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# A Canadian Soldier in the Great War: The Experiences of Frank Maheux

Desmond Morton

For several years, most recently with help from the late, lamented SSHRC and a year's leave from the futility of university administration, I have sought to write a collective biography of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). It is a very large and disparate family. With varying levels of enthusiasm, about 619,000 Canadian men and women joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force. About a hundred thousand were conscripts - "MSA [Military Service Act] men" was the permitted term. The vast majority were volunteers. They included Victoria Cross winners, deserters, unsung heroes, twenty-five victims, reluctant firing squads and a small majority who never saw service beyond the shores of Canada or England.<sup>1</sup>

Several years of collecting letters, diaries and personal memoirs has eroded many of the generalizations I once shared. Even by 1918, for example, the Canadian Corps remained 50 per cent British-born.<sup>2</sup> A common image, seized on by the British when the First Contingent first arrived and never relinquished, was that "Canadoos" were robust, free-spirited frontiersmen. In his moving account of the CEF, Pierre Berton renewed the stereotype for 1917: "... to a very large extent the men who fought at Vimy had worked on farms or lived on the edge of the wilderness."<sup>3</sup> By the war's end, with help from the MSA, farmers, hunters, fishermen and lumbermen formed only 22.4 per cent of the CEF.

Among them was a typically untypical man named Frank Maheux or, since precision in such matters concerned notaries more than him, Francois-Xavier Maheux.<sup>4</sup> Maheux was a logger from Baskatong Bridge, 31 miles north of Maniwaki on the Quebec side of the Ottawa River. Once he had arranged for two bad teeth to be pulled, Maheux enlisted in Ottawa on November 20th, 1914 and joined Eastern Ontario's contribution to the Second Contingent, the 21st Battalion. A composite of militia infantry units in the 3rd Division, the 21st was primarily an offshoot of the 14th Princess of Wales' Own Rifles of Kingston. That was no coincidence. Normally the warden of Kingston Penitentiary, the commanding officer of the 14th, Lt. Col. William St. Pierre Hughes was a younger brother of the Minister of Militia, Major-General Sam Hughes. Command of the 21st Battalion would suffice until he could become a brigadier.

Maheux was a typical 1914 recruit in a lot of ways - his height, five feet five inches, was the CEF average.<sup>5</sup> His meagre education was typical too. He was Catholic, second to the Church of England among denominations in the CEF, and just ahead of the Presbyterians. In other ways, he was untypical. Maheux had been born in Quebec City where his mother remained. He was colloquially bilingual and his letters in French suggest that any formal education he boasted was in his mother tongue.

He was 34 years old, about ten years above the average. Maheux was married when he enlisted, with at least three living children.<sup>6</sup> That, too, was exceptional in 1914, when tradition and economy persuaded authorities to favour younger single men.<sup>7</sup> Maheux was also exceptional in claiming his service in "D" Squadron, the bilingual component of the 4th Canadian Mounted Rifles during the South African War.<sup>8</sup> He and his unit had reached Cape Town too late for the fighting but his prior experience helped persuade him to enlist in what he soon realized would be "the worst war since the world began."<sup>9</sup> It also made him doubly welcome in an army of raw recruits.

More usefully for an historian, Frank Maheux wrote long, passionate and descriptive letters to "poor Angeline," or Angelique, the full-blooded Odawa he had married in 1905 when he had worked in a lumber camp near her reserve. Maheux was also untypical as a correspondent. Most soldiers wrote letters; many families preserved them. Soldiers found ways around the official ban on personal diaries and cameras. Most collections of letters and tiny illegal diaries were at least partly directed at posterity. Authors, from Siegfried Sassoon to Corporal C. West of the 43rd Battalion, had an eye on historians. Who can blame them, when their young lives would have no other memorial? Soldier-authors, on the whole, were exceptional in their education, their sensibility and their self-consciousness. They wrote, often, as they wished to be remembered. Frank Maheux wrote without an eye to posterity and solely as husband and father. He sought to communicate to a wife he had abandoned, who was left to raise their five children and who, he insisted, was never out of his mind. His writing, the rough transliteration of his speech, was as rough a tool as his logger's axe or peavey, and often as sharp. Maheux wrote out of guilt, homesickness and, unlike most of his fellow soldiers, to convey the pain and fear and misery of his life as a soldier. He wrote the English he had learned in the shanties. He spelled phonetically and imaginatively. Maheux's prose flowed without the constraints of paragraphs, capitals or punctuation. Its impact was sufficient to provoke this article.<sup>10</sup>

Why did a married man of 34, with little knowledge of the world, join up? Patriotism was never acknowledged as a factor. "Look at the difference," he appealed to Angelique, more conscious than she that a protest from his wife could terminate his career,<sup>11</sup> "in working hard in chanty for 22.00 here you will get 30.00 a month and a fund of the Government beside." Indeed, with \$20 separation allowance, \$25 from the Patriotic Fund and \$15 assigned pay belatedly extracted from Maheux himself, Angelique would have three times as much as he could earn in the bush. "You won't get no hard times because you get more money every month than you never get before."<sup>12</sup> In a letter home, he also confessed that one of his creditors ["their not a man in this world I hate like him"]<sup>13</sup> had sent a bailiff to the camp and he had fled. In October 1914, the army doubtless seemed a good refuge to a veteran.

The government was a more generous employer than any lumber baron, handing out uniforms, socks, a razor, brushes, a fur cap: "we look like dam fool with them fur cap - they are about 1 foot high."<sup>14</sup> Wartime Kingston was hospitable. When the Methodists offered a free supper, Maheux confessed "we will say we are Methodists for one night it will pash [pass] time."<sup>15</sup> Christmas brought "cakes, Turkey, pies, all what you are able to imagine and lots women singing but my dear wife all that good stuff I got sooner I had got only a piece of Bread and greese and be with my little family."<sup>16</sup> In April he reported: "The Government were not to bad for Easter breakfast we had 3 eggs each that was better than nothing."<sup>17</sup>

Homesickness dominated Maheux's letters. He dreamed that his wife was beside him and woke to find nothing more than an army bunk. He described their shy love-making on the banks of a well-remembered river, though the act itself was depicted by an imaginative squiggle.<sup>18</sup> He also remembered his paternal duty. "Tell me when Petuwise [his son] is going to make his first communion." "I want you to be a good boy in scholl and good if you want to make your first communion this spring," he instructed his son, "and every night and every morning when you say your prayer say a prayer for papa."<sup>19</sup>

He needed prayers. Prior service soon earned Maheux a sergeant's stripes but they came down in January after a turbulent leave and losing struggles with an old enemy, the bottle. Frank had gone home for a New Year's furlough, walking the 47 miles north from Maniwaki to Baskatong Bridge. Then, after less than a day, he "borrowed" Angelique's nest-egg of \$27 and set off with his pals for a spree which ended in Hull on the way back to Kingston.<sup>20</sup> The cheque, promised in the next letter never arrived. A bout of illness, approaching departure and a Kingston nurse's advice brought Angelique a belated confession: "since I am here I drank a good deal; spend money even when I had been able to send it to you . . . it is very hard in the army for a man who is used to drink to not take a drink but true as God from now you will see a difference."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Angelique saw little of her new wealth until Maheux's battalion went overseas in May.

The 21st Battalion, 1006 strong and under the stern but influential Colonel Hughes, crossed to England in May on the *Metagama*.<sup>22</sup> In the Irish Sea it passed boats hunting for dead from the *Lusitania*, sunk only two days earlier. To the troops, U-Boat danger still seemed real enough. "I forgot to tell you," wrote Maheux, "over 80 nurses cross over with us. I am pretty certain some of them made something in their pants because one night I pretty near my self."<sup>23</sup> In England, he encountered tiny railway cars, steady rain and wartime atrocity stories: "they found the poor 6 Canadians killed in a barn they were nailed with a bayonette in each hand and it was marked in English 'that show you Canadiens to stop in Canada.'"<sup>24</sup> Canada's Golgotha, as mythic as the angel of Mons but far crueller as an excuse to kill surrendering Germans, was ultimately embodied in a wartime statue.<sup>25</sup>

Army life was tougher in England than in Canada, training was more demanding, food was poor and it was a little late for second thoughts: "Their hundred of poor young fellow here when they join the Army in Canada they thought it was only fun but now they see their mistake but it is too late." Maheux observed, with a mildly self-pitying reminder that he was suffering so his wife could live in wealth: "you know yourself how I am not very delicate and



*Frank Maheux*

every night I am play out but I dont care i am getting the money."<sup>26</sup> Like other Canadians, Maheux professed shock at English morals: "The people are very bad on sunday all the hotels are open on Sundays you go to a hotel you see women drinking beer the same like men." Angelique must not worry that her husband would succumb to temptation: " the priest gives us hell of sermon Sunday about fellows going with girls here in England and the worse of it they are rotten from their feet to their nose . . . all the priests says is they are snakes from hell with fire in their mouth all over."<sup>27</sup> A few months sickened Maheux of training: "we are so tired of drill we are ready to take any sort of hardship." As preparation for the front, he shaved his head: "I got my hair cut close to the coco. I look like a Coco but I feel very well."<sup>28</sup>

As he would through the war, Maheux did what he could to play the husbandly role of good provider. If his wife was cold or hungry, it was her own fault because he had left her with more money than they had ever had. She must not even consider a job as a camp cook because people would say he had left her short. If their poor log shanty "lick [leak] like a basket," she should get some Indian to put tarpaper on it.<sup>29</sup> She must buy a barrel of butter and lots of potatoes and turnips before winter approached and prices rose.<sup>30</sup> In fact, Angelique had a tough time, dunned by the creditors Frank had left behind and whom he refused, on principle as he claimed, to pay. At times she was penniless, when promised money failed to appear from the Patriotic Fund. In 1917, she felt obliged to move to Maniwaki because the cabin, bad to start with, was uninhabitable without constant repairs. It was tough to persuade a distant husband that prices had soared in Canada as well as in England and France.<sup>31</sup>

In September 1915, the 2nd Canadian Division moved to France. On the 23rd, Maheux reported from the trenches: "my Hotel here is a hold in the ground about 3 1/2 feet deep and 3 1/2 wide." The noise, he claimed, was ten times worse than thunder and "it takes all our nerves to tuff it." Loyally, he insisted, "as long as they will be Canadians left we will hold our place." At least he could get chewing tobacco:

"I smoke a plug a day that the only poor pleasure left to me now."<sup>32</sup> Trench life meant living and sleeping in mud, with perhaps a fortnightly bath behind the lines: "for that part I don't kick I never care much to wash in the morning."<sup>33</sup>

Wounds and death were a constant of life at the front, though Maheux had lived with danger in South Africa and in the lumber camps. "The last night we were in the trenches," he reported in November, "one poor soldier got a pr of Rubber Boots from (h)is wife he put them on the same night he was killed . . . that the fortune of war the way it is the same as on the drives when your time is up you have to jump but I sooner jump way to Canada first."<sup>34</sup> In battle, death came wholesale. In April, Maheux's battalion was involved in the 2nd Division's hopeless attempt to recapture two German mine craters near St. Eloi: "we were walking on dead soldier and the worse they was about 3 feet of mud and water I saw poor felows trying to bandage their wounds bombs heavy shells were falling all over them poor Angeline, it is the worse sight that a man ever want to see but thank God I went through without a scratch."<sup>35</sup> Maheux tried to reassure his wife: "I knowyou are like me sick of the war so I'll speak about something else but I want to tell you this, don't be uneasy about me some things tells me that I'll go true all right. I saw fellows dropping all around me and nothing touch me steel and pieces of iron were falling the same as snow... ." Though he had promised to spare his wife further horrors of war, he could not stop himself. "I forgot to tell you the last engagement our Commander put 5 jars of rhum and a cup everybody served himself with rhum to give himself courage but I tell you nobody abuse it we were thinking to much of the charge."<sup>36</sup>

Like other soldiers, the early bravado faded fast. In the trenches men formed close friendships. Chums were the only guarantee a man had that someone would help him if wounded and seek his body if dead. His chum, Anderson, died during the St. Eloi debacle: "a piece of steel cut him pretty near in two .. he never knew what happen to him." Terrified under the bombardment, "I made a promise I won't touch liquor for 3 years and make a trip

to Ste Anne de Beaupre." Two men of his battalion, he claimed, had been caught with self-inflicted wounds. "Both of them shot each other in the legs so they got off from the army for a while, but they will be penish. I saw poor fellows but Thank God only a few loose their nerves the same like crasy men, you can't do nothing with them." Maheux's first wounds came a month later, in June. Two gashes from shell fragments were not enough for Maheux to report sick - not if his belongings would be stolen in his absence. Nor were army doctors likely to be helpful. After a German mortar bomb - a "sausage" - exploded nearby, his ears caused him continual pain "but the doctor anything wrong with you it makes no matter if it was sore eyes he always give Caster Oil we call him Caster Oil King."

Soon after he was caught in one of those savage little encounters that never rated inclusion in history books but which cost thousands of lives in aggregate. What began as a bombardment by heavy trench mortars ended in the loss of most of his platoon. He and his comrades fought a day-long, seesaw battle for a little bridge in no man's land near Ypres. By nightfall, the Canadians held their old ground. "It is a fright, it is like butchery my dear wife, it is not war there no name for it... I see poor fellows legs cut off trying to pull himself to some place or shelter against the shells but only to die. I saw to much Angeline I wont write to you about that any more. I see you got a cow I am very glad you wont be short of milk this summer."<sup>37</sup>

By August 1916, Maheux and his battalion had been almost a year in the trenches and the strain showed: "some old 21st soldiers after a bombardment they will be wite for a few minutes and start to cry that what you called shell shock it is to hard on your nerves you see the shells exploding all around us and between you are asking yourself I might be killed by the next one."<sup>38</sup> Such comments were preludes to renewed concern for his family and especially his baby girl, Condy: "Is she fat, does she remember me?"

A month later, on September 15th, the 21st Battalion opened the second phase of the Battle of the Somme. In its most glorious and costly

day of the war, the battalion took the German-held ruins of the Sugar Factory at Courcellette and lost all but 64 of its men.<sup>39</sup> Maheux's account is as eloquent as any:

Rec'd your letter glad to see that you are well, hoping my letter will find you the same I past the worse fighting here since the war started we took all kinds of prisonners but God we lost heavy, all my camarades killed or wounded, we are only a few left but all same we gain what we were after we are in rest dear wife it is worse than hell the ground is covered for miles with dead corpses all over and your Frank past all true without a scratch pray for me dear wife I need it very bad. I went true all the fights the same as if I was making logs I baynetted some killed others. I was caught in one place with a chum of mine he was killed beside me when I saw he was killed I saw red we were the same like in a butchery, the Germans when they saw they were beaten they put up their hands up but dear wife it was to late. . . .<sup>40</sup>

Maheux emerged from the Somme campaign a sergeant, with one of 16 Military Medals the 21st Battalion earned for its role at Courcellette. In October he escaped the wretched battlefield for a week in England. Officers got leave every quarter; soldiers once a year. It was Maheux's chance to send home two captured German watches for his wife and eldest son: "Tell Petuise not to play with the german watch"; he had spent five shilling getting it fixed.<sup>41</sup> He sent magazine clippings too, to portray to them what battle had been like. "I am sending you a picture of the tanks. I fought in Sept beside some of them but they get blew by shells or stuck in shell holes . . . they are like an alephan [elephant] they are so big."<sup>42</sup> London was wet, cold and friendless. "I got my fortune tell me a gypsy she says I am going to live old and she told me I had a wife far away, and my wife was dark and I had some children she say I go true this war without a scratch and she told me that you love me very much."<sup>43</sup>

Back in France, Maheux savoured the small pleasures of being a sergeant: "I never work at anything just giving orders I am here the same as foreman in the chanty but more men to look after instead of culling trees we are doing our best to kiled as much as possible." Still, the memory of how he had won promotion troubled him: "if a poor soldier killed here doesn't go to heaven without stopping no place, I'll believe there were none. . . . I was allway in the worst place that the way I got my stripes and my Medal but I suppose my time was not up."<sup>44</sup> It



was lonesome too, with so many new men. Another chum had died at the Somme and he was intrigued to receive a letter from the man's father, the high constable of Carleton county, asking for help in locating the body. Of course he would try, though it would be dangerous and next to impossible.<sup>45</sup> The winter of 1916-1917 - the worst in half a century - added to any soldier's ordeal, "them countrys France and Belgium I wouldn give a cent for it, you can[t] keep nothing dry every[where] wet we can make no fire it is worse than ever."<sup>46</sup> Still, like most in the CEF, Maheux preferred the French to the Belgians:

The poor French people, they are very good, every family lose some body, every body are in black the people are very modest they are better than the Belgians I like them better they will be thousands and thousands poor widows after the war it is a fright the way it is . . . you see girls and women working in coal mine it is a pity to see them.<sup>47</sup>

As ever, Maheux's thoughts returned to his wife and children. His little daughter sent him her first letter "I understand every word she write" he reported. On the long, cold morning stand-to's, his thoughts turned to Angelique: "I'll say to myself Angeline is sleeping now I dont know what I'll give to be beside you instead I'll have my rifle beside me so you can see for a poor bugger no [t] use to think so much that will drive a fellow crazy."<sup>48</sup> With each month, the odds against his survival rose. The succession of trench raids that preceded the Canadian assault on Vimy Ridge proved deadly for front-line infantry. On January 11th, 1917, he had premonitions: "I am called dear wife to go over to the German trench tomorrow. . . . Dear wife one thing I want you it is have the children well educated and kept them from liquor. I know some time I dint do right like drinking but I ask you pardon dear wife and I believe all my faults they are all pardon. One think I know the Government will used you well."<sup>49</sup>

Somehow, Maheux survived the patrols and the great attack on Vimy too. The 21 st Battalion was part of the second wave and took the ruins of Thelus. Letters for this period are missing and he may have been left out of the battle, a

*Opposite: Frank Maheux and his Family*  
(NAC PA 120121)

new practice in the wake of casualty rates that annihilated units. He was certainly involved in the brutal fighting beyond the Ridge when the Germans stalemated the Canadians: "we got a big drink of rum I wish we were out of it but one think my Regiment wen threw all the fighting lost heavy but what we took we lost some of it but it was not long after that we chased them with the baynette."<sup>50</sup> Later in the struggle, Maheux had one of his several contacts with German gas: "I forgot to tell you before the Germans attacked us the 3rd time, they sent gas we had our respirator for 3 hrs in one time that what save our life. . . . I was choking but soon as I put the tube in my mouth I got fresh air I was all right but they very warm thing over your head."<sup>51</sup> The discomfort was worth it. In June, Maheux described the horror of gas: "We got a bad dose at vimy - when the gas comes it is like pineapple it smells so good if you smell a litytle you die choke and you can't get your wind I saw may dying like that healthy young men the best in the nation just kids."<sup>52</sup>

For Maheux, the CEF and all armies, wars bring long periods of boredom interspersed with spasms of sheer terror. In one of the interludes that the army called rest - drilling, polishing, inspections and digging reserve trenches - Maheux experienced a little extra and unexpected fright:

One thing I forgot to tell you . . . the Battalion send 4 sergeants to the place where all the fly machines to be able to understand the aeroplane signals. I went up in one I went up about 3000 feet it was lovely. I enjoy my trip. I was only afraid when we left the ground it was all right after but I never go into another aeroplane. . . .<sup>53</sup>

Soldiers commonly debated whether the Somme or Passchendaele were worse. Maheux was at both, though his 2nd Division had an easier time at the terrible Flanders battle than the 3rd and 4th Canadian Divisions, which had pushed the Allied line beyond the bottomless Ravebeek and further up the faint slope to Passchendaele. "I past threw the battle of Passchendaele without a scratch," he reported to Angelique, "it was one of the worst place I was in there's no name for it." Somebody had stolen his rifle in the dark, "but God I was able to get thousands before I got to the front line from dead fellows."<sup>54</sup>



Once again it was his turn for leave. By November 15th, he was again in London. Maheux found it an even more miserable experience than in 1916. He felt sick. His head, he reported to his wife, felt like a pumpkin and he reported sick. Whatever Angelique was left to imagine, a medical officer promptly diagnosed gonorrhoea.<sup>55</sup> For the next month, Maheux was confined to the Canadian Special Hospital at Witley. Despite the fact that his pay and her separation allowance were stopped during treatment, this was one confession Maheux chose not to make to his wife. During his stay in hospital, soldiers shared in the Canadian general election. Maheux's choice was characteristically pragmatic: "I vote for the men that will give me 3 months leave" he reported.<sup>56</sup> A few weeks later he explained, "I vote to the last minute for Borden we want some body to take out place if he dont keep his promised we will cut is xxxx when all the old boys goes back home."<sup>57</sup>

To qualify for the promised leave to Canada, Maheux preferred to get back to France. For all the horrors, he was lonesome for the only home he had overseas. He appealed in vain to Colonel Jones, his old commanding officer, "he told me no I was long enough their," though perhaps surprisingly Jones suggested that Maheux might be a candidate for a commission. "If I like to be an officer I am able any day but I dont want it, it takes money it takes only the last cent you have also you have topayabatman, buyyour own close [clothes]."<sup>58</sup>

Instead, he was posted to the 6th Reserve Battalion at Seaford. "If I like I'll never go back to France any more I'll be instructor for the Conscripts," he explained, ". . . you know I never was afraid to loose my old skin but still I done my bit in France."<sup>59</sup> He soon had second thoughts. Sent to the new Canadian Trench Warfare School at Seaford for an instructors' course, he soon had the familiar, galling experience of any veteran: "I know years ago what they show me but still you have to go threw it. . . I hate the job allready." Training camp had miseries of its own for Maheux:

"Dear wife with all the Danger and Hardship in France I preferred to be there than here here it is a steady shinning your buttons and Boots. . . that makes a man sore about the Army but still you are able to past threw all that when you have a Dear wife and childrens waiting for you in Canada."<sup>60</sup>

England in 1918 was no paradise, "they are taking men here with 6 or 7 children for the war they start to see horse meat in London on a.c the meat it is so scarce it is a fright. . ." Still, he confessed, "the food is good in the Army."<sup>61</sup> ". . . for Sergeant's Mess we pay dear enough but we get better grub than the rest."<sup>62</sup> Despite his vote and Borden's victory, there was no leave for Second Contingent men: the successful German offensives in March and April saw to that. Homesickness, boredom with training and the appeal of serving with a popular officer, Lt. Col. Jack Leckie, persuaded Maheux at the end of summer of 1918 to volunteer for Syren Force, an Allied expedition to Murmansk to push the Russians back into the war. Canadians, the British assumed, would be better adapted to the climate than the second line units of French, Serbs and Italians who were being offered by the Allies. The Canadians could also train others in the skills of their sub-Arctic homeland. Maheux, the ex-"bush ranger" must have seemed an ideal volunteer. To his wife, he explained that there was also a remote chance of home leave: "We might past by Canada so that the reason that make me go with him. . . . Also that a country I never saw."

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In fact, Maheux injured his foot on the ship going to north Russia and spent his first few months in hospital convalescing. Hardly had he settled in for the Russian winter than news came of the Armistice. As a small comfort, he later assured Angelique that if he had gone to France he would probably not have survived. The 21st Battalion had been virtually wiped out in breaching the Drocourt-Queant line.<sup>64</sup> His life and his war continued. At Murmansk, General C.C.M. Maynard's small army was menaced by Bolsheviks, Finns and its own mutinous members.

To keep the initiative, Maynard decided to send Leckie and four columns to seize Bolshevik outposts. The trickiest objective, Segeja, was a key point on the railway which the Finns, too, might grab. Maheux was involved.<sup>65</sup> On February 18th, after a three-day trek through bush and snow, Major L.H. MacDonald's column attacked. A few shots scattered Maheux's Russian levies and left him alone with a badly wounded Sergeant O'Brien, late of the 38th Battalion: "he ask to be finish with my revolver the poor man he thought we were going to leave him & here you know if they catch you prisoner they cut off your ear, nose, monkeys, everything and then after you suffered for a long time they killed you." Maheux smashed in the door of a nearby log house, forced three frightened men to rescue his pal and stood guard as nervous women applied bandages. Later, when more troops arrived, they found the Bolsheviks - Maheux called them "Chinamen" - eager to surrender. "The poor buggers they got coward and they think if they put their hands up we was going to safe their lives." Civil wars don't work that way. "Well, poor wife, we was like wolves."<sup>66</sup> By Maheux's account, the terrified enemy were slaughtered, including three found nearly frozen in a rain barrel. By nightfall the town was cleared. Among the ten Allied wounded was Frank Maheux, shot through the right shoulder. He sent his wife a piece of his torn undershirt with the bullet hole. It was not too clean, he confessed, he had worn it for five weeks.<sup>67</sup>

The poverty and squalor of North Russia were not strange to him; the people were different. Billeted on a Russian family, he was embarrassed when the woman of the house offered him all she had, two hard chunks of black bread. "Just to show you the kind of people they are, the poor woman she undress herself in front of all of us, also the little girl put on night clothes." The woman also offered her unsought guests her blankets and quilts but, once she thought Maheux was asleep, she came and fetched two of them back. Acutely embarrassed to be found wearing only his shirt, Maheux confessed to Angelique that he feigned sleep.<sup>68</sup>

By winter's end, Maheux and just about every other Allied soldier was satisfied, as he said, to "let the bloody Russians settle their business themselves."<sup>69</sup> Ottawa vociferously agreed and allowed the British only a couple of weeks' delay before releasing the Canadians. Maheux sailed from Murmansk in late April. Whether he knew it or not, Maheux's brush with VD would, in any case, have delayed his return to Canada. To avoid the scandal of quarantining thousands of infected heroes at Toronto or Montreal, Ottawa had agreed that "venereals" would remain in England until they were certified cured.<sup>70</sup>

Maheux's release came in May. By June 15th, he was in Ottawa, a civilian again, with a transport warrant to Maniwaki, \$35 for a new suit of civilian clothes and \$750 to his credit in War Service Gratuity.<sup>71</sup>

Throughout the war, Maheux had promised his wife that their hard times were over. They would live in a house, he would learn to farm, they would never again be separated. It was not, of course, to happen. When the gratuity was gone, he went back to the woods. Through the 1920s, he found fairly steady work building forest ranger towers in Quebec. His years, the long ordeal in the trenches, a family that had grown to nine children and just possibly his drinking caught up with him. In 1928, veterans' preference got him a job in the Ottawa post office. Like other veterans he tried for a pension, claiming a double hernia but a sceptical pension commission found not even the faintest evidence in his medical records.<sup>72</sup> Maheux was fit enough in 1940 to volunteer for the Veterans' Guard of Canada but his health broke down after only a few months guarding German prisoners of war and he was released in February 1941 and returned to his peacetime job. Service in his third war allowed Maheux to add two more medals to a collection that included the King's South Africa Medal. In 1951, he retired at 70 and died a year later.<sup>73</sup>

There is no typical soldier. There were men who fought throughout the war, from the Ypres salient in December 1914, where the PPCLI entered the line, to Mons, where the same

battalion ended the war in November 1918 - though there were very few. There were many more who served only a few days. The average survival for front-line infantry in France was a year; infantry subalterns lasted half that long. The average battalion renewed its strength four to six times between 1915 and 1918.

Frank Maheux was one of the CEF, typical in some ways, unique in many more. His story and hundreds like it enrich our understanding, not just of the CEF but of war and Canada. Maheux claimed no great ideals; he enlisted for money for himself and his poor neglected family; he drank too much; he was unfaithful to "that poor wife" he so adored. Maheux confessed freely to fear and boredom. He was grateful that his fighting was over at the end of 1917 yet, within months, he wanted to return to the comradeship of his own battalion because, as so many soldiers found, it was his only home overseas. Twice, in the fury of battle, Maheux confessed to killing prisoners. Yet he was one of those who gave Canadians a sense of doing great things together. He was a man among men.

### NOTES

1. Statistical information on the members of the CEF may be found in A.F. Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-19, General Series, vol. I, Chronicle, August 1914-September, 1915* (Ottawa, 1938) and in the records created from Hollerith cards by his staff and found in the GAQ files in the R.G. 24 series of the National Archives of Canada. See also G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919: The Official History of the Canadian Army in the First World War* (Ottawa, 1962), Appendix C.
2. The Australians, in contrast, managed to be 80 per cent native-born.
3. Pierre Berton, *Vimy* (Toronto, 1986), p.27.
4. Maheux's enlistment documents use the full, presumably correct form of his name but when writing it himself, he seems to have preferred "Frank Maheux" or "Maheu" and so shall I. For his papers, see National Archives of Canada. M.G. 30 E 297. Unless otherwise indicated all Maheux letters are from that collection.
5. Maheux's personnel records were kindly made available by Karen Woloshansky of the National Personnel Record Centre in Ottawa.
6. His paybook refers to five children; two boys aged 8 and 5 and three girls, aged 7,2, and 1 but his letters appear to make reference to only three of his children.
7. Until August 1915, married men required permission from their wives to enlist. See Duguid, *Official History*.
8. On the 4th CMR, See "Report on Services of 4th CMR," in *Canadian Forces in South Africa*, Canada, Sessional Papers, 1902, 35a, pp.79-81.
9. Maheux to Angelique, 26 June 1915, file 4.
10. See also "My poor Wife I am Lonesome," *Ottawa Citizen*. 5 November 1992.
11. Protests from wives had ended the CEF service of seven officers and 372 other ranks who had gone to Valcartier in 1914. See Duguid, *Official History*, appendix 94.
12. Maheux to Angelique, n.d. [1914] file 1 (A private was paid a dollar a day plus 10\* a day field pay. To qualify for \$20 a month separation allowance, he had to assign at least \$ 15 a month. Rates of support from the Canadian Patriotic Fund varied by province, county or municipality but the guidelines set by the Fund in Ottawa would have suggested at least \$25 a month for Mrs. Maheux.) E.S. Green, Wright County Branch, C.P.F. to Pvt. (sic) Frank Maheux, 18 November 1914 notifying him of a cheque to his wife for \$25.00.  
As a non-commissioned officer, Maheux could have assigned more to his wife but his pay records suggest that she did not benefit from his promotions. Separation allowance was raised to \$25 in 1917 after the CPF showed signs of strain and it was raised again to \$30 in December 1918 when the war was over, inflation soared and it was necessary to retain the good will of the returning troops. During her husband's absence Mrs. Maheux received \$1337 in separation allowance and \$750 in assigned pay or a total of \$2087 from November 1914 to July 1919. (National Personnel Record Centre, 59625 Francois-Xavier Maheux) On pay rates see Duguid, *Official History*, pp. 57-8, appendices 91, 92.
13. Maheux to Angeline, 14 February 1915, file 2.
14. Ibid., 15 December 1914, file 2.
15. Ibid.
16. Ibid., 27 December 1914, file 2.
17. Ibid., 4 April 1915, file 3.
18. Ibid., 25 January 1915, file 3.
19. Addendum to letter, 29 March 1915, file 3.
20. Maheux to Angeline, 10 January 1915, file 3.
21. Ibid., 22 March 1915, file 3 (see also 29 March 1915).
22. Inspection Reports, 21st Battalion, R.G. 24; Charles H. Stewart, *'Overseas': The Lineages and Insignia of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Toronto, [1971]) p. 12.
23. Maheux to Angeline, 16 May 1915, file 3.
24. Ibid., 19 May 1915, file 3.
25. On the statue and its significance see Maria Tippett, *Art at the Service of War: Canada, Art and the Great War*. (Toronto, 1984), pp. 65, 81-7.
26. Maheux to Angeline, 1 August 1915, file 4.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 26 June 1915, file 4.
29. Ibid., 15 January 1915, file 3.
30. Ibid., 1 August 1915 *inter alia*.

31. See, for example, letters of 6 February and 13 March 1918, when Maheux seeks to persuade his wife to claim \$100 of his deferred pay and send him \$25 (and then \$30) to meet his needs in England. (In 1916, up to half a soldier's pay was "deferred" to provide postwar savings and drain away the seemingly excessive purchasing power Canadian soldiers enjoyed by comparison with British or French troops.)
32. Ibid., 23 September 1915, file 4.
33. Ibid., 30 September 1915, file 4.
34. Ibid., 4 November 1915, file 4.
35. Ibid., 12 April 1916, file 6.
36. Ibid.
37. Ibid., 20 June 1916, file 7
38. Ibid., 16 August 1916, addendum, file 7.
39. On the role and performance of the unit see Lt Col Elmer Jones 21st Bn CEF - Brig. Gen. Rennie 18 October 1916, MG 30E; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, p. 169.
40. Maheux to Angeline, 20 September 1916, file 7.
41. Ibid., 14 October 1916, file 6.
42. Notes on clippings, n.d. file 8.
43. Ibid., 17 October 1915, file 7.
44. Ibid., 3 November 1915, file 7.
45. William H. Hamilton to Maheux, 16 October 1916; Maheux to Angeline, 7 November 1916, file 7.
46. Ibid., 10 November 1916, file 7.
47. Ibid., 26 November 1916, file 7.
48. Ibid., 19 December 1916, file 7.
49. Ibid., 11 January 1917, file 9.
50. fragment, April-May, 1917, file 9.
51. Ibid.
52. fragment, June 1917.
53. Maheux to Angeline, 18-19 September 1917, file 10.
54. Ibid., 15 November 1917, file 10. (See also Ibid., 25 November 1917).
55. The information is in Maheux's medical record in his personnel file at NPRC.
56. Ibid., 6 December 1917, file 10.
57. Ibid., 22 December 1917, file 10. When the promise was not fulfilled Maheux reported that he also wrote to his new M.P., uncertain whether the Unionist or the Liberal had won.
58. fragment, 1918, file 14. (a batman was an officer's servant.)
59. Ibid. 30 January 1918, file 12.
60. Ibid., 13 March 1918, file 12.
61. Ibid., 26 January 1918, file 12.
62. Ibid., 2 February 1918, file 12.
63. Maheux to Angeline, n.d. from Witley [September, 1918], file 14. Since the requirement was for volunteers to be unmarried and without dependents as well as "adventurers of the deepest dye," Maheux was a distinct exception to the rule. See R.G. 24, G.A.Q. 10-28 "The Syren Party."
64. Ibid., 8 March 1919, file 15.
65. On the Canadians in the Syren Force, see J.A. Swettenham, *Allied Intervention in Russia, 1918-1919 and the Part Played by Canada* (London, 1967), pp. 52-3; 189-191; 200-202; Roy Maclaren, *Canadians in Russia, 1918-1919* (Toronto, 1976), pp. 95-7.
66. fragment, undated [1919] file 16.
67. Ibid., [February-March, 1919], file 16.
68. Maheux to Angeline, 8 March 1919, file 15.
69. fragment, undated [1919], file 16.
70. Francis Carman, *The Return of the Troops: A Plain Account of the Demobilization of the Canadian Expeditionary Force* (Ottawa, 1920), pp. 107, 110.
71. Dispersal Certificate. 14 June 1919, NPRC file.
72. Department of Pensions and National Health to Maheux, 23 July 1937, file 19.
73. Family recollections with MG 30 E 297, *Ottawa Citizen*, 5 November 1977.

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