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Major-General François-Louis Lessard, c.1914

The Right Stuff?

Evaluating the Performance of Lieutenant-Colonel F.-L. Lessard in South Africa and His Failure to Receive a Senior Command Position with the CEF in 1914

John Macfarlane

When Canada decided to contribute an expeditionary force to support the British in August 1914 a commander had to be named. While the Conservative Minister of Militia and Defence, Colonel Sam Hughes, thought that he himself might be the most appropriate leader of the 1st Canadian Division, the British Commander-in-Chief, Lord Kitchener, disagreed. As Hughes contemplated several other candidates, one officer he did not consider was Major-General François-Louis Lessard.¹

Lessard had strong supporters. He was "held by many to be the most accomplished officer in the Canadian Forces" in 1914, wrote Colonel A.F. Duguid, first historian of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.² Premier J.P. Whitney of Ontario advised Prime Minister Robert Borden that "in my opinion Major-General Lessard should command the First Contingent...I think most people will agree with me that he is the one outstanding man for the position."³ J.F. Cummins, writing in the *Canadian Defence Quarterly* shortly after the First World War, suggested that Lessard had been the best candidate due to his age, rank, experience, efficiency and knowledge of both the francophone and anglophone military establishments.⁴ But, despite the protests of some of his supporters - including the Chief of the General Staff Sir Willoughby Gwatkin⁵ - Lessard received no overseas command, not even a brigade. Instead, he was made Inspector-General for Eastern Canada. This was an important position, but it was certainly not the front-line command role hoped for by Lessard.



Some historians have suggested that his age made him ineligible for the position of senior commander overseas.⁶ Aged 53 in August 1914, he was still younger than the leader eventually selected, Major-General E.A.H. Alderson. The 55-year-old Alderson had considerable experience on active service, and had commanded Canadians in South Africa. Hughes preferred him over two other British officers he had considered (the 61-year-old Earl of Dundonald, and the 69-year-old Major-General Reginald Pole Carew), and Kitchener approved the choice.⁷ The commander Hughes later selected to lead the 2nd Division, the famous Western Canadian Major-General Sam Steele, was ten years older than Alderson! Neither Lessard's age nor his rank prevented Sam Hughes from naming him to an overseas command. As Lessard also had experience commanding troops in South Africa (as did Steele), why was he not considered for a divisional command?

Attempting to analyze the decision-making process under Sam Hughes is not easy. The considerations that lay behind each appointment could be very complex, or else very simple. Hughes sometimes could make non-biased appointments of outstanding individuals - perhaps most notably Arthur Currie to command the 2nd Canadian Infantry Brigade in 1914 - but being a friend of the Minister and a Conservative were often sufficient. Was Lessard a victim of this arbitrariness, or were there other reasons? A look at Lessard's military experience is necessary before reaching any conclusions.



Photograph on file, Canadian War Museum

Lieutenant-Colonel F.-L. Lessard at the time of the South African War.

He acquired his first experience of active service during the North-West campaign in 1885. As the cavalry's role was limited to protecting supply lines, however, Lessard's group never came under fire, and their main battle was against boredom. An even greater battle against boredom was to be joined in 1893 when Lessard's cavalry corps, which had recently been renamed the Royal Canadian Dragoons, moved to Toronto. Promoted lieutenant-colonel to command the Dragoons in July 1899, Lessard received high praise from the *Military Gazette* for his enthusiasm and hard work.¹⁰ He was thus well placed to play an important role in the Canadian contingents that would soon sail to participate in the South African War.

On 12 October 1899 forces from the Boer republics of the Transvaal and the Orange Free State invaded the British Cape Colony and Natal, helping London justify an anticipated war in the area. Ottawa had already been wrestling with the question of possible Canadian participation for weeks, and showed at least as much opposition as support for the idea. But once war was declared the Canadian government almost immediately announced a contribution of 1,000 volunteers. Over 6,000 additional volunteers would join them during the following two and a half year struggle, mostly paid for by the British. The Canadian Prime Minister, Sir Wilfrid Laurier, emphasized his support for the empire's fight for humanity, religious freedom and civil rights - such as securing the right to vote for the *Uitlanders* (disenfranchised subjects of the Crown living in the Boer colonies); but many critics suspected that London sought liberty only for white Anglo-Saxons,¹¹ and was merely attempting to protect its economic interests in South African diamond and gold mines.

Lessard was born in Quebec City on 9 December 1860. His father, Louis L. Lessard, was Secretary with the Permanent Building Society, and François-Louis, known to his friends as Louis, attended St. Thomas's College. He served in a number of local militia units, and then joined "B" Battery of the Quebec Garrison Artillery as a gunner, and in which he became a second lieutenant in 1880. In 1884 he joined the Cavalry School Corps of the Permanent Force at Quebec, and was promoted captain in 1888. Although he had deep roots in the francophone community, like some of the francophone political, economic, and military leaders of the time - such as Sir Wilfrid Laurier and RMC graduates Percy Girouard and P.-H. D. Casgrain⁸ - he was not entirely out of place among the British elite. Some soldiers under his command in South Africa thought they recognized a French accent when he spoke English, while others identified it as British!⁹

Canadian support for the war was far from unanimous, and non-anglophones were understandably among the most hesitant. Had francophone opposition to the war been as fervent as some accounts claim, however, the support of someone like Lessard for the cause would be difficult to explain.¹² In fact, it appears that support for the war in English Canada has often been exaggerated and support in French Canada

underestimated.¹³ In the early months of the struggle *La Presse* and *La Patrie* both had articles critical of the British position, but they carried far more that were favourable. A leading opponent, Henri Bourassa, admitted privately that he could not understand why French-Canadian views of imperialism remained "unsettled" and support for Laurier so high.¹⁴ The francophone religious, business, political, and military elites were strongly behind the cause, as long as the war remained not a fight for Anglo-Saxon economic or political dominance, but a fight for humanity, religious freedom, and civil rights. This was the cause Laurier sought to emphasize,¹⁵ and it was this cause that Lessard intended to defend when he offered his services and encouraged his francophone compatriots to volunteer with him.¹⁶

Lessard would be disappointed when, in accepting the Canadian offer of troops, Britain specified a preference for infantry over cavalry. With no hope of embarking with his own mounted regiment, Lessard volunteered for special service with the First Contingent, consisting entirely of infantry, which sailed at the end of October 1899. He shared a cabin with his old friend from Quebec, Oscar C. Pelletier.¹⁷ After his arrival in South Africa Lessard joined the staff of the commander of the British cavalry, Sir John French, and he gained some valuable experience, most notably during the relief of Kimberley in February 1900. He would soon have the opportunity to put this to good use in command of his own Canadian mounted battalion.

In December 1899, London accepted a second Canadian contingent. This left on three ships in January and February and consisted of two battalions of Canadian Mounted Rifles (750 men), and three batteries of Royal Canadian Field Artillery (539 men). When they arrived in late March, Lessard assumed the command of the 1st Battalion CMR, with the Westerner T.D.B. Evans as his second-in-command. The 2nd CMR was under the command of L.W. Herchmer, with Sam Steele as second-in-command, both from the North-West Mounted Police. However, Steele soon left to lead Strathcona's Horse, and Evans replaced Herchmer in May 1900.¹⁸ Another change was in the name of Lessard's unit. As its manpower nucleus of trained soldiers came from the Royal Canadian Dragoons, Lessard argued

successfully for the unit to be known under this designation. Although some of the recent volunteers who now found themselves Dragoons considered the request "rather absurd,"¹⁹ the British were impressed, seeing Lessard's persistence as a defence of the regimental system and a commitment to building the traditions that lay at its heart.

Lessard was anxious to take his battalion into action when it arrived in South Africa, too anxious for the British who would have preferred a few more weeks of training. He nonetheless had his wish immediately, and led the Dragoons in operations in the Cape Colony, the Orange Free State, and the Transvaal. By the time his battalion left South Africa in December it had ridden 1,700 miles and had fought 27 separate engagements, including an impressive victory at the battle of Coetzee's Drift in May.²⁰ After fighting disease, the elements, and the enemy, many looked forward to the end of the war. But after the Transvaal's capital, Pretoria, fell in June, the role of mounted infantry became more important than ever, as the Boer mounted commandos adopted a guerrilla-style war.

Horsemen were now essential for escort and reconnaissance duties, and to participate in raiding parties against Boer commandos. The task was not easy for the Dragoons, as the number of men and horses had fallen to less than half of the original strength. Some had been assigned new roles while others had been wounded or become ill.²¹ Lessard himself was injured in an accident and spent most of August recovering. After a battle at Witpoort Pass, he was returning to camp in the dark over rocky ground when his horse fell on him, spraining his thigh.²² After his return he assumed command of 1,400 hundred troops stationed in the town of Belfast, 200 kilometers to the northeast of Pretoria. During his two weeks of command in mid-October, Lessard reportedly adopted a more aggressive stance than his predecessors, organizing and sending out a large number of expeditions into the surrounding countryside.²³

Despite occasional confrontations with Boer commandos, these fighting patrols, which Lessard commanded with skill, were characterized most often by monotonous routine.²⁴ Days were long, nights were cold, and

police actions applying the British "scorched earth" policy - the destruction of farms suspected of hiding saboteurs, or expelling women and children from their homes in order to clear the countryside of Boer supporters - were scarcely glorious or inspiring. The most notable exception was the rear-guard action at Leliefontein in November 1900.

Major-General H. Smith-Dorrien, commander of the 19th Brigade at Belfast, led an expedition to disperse a Boer commando laagered in the area of Witkloof on the Komati River, 200 kilometers to the south. Leaving Belfast on 6 November, the advancing troops included a section of the Royal Canadian Field Artillery with two 12-pounder guns commanded

gun covered the withdrawal of the second, with the troops formed in a semi-circle on each side. Under increasing Boer pressure, Lessard had to evaluate when to use the guns to support the rearguard and when to retreat. At one point when the 12-pounders were threatened, Morrison remembered Lessard galloping up and shouting "for God's sake Morrison save your guns! They are coming down on our flanks."²⁶ Eventually the gunners made good their withdrawal, thanks to the assistance of three Dragoons - Sergeant Edward Holland, who provided covering fire with his Colt machine gun,²⁷ and Lieutenants H.Z.C. Cockburn and R.E.W. Turner who rushed to help stave off the off the Boer attackers. In the process, the leader of the Boer commando, commandant H.R. Prinsloo, and the commander of all Boer



Lieutenant-Colonel François Lessard (left), commanding officer of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, with two of his lieutenants in South Africa.

by Lieutenant E.W.B. Morrison, and about 95 Dragoons.²⁵ After the force reached the Witkloof area, the strength of the Boer forces and his own lack of mobility convinced Smith-Dorrien to return to Belfast. The following day the forces began to withdraw while the Dragoons and Morrison's guns, all under the command of Lessard, were left behind to cover the retreat. This rearguard action, which took place near a farm called Leliefontein, resulted in three of the four Canadian Victoria Crosses awarded during the war.

As the Boers realized that the British were retiring they raced to reach the strategic ridges that dominated the escape route. Evans and his CMR played a crucial role in keeping open the line of retreat. As for the rearguard itself, Lessard ordered a staggered withdrawal, with each element supporting the other's movement. One

troops in the area, General J.C. Fourie, were killed, and the Boer attack lost momentum. Holland, Cockburn, and Turner were all later awarded VCs for their actions.

Lessard has received high praise from historians for his role at Leliefontein. Carman Miller, perhaps the leading Canadian authority on the war, has written that,

Lessard was superb: courageous, decisive, cool, and insistent, he remained with the rearguard. During the worst of the battle he rode along the ridge, keeping a general view of the engagement, anticipating moves, devising tactics, reassigning troops to shore up weak defences, making difficult decisions, and encouraging his men.²⁸

Brereton Greenhous affirms that "the column was saved from heavier casualties and the possible loss of the guns by Col. Lessard's tactical sense

and his initiative." He added that the engagement had important results, as, with the death of Prinsloo, the number of Boer attacks on rail lines in the area decreased.²⁹

The British heaped praise and awards on the veterans of Leliefontein. In addition to the three VCs, Morrison won the Distinguished Service Order, and Private W. Knisley of the Dragoons the Distinguished Conduct Medal. The British may have gone somewhat overboard. Some members of the battalion believed that the fight had not been that exceptional. One Dragoon wrote that when the awards were announced "there was strong criticism made by many of the men as to why all of these honours had been awarded in the fight at Leliefontein on November 7."³⁰ But certainly the Canadians had fought well, and the critics perhaps underestimated the consequences of failure by the rear guard, as well as the importance that the British commanders placed on saving guns.³¹

Leliefontein was one of the Dragoons' last actions. Shortly afterwards they boarded ship to return to Canada. As their commander, Lessard had acquired important military experience, learning from problems (most notably the need for appropriate reinforcements of men and horses), and from the successes.³² Most seem to have appreciated his qualities. Morrison echoed the sentiments of others when he wrote that during the fight at Leliefontein "we were holding our own nicely on the rearguard, thanks to Col. Lessard's excellent disposition of his force."³³ One officer who had served under him wrote that "as a soldier there was none better and we all loved him."³⁴ Lessard was praised, along with his men, by the British Commander-in-Chief Lord Roberts, by Sir John French, and by Smith-Dorrien.³⁵ And along with most commanders of colonial units, he was awarded a Companionship of the Order of the Bath (CB). Thus one would expect that Lessard's experience in South Africa would have weighed heavily in his favour when command positions were being assigned for the Canadian Expeditionary Force in 1914.

Praise for Lessard has not been unanimous, however. The historian Brian Reid has accused him of being overly aggressive at Leliefontein when positioning the guns, rattier than retreating more quickly. Reid adds that "his galloping about

the battlefield coupled with his shouts to Morrison leave the impression, perhaps unjustified, that he did not have a grip on the battle."³⁶ In Lessard's defence, it should be noted that many in his unit had become noticeably impatient with the long periods of inactivity and sought bolder action. Morrison remembered Lessard complaining in October 1900 in "vivacious style" that "my men, they know how to advance all right, but they do not know how to retire. You cannot get them out of a fight."³⁷ He may have concluded that to order his men to retreat at this critical point of the battle would have undermined their morale, and instead he endeavoured to bolster their known preference for aggressive action.

Reid notes that while Lessard's concern for maintaining good relations in his unit made him a popular leader, this does not necessarily mean that he was effective. Reid suggests that the decision in 1902 to name Evans, not Lessard, to command a later contingent of mounted troops, the 2nd Regiment CMR, indicates that some questioned Lessard's earlier performance.³⁸ On the other hand, it is possible that authorities preferred a Westerner for this latter unit. At least half of its strength came from the West, and the governor-general, Lord Minto, had earlier idealized Sam Steele and the Western riders, while questioning the ability of the professional Canadian cavalry in letters to British officials.³⁹ It is also significant to note that Reid considers the RCD "the most effective Canadian unit to serve in South Africa, and among the best on either side."⁴⁰ As commander, Lessard is entitled to share some of the credit, particularly when it appears that the most severe criticisms of his leadership seem to have come from a single source: Major-General E.T.H. Hutton, General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia from 1898 to 1900.

In October 1900 Hutton, who had departed his position in Ottawa the previous February to take up a British command in South Africa, wrote privately to Minto that Lessard, "though personally brave enough, lacks confidence in himself in action and upon any emergency - and naturally fails therefore in inspiring confidence among those under him. He is also lacking in judgment."⁴¹ This opinion came a week before Leliefontein. The following year Hutton again



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Lessard's two chief critics were the Minister of the Militia, Sam Hughes (left, pictured in 1904), and Major-General E.T.H. Hutton, General Officer Commanding the Canadian Militia, 1898-1900.

criticized Lessard's performance, telling Minto that when Evans was recommended for the CB Lessard had originally been recommended for the less prestigious CMC "It was not altogether an oversight for Evans is the best man," Hutton explained, "but it would never have done upon grounds of expediency for Evans to have a CB and Lessard only a CMG." In the same letter Hutton noted that at least one Dragoon was critical of Lessard's leadership in crisis.⁴² These opinions, coming from such a senior figure, could very well have harmed Lessard's chances of being selected to command Canadians in the First World War, although they do not seem to have been all that widely shared at the time that they were offered.⁴³

Probably an even greater obstacle to Lessard's chances, however, were the problems encountered in South Africa by Sam Hughes

himself. Hughes was a very enthusiastic supporter of the war effort and had sought to raise his own contingent. He quarreled with Hutton, who apprehended "trouble" should Hughes ever serve with British officers.⁴⁴ When the First Contingent sailed - with Lessard listed as "attached for instructional purposes" and quickly finding a place with the British - Hughes was "attached for passage" and not recommended for military service.⁴⁵ After much effort,⁴⁶ Hughes found an appointment with the British, but was soon ordered home for violating orders and publicly criticizing his superiors. The experience deepened his prejudice against professional soldiers - whether British or Canadian.⁴⁷

After the war, Hughes became the Conservative militia critic and very clearly expressed his preference for the non-permanent active militia over the Permanent Force. When he became Minister of the Militia in 1911, he immediately began to expand the role of the volunteer citizen-soldier (who could cut through "red-tape") at the expense of the Permanent Force

soldiers ("bar room loafers"), whom he believed should be relegated to instructional roles.⁴⁸ During this period Lessard, who had become adjutant-general,⁴⁹ the staff officer responsible for the organization of the forces, was equally clear about his support for the Permanent Force. He had several confrontations with the new minister, most notably in April 1912 when Hughes attempted to promote himself to the rank of major-general.⁵⁰

In lining up with the Permanent Force against Hughes, he also placed himself on the side of the British military establishment in Canada, which had concerns about the new minister's approach. The governor-general, the Duke of Connaught, for example, reported that Hughes' "treatment of the officers of the permanent forces has caused grave discontent." Hughes could hardly have been impressed with how famously Lessard got on with the British, and by the end of 1912 he had been replaced as adjutant-general by Hughes' Tory friend Victor Williams, and sent to a "lesser" post in Toronto, the command of Military District Number 2.⁵¹

Lessard had risen in the military establishment during a period in the late 19th century when several leaders - especially British professional soldiers on loan to Canada - were encouraging greater French-Canadian participation. When the war in South Africa broke out the call to arms clearly had greater appeal for anglophones, and no more than four percent of the 7,368 Canadian volunteers were francophones, a percentage well below the proportion of French-Canadian officers in the Canadian contingents. Those who had encouraged francophones to enlist did not see the obstacles - most obviously the need to speak English, and the service's very marked pro-English orientation. Indeed, from 1902 to 1914, the percentage of French-Canadian officers in the militia declined constantly.⁵² Hutton, for example, who as General Officer Commanding had been a strong proponent of a French Canadian presence in the Canadian militia, felt betrayed.⁵³ Hughes, on the other hand, had never hidden his francophobia, and the South African War served only to intensify it.⁵⁴ Some historians have seen Hughes's anti-French sentiments as sufficient reason for Lessard's not being considered for a

position of command.⁵⁵ But Hughes had even more reasons to dislike the career officer from the Permanent Force.

Personalities and politics were important. Prime Minister Borden considered Hughes an able, energetic minister at times, but was convinced that "on matters which touch his insane egotism he is quite unbalanced." The appointment of officers was one of these matters. Borden regretted that Hughes's "peculiar methods" created so many problems during the initial recruitment period for the Canadian Expeditionary Force in August-September 1914. "His intense vanity and a rather vindictive temper which developed during this period, contributed to the difficulty of the situation," Borden remembered.⁵⁶ According to his biographer, Hughes's preference for loyal Conservatives could be even stronger than his preference for Canadian officers over British officers.⁵⁷ Nothing is known for certain of Lessard's politics, although the fact that his career prospered under the Laurier Liberals and stalled under the Conservatives may suggest an allegiance to the former party. Whatever the case, when Hughes began looking for friends and Conservatives to appoint, Lessard's name does not appear to have been on his list.⁵⁸

Hughes's animosity towards Lessard was confirmed during the war. He certainly made life difficult for Lessard during the early months of the conflict. In November 1914, Hughes publicly blasted Lessard's practice mobilization of Toronto militia units and the following month, apparently dissatisfied with Lessard's militia inspection service that had been established by order of the Governor-General, Hughes set up a second inspection service to override it. In both cases Borden sided with Lessard, as did the Toronto press.⁵⁹ On one occasion Lessard visited Europe to report on the recruiting system, and undoubtedly took some pleasure exposing certain problems, such as the lack of coordination between Canadians, the British and the French.⁶⁰ As with a large number of Canadians, Lessard was becoming increasingly upset with the minister and stated privately: "I am out for this man's [Hughes's] blood. He is disgracing Canada and jeopardizing relations with the Imperial Government and the Army."⁶¹

When Hughes was eventually forced to resign in November 1916 Lessard was considered as a replacement. However, he was passed over for this and other positions, and the role for which he is perhaps best remembered during the First World War, when he is remembered at all, is as leader of the military intervention in the Quebec riots of 1918.⁶² During the last year of the war, from February to December, Lessard carried out another unpopular mission when Gwatkin appointed him to command Military District 6 at Halifax. He was praised for his handling of the difficult administrative task of applying Ottawa's plans to reduce the Halifax garrison (in order to free up overseas reinforcements), and increase the fighting efficiency of the fortress.⁶³ Lessard retired to live in Toronto in 1919, and died there in 1927.

It would seem that Lessard's performance in South Africa should have increased his chances for an overseas appointment in 1914. He had displayed both aggressiveness and restlessness for action in the earlier war, which were precisely the sort of qualities that Hughes admired. Indeed, few Canadians had such impressive credentials as Lessard in 1914. Hughes nonetheless had no shortage of reasons for disapproving of the Francophone Catholic Permanent Force cavalry officer who circulated so comfortably among the British. A rough ridin' militia Tory like Sam Steele was more his kind of man.⁶⁴

Lessard may or may not have been the most appropriate candidate for a divisional command in 1914. Nonetheless, an evaluation of his career, particularly his performance in South Africa, suggests that he merited more serious consideration for a senior position with the CEF than in fact Hughes' personal and political phobias allowed him.

Notes

1. Acting Canadian High Commissioner G. Perley papers, National Archives of Canada [NAC], MG27 IID12, Vol. 1 and Borden papers, MG26H, reel C-4214 contain correspondence, between London and Ottawa in Aug. and Sept., concerning the question of command. See also Documents on Canadian External Relations (DCER), Vol.1 and G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*, (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962), pp.28-29.
2. A.F. Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919*, Vol.1 (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1938), pp. 62-64.
3. Borden papers, NAC reel C-4386, p. 104132, Whitney to Borden, forwarded to Hughes, 7 Aug. 1914.
4. Directorate of History and Heritage (DHH), Lessard, 000.9, (D106), J.F. Cummins, "A Distinguished Canadian Cavalry Officer Major-General F.L. Lessard, CB," in *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, Vol.3, No.2, Jan. 1926, pp.128-131.
5. See S. Harris, *Canadian Brass* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988), p.107.
6. Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War, 1914-1919* (Toronto: Lester, Orpen Dennys, 1989), p.33.
7. Borden papers, NAC reel C-4214, p. 12464, Borden to Perley, 13 August 1914 and reel C-4386, p.104227, Perley to Borden, 7 September 1914. Dundonald had been GOC-Canadian Militia from 1902 to 1904. Perley papers, NAC Vol. 1, file 4, Lord Kitchener to Perley, 16 August 1914. Kitchener named three Canadians serving in the British Army who might be considered for command.
8. Philippe-Henri Duperron Casgrain acted as Assistant Adjutant-General at British Headquarters in South Africa while Percy Girouard was Director of Railways and later (1908-9) Governor of Northern Nigeria and (1909-12) East Africa Protectorate.
9. A.E. Hilder papers, NAC MG30 E339, "Comrades All," pp.57-8. E.W.B. Morrison, *With The Guns in South Africa* (Ottawa: Eugene Ursual, 1995 reprint of 1901 edition), p.215.
10. See Brereton Greenhous, *Dragoon: The Centennial History of the Royal Canadian Dragoons, 1883-1983* (Belleville: The Guild of the RCDs, 1983), p.52.
11. British Colonial Secretary Joseph Chamberlain often spoke of the destiny reserved for the Anglo-Saxon race and encouraged Australia, New Zealand and Canada to send troops, but refused offers from Nigeria and the Federated Malaya States: *Sessional Papers*, Department of Militia and Defence, No.20, 1900, pp. 11-16.
12. Accounts emphasizing the division between anglophones and francophones include R.C Brown and R. Cook, *Canada, 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974), p.39; Brereton Greenhous, "The South African War," in J. Martinson, éd., *We Stand on Guard: An Illustrated History of the Canadian Army* (Montreal: Ovale, 1992), p.56 and Jean Pariseau and Serge Bernier, *Les Canadiens français et le bilinguisme dans les Forces armées canadiennes, tome 1* (Ottawa: Ministère des Approvisionnements et services, 1987), p. 12.
13. Carman Miller, "English-Canadian opposition to the South African War as seen through the Press," in *Canadian Historical Review*, Vol.LV, No.4, (December 1974). Gaston Labat, *Le livre d'or: Canadian Contingents in South Africa* (Montreal, 1901).
14. Henri Bourassa papers, NAC MG27 IIE1, M-721, Bourassa to Goldwin Smith, 17 May 1900; Bourassa to Gregory, 15 March 1901.
15. Laurier papers, NAC C-722, 40950-70, Sir H. Devilliers, Chief Justice of the Cape Colony, to Laurier, 9 January 1900. He hoped Laurier would put in a word to London

- on behalf of those "who are not inflated by the pride of race..." Laurier did, but he was also concerned about the effect of "too zealous" anglophone criticisms of the lack of francophone volunteers: George Denison papers, NAC MG29 E29, vols. 9-10, Laurier to Denison, President of the British Empire League in Canada, 6 December 1899.
16. Lessard in *La Patrie*, 14 October 1899, pp. 13-15. See also *La Presse*, 9 October 1899.
 17. Oscar C Pelletier, *Mémoires* (Quebec: 1940), p.310.
 18. Sessional Papers, 35a, 1901, p.72. The official change was in August 1900.
 19. Richard Turner papers, NAC MG30 E46, M-300: In his diary, 5 September 1900. On *the British* see Greenhouse, *Dragoons*, pp.87-8. Only about half the officers and a few men had been with the RCD in Canada.
 20. NAC RG9,II,A3, vol.32, Dragoons Diary. *Sessional Papers* 35a, 1901, Lessard Report. Carman Miller, *Painting the Map Red: Canada and the South African War, 1899-1902* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's, 1993), pp. 152-261. Hugh Robertson, "The Royal Canadian Dragoons in South Africa," (MA thesis, University of Ottawa, 1982). Greenhouse, *Dragoons*, pp.85-125. Brian A. Reid, *Our Little Army in the Field: The Canadians in South Africa, 1899-1902* (St. Catharines: Vanwell, 1996).
 21. NAC RG9, II A3, Vol.32, Dragoon's Diary. Miller, *Painting*, pp.240-58. Greenhouse, *Dragoons*, p. 115.
 22. NAC RG9, II A3, Vol.32, Lessard to Col. Aylmer, A.G., Ottawa, Report for 31 July - 14 October, 1899.
 23. Miller, *Painting*, pp.256-61. NAC RG9, II A3, Vol.32, Dragoon's Diary.
 24. The confrontations near Wonderfontein (August 30) and Van Wyk's Vlei (3 November) were typical examples of Lessard's skill during rearguard battles against Boer counterattacks. Miller, *Painting*, pp.258-266. NAC RG9, II A3, Vol.32, Dragoon's Diary.
 25. NAC RG9,II, A3, Vol.32, Dragoons Diary. *Sessional Papers* 35a, 1901, Lessard Report for week ending 12 November 1900. List of troops in order of march: advance guard (RCD, Squadron of 5th Lancers, 2 pom poms, 2 RCA guns, 4 Coys King Shropshire Light Infantry) main column (CMR, 4 RFA guns, 2 5" guns, Royal Engineers section, 4 Coys Shropshire Light Infantry, 2 Coys Suffolks, Bearer Coy). Rear guard (baggage, 2 Coys Suffolk, 20 Lancers).
 26. NAC RG9JLA3, Vol.32, Morrison's Report of D Battery, RCA, 7 November 1900.
 27. *Sessional Papers* 35a, 1901, Lessard Report. Lessard had high praise for the effectiveness and mobility of the Colt.
 28. Miller, *Painting*, p.271. See also pp.272-276
 29. Greenhouse, *Dragoon*, pp.126, 136. Also on p. 144: Lessard was "very popular and efficient." Other historians of the Dragoons have agreed: Robertson, "Dragoons," pp. 177, 226-227 and Larry Worthington, *The Spur and the Sprocket*, (Kitchener: Reeve Press, 1967), p.41. See also Charles Marie Boissonnault, *Histoire politico-militaire des Canadiens-français, 1763-1945* (Montreal: éditions du bien public, 1967), pp.176, 201-207.
 30. Hilder papers, NAC, "Comrades AU." p.81. He added that men were upset that no mention had been made of the casualties. While giving the overall impression that Lessard was a popular leader, Hilder occasionally questions certain decisions: pp.44, 61.
 31. G.W.L. Nicholson, *The Gunners of Canada: A History of the Royal Regiment of Canadian Artillery, Vol. 1, 1534-1919* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967), p.157.
 32. In South Africa of the 345 Canadian horses that departed only 18 remained at the end: 40 died in transit, 287 died or were deemed unfit and left behind. An unrelated problem with horses included his own being sold at an auction in Toronto. Lessard also emphasized the need to ensure adequate reinforcements; his Dragoons had 52 casualties - 9 were killed in action, including 2 at Leliefontein - 16 died of disease, and 27 were wounded: *Sessional papers*, 35a, 1901, Lessard Report, pp.81-106. See also Carman Miller database, NAC MG31 G36.
 33. Morrison, *Guns*, p.266. Also NAC, Turner, in his diary, 15 November 1900, was pleased with the performance, comparing it to a "Wild West show." NA, Hilder papers, "Comrades All," pp.58, 73. Reid, *Army*, pp.137, 172, argues that Lessard was more popular than Otter. A YMCA representative impressed by Lessard presented him a crucifix as a token of respect: Miller, *Painting*, p.441.
 34. Quoted in Worthington, *Spur and the Sprocket*, p.41.
 35. Turner papers, NAC, his diary, 15 November 1900, copy of letter from Roberts. Borden papers, NAC reel C-4386, p.104132, Whitney to Borden, 7 August 1914, repeats French's praise of Lessard during an expedition in South Africa. General H. Smith-Dorrien, *Memories of Forty-Eight Year's Service*, (London: Murray, 1925), p.257, describes Lessard as a most able commander who displayed "the greatest gallantry." See also Smith - Dorrien's letter of 23 November 1900, in *Sessional Papers*, 35a, 1901.
 36. Reid, *Army*, p. 136.
 37. Morrison, *Guns*, p.231.
 38. Reid, *Army*, p. 159. Also in conversations with the author in December 1998. Evans was also selected for the Yukon Field Force in 1898, and Lessard was not, apparently because he was from the East.
 39. Minto papers, NAC MG27 IIB1, reel A-130, Minto to Lord Roberts, 31 December. 1899; Minto to J. Chamberlain, 7 January 1900; Minto to Lansdowne, 2 May 1900. Also Minto to Laurier, 21 November and 5 December 1899.
 40. Reid, in a document prepared for the Canadian War Museum: *Centenary Display*, 2nd Contingent, p.5. He explains that the unit had fine soldiers and officers, benefited from a month of training in Canada and used the Colt gun aggressively.
 41. Minto papers, NAC Vol. 17, Hutton to Minto, 30 October 1900.
 42. Hutton in letter to Lord Minto, 30 May 1901, quoted in Greenhouse, *Dragoon*, pp. 116-117: "Nothing will ever make Lessard a good leader in war," one Dragoon complained to Hutton, adding that Lessard was undoubtedly an excellent organizer and peacetime administrator.
 43. Greenhouse, *Dragoon*, p. 175.
 44. Minto papers, NAC reel A-130, Hutton to Minto, 10 August 1899.
 45. *Sessional Papers*, 35a, 1901.
 46. Canadian War Museum [CWM], Otter Papers, 58A, Vol. 101, Hughes to Otter, 29 September 1899. Laurier papers, Hughes to Laurier, NAC C-769-71, 4 October 1899, 27 December 1899.

47. Sessional Papers, 35a, 1901. Ronald Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1986), pp.71, 76, 93.
48. Governor General's Numbered Files, NAC RG7 G21, Connaught to Colonial Secretary, reporting on Hughes and his "bar room loafers" comment. Also Haycock, *Hughes*, pp.98, 135-146.
49. In 1901 he became Colonel brevet, in 1907 Colonel substantive, in 1911 Brigadier-General and in 1912 Major-General.
50. Minutes of the Militia Council, 1913, NAC RG9 IIA2, Vol.9. Haycock, *Hughes*, pp.140, 157, 173, 189. Harris, *Canadian Brass*, p.26. Greenhous, *Dragoon*, p.161.
51. NAC Governor General's Numbered Files, Connaught to Colonial Secretary, November 1913. He added that militia officers with little experience were preferred. On Mackenzie's disputes with Hughes see his letter to Connaught 10 March 1913 in the same collection. On Williams, who commanded at Valcartier before Alderson took over the 1st Division on 14 October, see Minutes of the Militia Council, Vol.8, December 1912 (when he replaced Lessard). On Toronto being the "lesser" post, see Haycock, p. 159.
52. In 1895 francophones represented 14.2%, in 1905 10%, and in 1910 8.4%, according to Pariseau and Bernier, in *Bilinguisme*, p.53. Also pp.23-7, and Desmond Morton, "Le Canada français et la Milice canadienne, 1868-1914," in J.Y. Gravel, *Le Québec et la Guerre*, (Montreal: Boreal, 1974), p.45.
53. Minto papers, NAC Vol. 17, Hutton to Minto, 18, 28 June 1899, 10 February 1902. Pariseau and Bernier, *Bilinguisme*, pp.64-66.
54. Haycock, *Hughes*, pp.26-27, 114, 218. Morton, "la Milice," p.44.
55. An officer of the Dragoons suggested that Lessard "should have had the Canadian Division in 1914 instead of Alderson, but of course Sam Hughes would have none of a French Canadian or a Catholic." Quoted in Worthington, *Spur and the Sprocket*, p.41. Also Gérard Filteau, *Le Québec, Le Canada et la guerre, 1914-1918*, (Montreal: L'Aurore, 1977), p.31; Jean Provencher, *Quebec sous la loi des mesures de guerre, 1918* (Montreal: Boreal, 1971), p.82.
56. Borden papers, NAC reel C-4214, p. 12544, Borden to Perley, 19 October 1914. See also pp. 12466-530 for complaints of Hughes' behaviour. R.L. Borden, *Memoirs*, (Toronto: Macmillan, 1938), p.472, also p.463.
57. Haycock, in *Hughes*, p.98, argues that as militia critic Hughes did not lobby hard for a Canadian GOC because Laurier was in power and would appoint a Liberal.
58. Cummins, in "Distinguished," notes that most preferred Lessard as commander of the 1st Division but that: "For reasons which imply no reflection upon the General, the Minister thought otherwise." Haycock, in *Hughes*, pp. 184-186, adds that "Hughes did not employ his professional soldiers effectively" and in 1914 "only his personal choices from their ranks were allowed to join the overseas contingent."
59. Haycock, *Hughes*, pp. 189-191, 211-213.
60. Lessard papers, NAC MG30 E41, Lessard to Hughes, May 1916. "Troops Training in England." p.2. Also NAC RG150 accn 1992-93/166, box 5596, Lessard's Record of Service. He arrived in England 1 February 1916 and in France 21 February, returning to Canada that summer.
61. Haycock, *Hughes*, p.300.
62. Edward Kemp of Toronto replaced Hughes. Lessard was considered for a proposed local council to make promotions, appointments and approve purchases early in 1916: Desmond Morton, *A Peculiar Kind of Politics: Canada's Overseas Ministry in the First World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), pp.66-68, 90-92. On the Quebec riots see Nicholson, *CEF*, p.348, and Provencher, *Quebec*, pp.80-110. Lessard was not mentioned in the "Who's Who in Quebec," *Biographies Canadiennes-françaises* (1921-1927), nor in J.L. Granatstein and D. Bercuson, *Dictionary of Canadian Military History* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1992), although the latter lists Evans and Steele.
63. Roger Sarty, "Silent Sentry: A Military and Political History of Canadian Coast Defence, 1860-1945," PhD thesis, University of Toronto, 1982, pp.326-335. See also NAC RG24 box 2323, HQS 66 Vol. 10, W.R. Lang, Colonel, General Staff MD 6, 12 December 1918, "Memorandum on the Reorganization and Efficiency of the Defence of Halifax and N.S., 11 February to 11 November 1918."
64. Perley papers, NAC Vol.3, Perley to Borden, 8 April 1915, Kitchener did not want Steele in command in the field and recommended A. Currie, who eventually took over the command of the 1st Canadian Division.

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