	0	1	2	1	0	0	4
Negligence with firearms	0	2	8	6	9	0	25
Other	0	2	3	7	7	9	28
Total	6	16	45	70	69	27	233

campaign, the Battle of the Somme. However, unlike the period following St. Éloi, Tremblay was not there to restore discipline, and infractions did not diminish. Infractions reached 103 in January 1917.²⁶

Court-martial proceedings also paint a negative picture of the unit's behaviour. (Table 2)

Like the evidence provided by the Part II daily orders, illegal absences (desertion and absence without leave) were also the most frequent infractions that were punished.²⁸ The "Van Doos" were charged with 118 counts of illegal absences; that is 50.6 percent of all their infractions. These statistics also demonstrate that the most troublesome period for the "Van Doos" were the months after Courcellette at the Somme to the end of 1917; close to half (49.4 percent) of all infractions were committed during these months. What is even more significant is that just under 60 percent of all illegal absences that were brought before courts-martial occurred during that time. These statistics thus confirm Dubuc's and Tremblay's various complaints, and, as courts-martial significantly increased after March 1917, they further show that the

unit's commanding officers sought to correct the problem through the use of legal procedures.

The 24th Battalion (Victoria Rifles of Canada)

An examination of the other units of the 5th Brigade is much more complicated than that for the "Van Doos." Although quantitative sources are available, qualitative ones are much more difficult to locate. The 22nd Battalion has been commented on and studied by various historians and veterans alike, but the same cannot be said about the other units of the 5th Brigade. Although the letters found in the courts-martial proceedings do provide some written statements on the overall discipline of the units, such letters were not always

available. This analysis will therefore focus on the statistics that were gathered from the Part II daily orders and court-martial proceedings.

A study of the minor infractions reveals two contrasting stories. Whereas members of the "Van Doos" were punished 2,475 times, the Victoria Rifles' personnel were punished only 911 times. (Table 3)

These statistics seem to indicate that the 24th Battalion was much more disciplined than the "Van Doos." The battalion's monthly average of infractions was much lower with 24.6 from October 1915 to September 1916, 25.3 the following year, and 23.9 during their final year at the front. The unit's average throughout the war was 24.6 infractions per month. However, like the "Van Doos," the Victoria Rifles also had problems

Table 3 – Minor infractions of the 24th Battalion²⁹

Year	Absences	Drunkenness	Other Infrac.	Total
October 1915 to September 1916	128	60	108	296
October 1916 to September 1917	104	51	149	304
October 1917 to November 1918	121	59	131	311
Total	353	170	388	911



The 24th Battalion, commanded by Lieutenant-Colonel William H. Clark-Kennedy, VC (left), was a well-disciplined unit. It was not necessary to invoke the death penalty to set an example to others in this battalion.

with illegal absences. A total of 353 punishments were given for illegal absences. They accounted for 38.7 percent of all infractions, compared to drunkenness (18.7 percent), which was the second most frequent infraction.

The statistics gathered from court-martial proceedings also indicate a similar situation. Only 119 infractions were convicted by courts-martial throughout the war. (Table 4)

These statistics also seem to indicate that the 24th Battalion was much more disciplined than the "Van Doos." This is especially true with illegal absences; men of the Victoria Rifles were convicted by courts-martial only 35 times compared to 118 for the 22nd Battalion. Not unlike the Van Doos, however, illegal absences were the most common breaches. Thirty-five (29.4 percent) of the courts-martial convictions were for AWOL and desertion.

No member of the Victoria Rifles was executed during the First World War. Only three death sentences were issued, but all were commuted. With every death sentence passed came several letters and appeals from the commanding officers of the 24th Battalion, 5th Brigade, and 2nd Division. For example, Sergeant F. Jennings was sentenced to death for an absence that lasted from 21 January 1916 until he was apprehended on 8 January 1917.³¹ Appeals came from all levels of the Canadian Corps. Lieutenant-Colonel W.H. Clark-Kennedy, commander of the 24th Battalion, was the first to urge mitigation of the sentence by arguing that the "state of discipline of the battalion [was] good."³² This was followed by the appeals from Major-General Burstall, 2nd Infantry Division, and Brigadier-General Ross, 5th Infantry Brigade. Burstall argued that the death penalty be commuted "because the discipline in the 24th Canadian Battalion is and has been good."³³ Ross likewise added that "in view of the fact that the discipline of the 24th Battalion is good and an example is not required...I recommend that the sentence be commuted."³⁴

The fact that Clark-Kennedy's opinion of his battalion's discipline

Table 4 – Court-martial convictions of the 24th Battalion³⁰

Infraction	Sep 1915 to Feb 1916	Mar 1916 to Sep 1916	Oct 1916 to Feb 1917	Mar 1917 to Dec 1917	Jan 1918 to 11 Nov 1918	Postwar	Total
Desertion	0	2	1	2	0	0	5
AWOL	1	2	4	8	7	8	30
Illegal absence related infractions	0	0	0	2	0	3	5
Drunkenness	2	1	5	1	1	0	10
Insubordination	0	0	0	4	2	2	8
Theft/Fraud	0	0	2	0	2	3	7
Striking officer or other rank	1	0	0	0	1	1	3
Disobeying	1	0	0	2	0	18	21
Negligence with firearms	2	0	4	4	7	1	18
Other	0	1	0	4	3	4	12
Total	7	6	16	27	23	40	119

were shared by several officers and outsiders render his comments much more credible. Evidence does not suggest that the 24th Battalion, or any of the brigade's battalions, attempted to hide cases of indiscipline on a regular basis. In fact, such a practice would not have benefited a commanding officer, and might have led to significant disciplinary problems. His men undoubtedly would have taken advantage of such a situation as they would have been aware that their actions would not result in an appearance before court-martial. Thus, as was the case with the "Van Doos," an undisciplined 24th Battalion, or any other, would likely have attracted the notice of brigade and division commanders as well as that of other units.

The 25th (Nova Scotia) Battalion

The record of minor infractions also suggest that the 25th Battalion was much more disciplined than the "Van Doos." (Table 5)

During the unit's three years at the front, a total of only 920 minor infractions were punished. The battalion's monthly average was only 28 infractions from October 1915 to September 1916, 21 the following

year, and 25.5 during their final year at the front. The unit's average throughout the war was 24.8 per month. However, as with the "Van Doos," the majority of the unit's infractions were illegal absences. Throughout the war, a total of 382 punishments were given for illegal absences, which accounted for 41.5 percent of the unit's minor infractions.

Court-martial proceedings also suggest the good behaviour of the unit. A total of 109 infractions were convicted by courts-martial. (Table 6)

The contrast with the "Van Doos" was still more marked with illegal absences, with only 25 convictions. Illegal absences were nevertheless the most frequent court-martial conviction (22.9 percent).

Despite the battalion's good discipline, one of its soldiers was executed during the war. Private Elsworth Young suffered the death penalty as a result of an illegal

absence during the Somme operations. Although there is very little evidence concerning this court-martial, it is possible that the battalion recommended commutation. In his study of executions, Godefroy noted that the commander of the 2nd Division, Major-General R.E.W. Turner, had asked for the commutation of the death sentence in this case.³⁷ As was demonstrated with the 24th Battalion, the recommendations of the division were generally similar to those of the brigade and the battalion. Moreover, available evidence concerning the 22nd and 24th Battalions, and Teresa Iacobelli's work have suggested that the overall discipline of the battalion was the *most* important rationale when arguing for or against the death penalty. Although it cannot be fully proven, circumstantial evidence suggests that the unit sought the commutation of Private Young's sentence based on

Table 5: Minor infractions of the 25th Battalion³⁵

Year	Absences	Drunkenness	Other Infraction	Total
Oct 1915 to Sep 1916	123	60	153	336
Oct 1916 to Sep 1917	95	44	113	252
Oct 1917 to Oct 1918	164	34	134	332
Total	382	138	400	920

Table 6 – Court-martial convictions of the 25th Battalion³⁶

Infraction	Sep 1915 to Feb 1916	Mar 1916 to Sep 1916	Oct 1916 to Feb 1917	Mar 1917 to Dec 1917	Jan 1918 to 11 Nov 1918	Postwar	Total
Desertion	0	2	1	0	0	0	3
AWOL	0	4	4	5	7	2	22
Illegal absence related infractions	0	2	1	2	2	1	8
Drunkenness	8	6	4	4	3	0	25
Insubordination	0	0	0	1	5	0	6
Theft/Fraud	1	1	0	1	3	0	6
Striking officer or other rank	0	1	0	0	3	1	5
Disobeying	0	0	0	1	3	0	4
Negligence with firearms	0	0	3	1	3	1	8
Other	0	2	2	6	8	4	22
Total	9	18	15	21	37	9	109



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Like the 24th Battalion, the 25th Battalion had fewer disciplinary problems than the 22nd Battalion. Only one man from the unit was executed and evidence suggests that the battalion tried to have his sentence commuted. Here the battalion commanding officer, Lieutenant-Colonel Arthur Blois, talks with his soldiers, February 1918.

there is a link between poor morale and poor discipline, and that one of the most significant consequences of poor morale is the aberrant behaviour of soldiers.⁴³

When dealing with the 22nd Battalion, it is easy to demonstrate that during its most troublesome period (September 1916 to July 1917) the unit did suffer morale problems, especially if discipline is a good measure of a unit's spirits. Throughout the war, but particularly after September 1916, members of the unit contravened regulations much more frequently than any other battalion in the 5th Brigade. More importantly, the evidence left by Tremblay and Georges P. Vanier, who served alongside Tremblay in the battalion, confirms such a breakdown of morale. In a letter dated 12 October 1916, for example, Vanier commented on the character of the unit: "Le bataillon a bien changé [depuis Courcellette]; peu des anciens restent. La gaieté d'autrefois ne règne plus: cela n'est pas surprenant quand on considère les amis qui ont fait le suprême sacrifice. Ça rend un peu triste..."⁴⁴ When Tremblay returned to the unit in February 1917, he noticed that the battalion's problems were much more than disciplinary. On 2 March 1917, he complained that "L'esprit de corps si remarquable au 22e avant la Somme n'existe pas, il faut tout de suite la ressusciter."⁴⁵ Tremblay was extremely distressed about the state of his battalion which explains why he resorted to harsh discipline to fix it. His actions proved fruitful. By the

the good discipline of the unit. Corps and army commands nevertheless confirmed the death sentence. Private Young was shot on the morning of 29 October 1916.³⁸

The 26th (New Brunswick) Battalion

The examination of the 26th (New Brunswick) Battalion was more problematic than the other units of the 5th Brigade as the Part II daily orders for the first two years of the war are missing. (Table 7)

From January 1917 to December 1917, the 26th Battalion was punished 19.1 times per month, and 38.5 times per month during its final year at the front. The 22nd Battalion, on the other hand, was punished 62.6 and 49.6 times per month during the same time periods. However, like the "Van Doos," the unit also had a problem with illegal absences as they accounted for 53.9 percent of the unit's total infractions.

Court-martial proceedings also suggest the unit's good behaviour.

Throughout the war there was a total of only 90 convictions. (Table 8) There were only 28 counts of illegal absences as compared to 118 in the 22nd Battalion. Remarkably, only two men in the 26th Battalion were charged with desertion. Nonetheless, illegal absences were the most common court-martial conviction, 28 of 90 (31.1 percent) were for AWOL and desertion.

Problems of Morale in the 22nd Battalion

Despite the fact that several historians have commented on the 22nd battalion's poor discipline, very few have attempted to explain its cause.⁴¹ This next section argues that poor morale, resulting from the arrival of new recruits and a change in leadership, played an important role in the disciplinary problems of the unit.⁴² Although military morale is a very difficult topic to examine as it is subjective, several historians and specialists nonetheless agree that

Table 7 – Minor infractions of the 26th Battalion³⁹

Year	Absences	Drunkenness	Other Infractions	Total
Jan to Dec 1917	104	26	100	230
Jan to Oct 1918	228	28	129	385
Total	332	54	229	615

Table 8 – Court-martial convictions of the 26th Battalion⁴⁰

Infraction	Sep 1915 to Feb 1916	Mar 1916 to Sep 1916	Oct 1916 to Feb 1917	Mar 1917 to Dec 1917	Jan 1918 to 11 Nov 1918	Postwar	Total
Desertion	0	1	0	0	1	0	2
AWOL	0	2	0	9	10	5	26
Illegal absence related infractions	0	1	0	1	0	0	2
Drunkenness	0	0	2	1	6	2	11
Insubordination	0	0	0	3	2	0	5
Theft/Fraud	0	0	0	1	7	3	11
Striking officer or other rank	0	0	1	0	1	0	2
Disobeying	0	0	0	1	1	0	2
Negligence with firearms	0	0	2	1	7	0	10
Other	1	2	3	6	7	0	19
Total	1	6	8	23	42	10	90

summer of 1917, he commented that the morale and the character of the battalion was improving. On 3 July 1917, he noted that his men were "de la plus belle humeur."⁴⁶ Even as the unit was involved in bloody operations at Hill 70 in mid-August 1917, Tremblay again noted that "le moral ne pourrait être meilleur."⁴⁷

Available evidence suggests that the arrival of reinforcements, officers and other ranks, after the Somme operations of 1916 significantly affected the morale of the unit. Reinforcements can have a significant impact on morale as they may alter a unit's "esprit de corps" as new recruits may not share the same values and bond as veterans. Lieutenant-Colonel Roy R. Grinker and Major John P. Spiegel believe that when soldiers do not share this "esprit de corps," poor morale will ensue.⁴⁸ Soldiers will perform their duties out of fear of punishment rather than out of a sense of pride, and will show their resentment by an occasional "breach of discipline or acts of hostility."⁴⁹

As a result of the casualties suffered in September 1916, the unit received more than

500 reinforcements, half of the unit's manpower.⁵⁰ In fact, the battalion had lost so many men that Georges Vanier noted that "the battalion has changed to such an extent that one could hardly recognize it."⁵¹ Tremblay complained in November 1916 that the battalion's rookies "n'ont pas l'esprit de corps que nous avons développé chez nos hommes jusqu'à Courcellette."⁵² It is apparent that these reinforcements did not

share the same commitment as the battalion's veterans. For example, between October 1916 and March 1917, soldiers from the unit were punished by courts-martial 27 times for illegal absences.⁵³ Out of these 27 illegal absences, 14 (51.9 percent) were committed by soldiers who were amongst the soldiers that joined the unit after the Somme operations. Moreover, seven (25.9 percent) had joined the battalion only a few months before Courcellette. Only six (22 percent) had been with the unit for more than a year.

In fact, evidence suggests that these reinforcements were simply not up to par with the men that gave their lives at Courcellette; this was due to the poor quality of the battalions from which the reinforcements came. In the weeks that followed the Somme offensives, the unit



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Major Georges P. Vanier, a future governor-general of Canada, believed that the heavy casualties suffered by the 22nd Battalion, and subsequent high number of replacements which joined the unit, adversely affected the battalion and contributed to its disciplinary problems.



Soldiers of the 22nd Battalion rest in a shell hole on the way to the front, September 1917.

received a total of 600 reinforcements from the 41st, 57th, and 69th Battalions.⁵⁴ These battalions were based in Britain and were broken up to feed units at the front. According to Jean-Pierre Gagnon and Desmond Morton, these three units suffered from significant leadership and disciplinary problems. The most well-known case is described by Desmond Morton in an article on the 41st Battalion. As a result of recruiting problems, the unit depended on other units to fill the gaps in their ranks. Morton noted that “predictably, they handed over their least desirable specimens.”⁵⁵ These same specimens soon joined the ranks of the 22nd Battalion. Morton also noted that the unit’s officers were utterly incompetent,

and provided poor training. Not only did they suffer from drinking problems, but according to the a court of enquiry into the state of the 41st Battalion in March 1916, “the officers did not seem to help and the N.C.O.’s less. They dropped out of the ranks themselves” during marching orders.⁵⁶ The battalion’s discipline became such a problem that two of its men, Lieutenant Codère and Private Sokolovitch, were involved in separate cases of manslaughter.

The majority of studies on military psychology agree that one of the most important factors in maintaining high troop morale is the commanding officer.⁵⁷ John Baynes noted that “the influence of the Commanding Officer was the greatest overall factor in shaping

the battalion’s character.”⁵⁸ Thomas Tremblay embodied many qualities of a great leader and it is easy to understand how his leadership could have led to such high spirits and morale amongst the men of his unit.

Tremblay had the trust of all who fought alongside him. In a letter dated 5 June 1919, Georges Vanier noted that “as long as I followed him no harm would come to me.” Even when they were in a difficult situation, he never lost his confidence in his leader and always thought that Tremblay “would bring us through.”⁵⁹ Tremblay’s courage was also a source of admiration. He was an example that all respected. He was in the front lines at Courcellette and risked his life with his men. After the

advance itself, one unknown soldier noted:

Lieutenant-Colonel Tremblay went forward with the first wave and remarking a tendency to move too much to the right in the direction of Martinpuch, himself ran along the whole line, redirecting the advance... Three times Col. Tremblay himself was buried by the earth from shells exploding near him.⁶⁰

This same soldier explained that the success of the battle was in large part due to Tremblay's work:

there is no one who is more deserving of praise than Lieut.-Col. Tremblay himself...He was at the forefront of the battle, constantly exposed to shell fire and the enemy's snipers. He personally placed the forward posts and frequently visited the whole line, encouraging his men and

directing defence...he was timeless in his efforts; never even paused to sleep and was the soul and spirit of the defence.⁶¹

Along with his tremendous character, courage and passion, Tremblay was a just leader and was concerned about the safety and the fate of his men. In his history of the 22nd Battalion, Chaballe noted: "Avant tout, il était juste, ce qui est chose capitale chez un chef. Connaissant tous ses hommes, il s'intéressait à leurs affaires privées. Dans la tranchée, il s'arrêtait au cours d'une tournée pour s'entretenir avec les soldats, demandant des nouvelles des parents, s'informant si l'on avait écrit, les interrogeant au sujet de la nourriture et des ennuis de la guerre."⁶²

Tremblay was a very special officer and his temporary loss had a significant impact on his men. In

a letter to Henri Bourassa, editor of *Le Devoir*, dated 23 January 1917, Corneloup noted, "when the sublime Tremblay left, these big children looked at one another. Sadness was written on their faces. A fear rose up, and confidence was gone. The second attack [at Regina Trench] was an utter failure."⁶³ Although the loss of Tremblay played a significant role in the battalion's difficulties, much of the blame must also fall on the shoulders of Major Arthur Dubuc, who replaced Tremblay after the battle of Courcellette. It is no coincidence that the unit's problems increased when Dubuc took over. He was unable to restore the unit's morale after the Somme as Tremblay had done after St. Éloi. A comparison of the little evidence which survives of his character and leadership demonstrates that he did not share the qualities of Tremblay and was perhaps, a mediocre leader.⁶⁴

Two soldiers of the 22nd Battalion repair a muddy trench.





Officers of the 22nd Battalion pose for a group photo in June 1918. Unit leadership played a significant role in determining morale.

subsequent similar ones, his men will follow him anywhere; if he loses it, he will never do any real good."⁶⁹ Although Dubuc might have rightly considered the consequences of losing both the commanding officer and himself (the second in command), and was justified to return, Patenaude considered Dubuc's caution as a sign of weakness. The first chance Dubuc had to prove that he was a great leader was perhaps considered a failure.

Dubuc was unlucky to have replaced the almost mythical figure of Thomas Tremblay. In contrast to Tremblay, Dubuc appeared weak and did not command the respect and hearts of his men. Evidence suggests that several individuals believed that Dubuc was incapable of leading the unit. As was previously noted, the commanding officer of the 2nd Division, Major General R.E.W. Turner, expressed his anxiousness about the battalion's discipline during Dubuc's command and wanted Tremblay to return to the front as soon as possible.⁶⁵ Although Claudius Corneloup believes that Dubuc was a fine commanding officer, he nevertheless admitted that he had been a problem to many. He noted, "il me semble que beaucoup ont été injustes envers lui. Sans avoir la témérité et l'audace du colonel Tremblay, qui était une âme extraordinaire, le major Dubuc était loin d'un peureux... On a essayé de jeter du discrédit sur cet officier supérieur... Il n'était pas aimé parce qu'il ne savait pas se faire aimer."⁶⁶

Moreover, it is fair to assume that he did not display the same courage,

and fearlessness as Tremblay. On the night following the attack on Courcelette, Private Leo Patenaude, later promoted to the rank of colonel, was ordered to make a dangerous run from the new front back to the original line. Despite enemy shelling and machine gun fire, he reached his objective. However, when Dubuc was asked to replace Tremblay at the front and take the same route that he had taken, Patenaude explains: "I don't know if I should say that but the second in command [Dubuc] of the 22nd unit the same night was ordered to report to replace Colonel Tremblay in the church where he was suffering from piles. The second in command went as far as Souvre LaFarnier and the firing was so intense that he came back to the 5th Brigade."⁶⁷ Gary Sheffield noted that in order to become a true leader, a newly appointed commander had to gain the confidence and the hearts of his men.⁶⁸ Sheffield thus believed that Bernard Montgomery was right when he advised that "the first thing a young officer must do... is go fight a battle, and that battle is for the hearts of his men. If he wins that battle and

Conclusion

By examining the discipline of the other battalions of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade and comparing it to that of the 22nd Battalion, this article has strengthened the understanding of the 22nd Battalion's behaviour, discipline, and ultimately, its combat record. It first reassesses a common assumption about the battalion's disciplinary problems, and reinforces it through a comparison of the three units that shared the wartime experiences of the "Van Doos." The statistics that were gathered, along with the complaints from battalion, brigade and divisional officers, which were themselves unique to the 22nd Battalion, are convincing. This article has also offered a new perspective on the disciplinary problems of the unit and has forwarded the theory that poor morale could have been a likely cause. Explaining why the "Van Doos" suffered from a morale crisis is a much more complex matter, which needs to be further explored as new evidence becomes available. At the

very least, this article has provided some plausible explanations – the arrival of new recruits and a change in leadership – and hopefully intriguing leads for other historians.

Notes

1. Desmond Morton, "The Supreme Penalty: Canadian Deaths by Firing Squads in the First World War," *Queen's Quarterly* 79, no.3 (1972), p.347.
2. Jean-Pierre Gagnon, *Le 22e bataillon (canadien-français), 1914-1919: étude socio-militaire* (Ottawa: Les Presses de l'Université Laval et le Ministère de la Défense nationale, 1986), pp.280 & 291.
3. Teresa Iacobelli, "Arbitrary Justice?: A Comparative Analysis of Canadian Death Sentences Passed and Death Sentences Commuted during the First World War" (M.A. thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 2004), p.58.
4. Andrew B. Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour?: The Story of the 25 Canadian Volunteers Executed in the First World War* (Nepean, On: CEF Books, 1998), p.44.
5. Patrick Bouvier, *Déserteurs et insoumis. Les Canadiens français et la justice militaire* (Outremont, QC: Athéna Editions, 2003), p.12.
6. In "The Divisional Experience in the C.E.F." a 2004 doctoral dissertation, David Campbell provided the first comparison between the discipline of the "Van Doos" and that other units of the CEF. By comparing the minor and courts-martial infractions of the battalions of the 6th Canadian Infantry Brigade (27th, 28th, 29th, and 31st Battalions) and the 19th Battalion with that of the "Van Doos," he concluded that the French-Canadian battalion was ill-disciplined. However, Campbell did not consider the discipline of the battalions that shared the most similar experience with the "Van Doos" – those of the 5th Canadian Infantry Brigade. Not doing so could have led to an inappropriate comparison. Battalions that did not participate in the same operations, which consequently might have resulted in fewer or greater total casualties and reinforcements, would not provide a just comparison as discipline could have been less or more of a problem, assuming the link between losses, morale, and discipline. In fact, Campbell's figures are, in several instances, significantly higher in one battalion than another. He explained that this was due to the fact that "some battalions were more heavily engaged in certain operations than other battalions..."
7. Archives of the Royal 22nd Museum, Personal Diary of Thomas Tremblay, 14 November 1916.
8. *Ibid.*, 1-23 January 1916. The lack of a precise date was Tremblay's own doing. Quite often, he summarizes days and weeks in short paragraphs. In this instance, he summarized his activities between January 1 and 23 in a few sentences.
9. The question of the five executed soldiers has been dealt with frequently by historians. Although questions of ethnic prejudice have been considered, most historians agree that the unit's poor discipline, and Thomas Tremblay's efforts to correct it, were the major causes of these executions. Although this article does not focus on the issue, the evidence considered confirms that it was Tremblay who first proposed the use of the death penalty to resolve the disciplinary problems of the battalion. As demonstrated by historians such as Jean-Pierre Gagnon and Teresa Iacobelli, Tremblay was constantly asking for the death penalty to restore the discipline of his unit.
10. Library and Archives Canada [LAC], RG 150, Series 8, Reel T-8667, Court-Martial Proceedings of Pte. Alexandre Gaudy.
11. Personal Diary of Thomas Tremblay, 3 March 1917.
12. LAC, RG 150, Series 8, Reel T-8655, Court-Martial Proceedings of Pte. Alexandre Dumesnil.
13. Claudius Corneloup. *La Coccinelle du 22e* (Montreal: Éditions Beauchemin, 1934), p.49.
14. *Ibid.*, p.52.
15. LAC, RG 41, Vol. 11, CBC Interviews, Major Mitchell and Frederick Portwine, p. 2.
16. *Ibid.*, pp.2-3.
17. *Ibid.*, p.2.
18. LAC, RG 41, Vol. 11. CBC Interviews, Crooks and McCorry (the first names and ranks of the two are not given.), p.9.
19. Unfortunately, Library and Archives Canada is missing the first two years of the Part II daily orders for the 22nd Battalion. For this section, the following comparison will therefore refer to the statistics gathered by Jean-Pierre Gagnon as he examined the complete version at the Archives of the Royal 22nd Regiment in Quebec City. His methodology was also employed when examining the minor infractions of the other units. Gagnon totalled all of the infractions that were punished from October 1915 to October 1918. He excluded the months of September 1915 and November 1918 because he wanted to create a monthly average of the infractions that were committed at the front; these two months were not fully spent at the front in combat and would therefore falsify his results. Gagnon, *Le 22e bataillon*, pp.287 & 404.
20. Throughout the First World War, the CEF considered illegal absences the most serious offence, and these were dealt with more ruthlessly than any other. In fact, of the 25 executed Canadian soldiers, 22 were executed for desertion; that is 88 percent of them were executed for deserting His Majesty's Forces without intention of returning. The British Army (non-colonial) boasted a similar ratio. Of 312 officers and other ranks who were shot at dawn, 268, or 86 percent, were executed for the crime of desertion. In fact, desertions were the cause of the majority of executions in both Allied and enemy forces. For example, of the 48 executions in the German army, 28 (58.3 percent) were for desertion. These statistics were taken from Bouvier, *Déserteurs et insoumis*, p.118 and Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour?*, p.3.
21. Gagnon, *Le 22e Bataillon*, p. 286.
22. Along with Table 1, Gagnon also provided an appendix, which displayed the number of infractions that were punished per month.
23. Gagnon, *Le 22e bataillon*, p. 283.
24. Col. Joseph Chaballe, *Histoire du 22e bataillon canadien-français, 1914-1919* (Montreal: Les Éditions Chanteclerc Ltée., 1952), p.98.
25. Gagnon, *Le 22e bataillon*, pp.283-285.
26. *Ibid.*, pp.285-286.
27. Although thoroughly researched, Gagnon's statistics were not considered as his methodology is simply not clear enough. Throughout the war, soldiers were not always with their respective units; many injured soldiers were attached to reserve units in England while others were briefly attached to other units at the front. Gagnon does not explain whether he included them in his statistics or not. Moreover, soldiers that were brought before courts-martial were often charged with and guilty of more than one infraction. However, Gagnon did not explain whether he included all of these infractions or simply the most serious ones in his statistics. In order to treat each battalion as equally as possible, this article will follow a different methodology. The statistics provided here, therefore, include all of the infractions that were committed by the men of the 5th Brigade, even while attached to other units. Moreover, they include all of the offences that were found guilty by courts-martial. Thus, if a soldier was guilty of two counts of illegal absences and three counts of insubordination, five infractions were added to the battalion's total. The following statistics were thus gathered from the court-martial proceedings of the 22nd Battalion. LAC, RG 150), Series 8, Files 649-A-3297 to 649-Z-75, Reels T-8651 to 8690.
28. According to the *Manual of Military Law*, desertion "implies an intention on the part of the offender either not to return to His Majesty's service at all, or to escape some particular important service..." In order to be punished for desertion, *intent* must be proven at the offender's court-martial. Intent may be proven in a variety of ways.

- For example, whether or not an offender was forcibly apprehended or came back of his own will, or whether he was in civilian clothing or still in uniform could influence the final verdict. If intent is not proven, then a soldier is guilty of *absence without leave* (AWOL). Although this was not as severely punished (none resulted in a death sentence), the penalty could be as high as a two-year imprisonment. War Office, *Manual of Military Law* (London: His Majesty's Stationary Office, 1914), p.18.
29. The following statistics were gathered from LAC, RG 150, Series 1, Vol. 73 and 74, Part II Daily Orders of the 24th Battalion.
 30. The following statistics were gathered from LAC, RG 150, Series 8, Files 649-A-3297 to 649-Z-75, Reels T-8651 to 8690, Courts-Martial Proceedings of the First World War.
 31. LAC, RG150, Series 8, File 649-J-11198, Reel T-8670, Court-Martial Proceedings of Sgt. F. Jennings.
 32. Ibid.
 33. Ibid.
 34. Ibid.
 35. The following statistics were gathered from LAC, RG 150, Series 1, Vol. 72-73, Part II Daily Orders of the 25th Battalion.
 36. The following statistics were gathered from LAC, RG 150, Series 8, Files 649-A-3297 to 649-Z-75, Reels T-8651 to 8690, Courts-Martial Proceedings of the First World War.
 37. Cited in Godefroy, *For Freedom and Honour?*, p.90. Unfortunately, at the time of writing, Young's court-martial files were in conservation, and could not be consulted. However, Godefroy has consulted them and provides much information on their content. He found his information in LAC, RG 24, Vol. 2538, HQS 1822 Vol. 2, Death Sentences and Executions in the CEF, 1915-18.
 38. Although it is still unknown why Young was executed, several historians have considered the issue. Teresa Iacobelli, for example, argued that timing was the most likely factor. She concluded that his death was "no doubt due to the fact that Young deserted during the heavy fighting at Courcellette..." Teresa Iacobelli, "Arbitrary Justice?" pp. 24-25.
 39. The following statistics were gathered from LAC, RG 150, Series 1, Vol. 75, Part II Daily Orders of the 26th Battalion.
 40. The following statistics were gathered from LAC, RG 150, Series 8, Files 649-A-3297 to 649-Z-75, Reels T-8651 to 8690, Courts-Martial Proceedings of the First World War.
 41. Jean-Pierre Gagnon is the only historian to have attempted to explain the cause of the disciplinary problems of the "Van Doos." Unfortunately, he did not offer an in-depth analysis, but simply stated that heavy casualties at the Somme in September 1916, and the arrival of hundreds of reinforcements as a result could have led to the unit's disciplinary problems. Gagnon also discussed the leadership of Thomas Tremblay, but failed to demonstrate how his temporary departure from the helm of the battalion affected the men of the unit. Gagnon, *Le 22e bataillon*, p. 285.
 42. Although this article focuses especially on leadership and reinforcements, it must be noted that the author nonetheless considered every element that played a role in troop morale such as food, water, rest, leave, rum, entertainment, and sports, to name a few. All of these elements were taken into consideration, but unfortunately did not always apply to the principal topic of this examination: the 22nd Battalion. Available evidence only allowed an examination of reinforcements and leadership.
 43. Although there is no absolute definition of morale, it can be defined as the willingness to fight and the overall contentment and pride permeating a unit. Thus, when the morale of a unit suffers, soldiers may not perform their duties with as much enthusiasm and drive, will complain about their officers and living conditions, but more importantly, a unit might start to suffer from disciplinary problems. See for example: John Baynes, *Morale: A Study of Men and Courage. The Second Scottish Rifles at the Battle of Neuve Chapelle* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1967) and John G. Fuller, *Troop Morale and Popular Culture in the British and Dominion Armies 1914-18* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).
 44. LAC, MG 32 A2 Vol. 3, File 3-3, Correspondence of Georges P. Vanier.
 45. Diary of Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Tremblay, 2 March 1917. "Esprit de corps" is an important factor in the motivation and morale of troops, and can be defined as a feeling of belonging to and identity amongst a group of soldiers. Quite simply, soldiers will fight for each other.
 46. Ibid., 3 July 1917.
 47. Ibid., 14 August 1917.
 48. Lieutenant-Colonel Roy R. Grinker, M.C. and Major John P. Speigel, M.C., *Men Under Stress* (Philadelphia: Blakiston, 1945), p.41.
 49. Ibid.
 50. LAC, RG 9, Series III-D-3, Online War Diaries of the 22nd Battalion from October 1916 to December 1916.
 51. LAC, MG 32 A2 Vol. 3, Correspondence of Georges P. Vanier, letter to his mother dated October 19, 1916.
 52. Diary of Thomas Tremblay, 14 November 1916.
 53. The following statistics were gathered from the examination of the battalion's appearances before courts-martial. LAC, RG 150, Series 8, Files 649-A-3297 to 649-Z-75, Reels T-8651 to 8960, Courts-Martial Proceedings of the Soldiers of the First World War.
 54. Gagnon, *Le 22e bataillon*, p. 286.
 55. Desmond Morton, "The Short, Unhappy Life of the 41st Battalion, C.E.F.," *Queen's Quarterly* 81, no.1 (1974), p.76.
 56. Ibid., pp.77-78.
 57. See for example Baynes, *Morale*, pp.98 & 110-113; Grinker and Speigel, *Men Under Stress*, pp.46-48; Lord Moran, *The Anatomy of Courage* (London: N.A., 1945), pp. 180-196; and Gary L. Tischler, "Patterns of Psychiatric Attrition and of Behaviour in a Combat Zone," *The Psychology and Physiology of Stress: With References to Special Studies of the Vietnam War*, ed. Peter G. Bourne (London and New York: Academic Press, 1969), pp.22-3.
 58. Baynes, *Morale*, p.101.
 59. LAC, MG 32 A2 Vol. 4, File 4-2, Wartime Correspondence of Georges P. Vanier.
 60. Canadian War Museum Archives, 58C 1 14.8, Account of the battle of Courcellette by an unknown soldier, September 1916.
 61. Ibid.
 62. Colonel Joseph Chaballe, *Histoire du 22e bataillon canadien-français, 1914-1919* (Montreal: Les Éditions Chanteclerc Ltée., 1952), p.111.
 63. LAC, RG 150, Series 8, Reels T-8653. Court-martial of Claudius Corneloup. Corneloup ended up being brought before a court-martial in February 1917 for the comments he made in this letter. The original letter was written in French, but it was typed and translated into English for the court-martial proceedings. Both are available in his file.
 64. Unfortunately, Dubuc still remains an unknown figure in Canadian military history and has been studied very little. Moreover, he has left no material about himself and his impressions of the battalion.
 65. Diary of Thomas Tremblay, 1-23 January 1917.
 66. Claudius Corneloup, *L'épopée du vingt-deuxième Canadien-français* (Montreal: La Presse, 1919), pp.134-5.
 67. Library and Archives Canada. RG 41, Vol. 11, CBC Interviews with First World War Veterans, Colonel Leo Patenaude Interview, p.2.
 68. Gary 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, 2000), pp. 79-80.
 69. Ibid., p.80.

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