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The Royal Military College of Canada and the Education of Officers for the Great War

Andrew B. Godefroy

The technical and tactical limitations of command and control on western front battlefields often meant that once the shooting started it was not the generals but rather the surviving junior officer who determined the outcome of an engagement. Yet despite the fact that Canada's Army performed exceptionally well in combat at the tactical level, our knowledge of the young officers who led their soldiers in battle remains limited, with existing studies concerning Canadian combat leadership often focusing on the more senior levels of command.¹ In the absence of more detailed study and analysis at the lower echelon of command, historians have relied largely on the less than flattering assessments concerning junior officers often found in the memoirs of private soldiers.² Though colourful they are not surprisingly often negatively biased, and provide but one perspective of the lieutenants and captains of the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF).

The study of Canadian junior combat leadership on the western front has yet to receive detailed attention from scholars.³ Aside from the publication of a small number of memoirs and letters, little is known about the social and professional lives of these young men.⁴ Therefore, to discern how junior officers were

Abstract: This article examines the wartime role of the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) in commissioning officers for overseas service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF). In particular, it examines the evolution of the college as the war progressed, how its graduates helped to shape both that institution and the army, and it provides new insight into the leadership provided by an important group of junior officers within the CEF.

shaped into leaders on the Western Front and to measure some aspects of their effectiveness within that environment, it is important to first understand how these junior leaders were in fact developed. This means examining their social, educational, and professional backgrounds prior to deployment and assessing to what degree, if any, their pre-war lives influenced their ability to act as effective leaders in combat.

In August 1914, there were many ways a young man might obtain an officer's commission in the newly-created CEF. For those already in uniform it was a simple matter of transferring over from the militia. For others a place might be found through professional or personal connections as towns across the nation began raising units for overseas service. A third option was to obtain an education and commission through

attendance at the Royal Military College of Canada (RMC) located in Kingston, Ontario.

This article examines the wartime role of RMC in commissioning officers for overseas service with the CEF.⁵ In particular, it examines the evolution of the college as the war progressed, and how that evolution influenced the pre-deployment education and training of Canadian junior officers. As well, it examines how those who were formed by this military institution in turn helped to shape both that institution and the army. Though RMC's graduates constituted only a tiny percentage of Canada's wartime officer corps, these alumni heavily influenced the culture of the military both during the war and after. Finally, with scholars traditionally focusing their research on the most senior levels of command within the CEF, this article provides new insight on its leadership through an important group of junior officers.

A Military College in Canada

The exponential growth of the Canadian army after the outbreak of war in August 1914 created an immediate need for fit and deployable officers, especially at the junior level. Although there was an abundance

of men suitable to fill the rank and file of the first Canadian contingent, experienced and competent junior leaders were in very short supply. In 1914 the Permanent Force in Canada's militia had only 260 commissioned officers and there were roughly the same number of experienced British expatriates serving with the part-time militia.⁶ Yet, the authorized establishment of just the first Canadian overseas contingent was 1,424 officers.⁷

The only other ready source of officers was RMC, created in 1876 and still the country's sole professional school of arms for young gentlemen seeking an officer's commission in either the British or Canadian forces. Under the mentoring and tutelage of experienced British and Canadian regulars, 37 gentlemen cadets were in the process of graduating from the college in the summer of 1914 and a further 128 were undergoing instruction.⁸ Still, their professional education did little to endear them to the Canadian minister of militia of defence, the energetic and erratic Sam Hughes, who was personally overseeing many of the first officer appointments for the CEF. Hughes was a strong proponent of the citizen soldier of the part-time militia and often regarded with contempt those who considered themselves "professional" soldiers, especially British regulars. Hughes preferred instead to select militia officers and newly-commissioned personal friends, especially for more senior positions.⁹ Yet, despite his proclaimed animosity towards "professional" soldiers, 25 percent of the 1st Contingent's senior officers were drawn from the pool of RMC graduates and those soon to graduate (see Figure 1.1).

Canada was not unique in its creation of a dedicated military college to train young gentleman to become career military officers, nor was it the first country to do so.

Figure 1.1 Commanders and Staff Officers of 1st Canadian Division, August 1914¹⁰		
	Total in Division	RMC Graduates
Divisional Commander	1	-
Infantry Brigade Commanders	3	1
Commander Royal Artillery	1	1
Artillery Brigade Commanders	3	-
Artillery Battery Commanders	12	2
Engineer Commanders	5	3
Infantry Battalion Commanders	12	1
Staff Officers (Brigade Major and Senior)	11	4
Total	48	12

Both Britain and the United States had previously established similar academies, and when the Canadian government embarked on the task of founding its own institution in 1869 it examined the experiences of both these predecessors very closely. Though the Dufferin commission, named for Canadian governor-general who initiated the study, initially favoured the British military school system, others urged that the college be modeled after the West Point Military Academy in the United States. Lieutenant-Colonel Thomas Bland Strange, the British officer commanding the Gunnery School at Quebec, had visited West Point previously on his own initiative and argued that the mathematics-based curriculum there, as well as its all-arms training program, made it the best example to emulate. Colonel Patrick Leonard MacDougall, the British officer serving as the adjutant-general of the Canadian militia, concurred with Strange's assessment based on his own findings and experience. With a limited defence budget and a small officer candidate pool, MacDougall felt that the government needed to follow the West Point model and be able to qualify all arms needed for Canada's fledgling Permanent Force as a single establishment.¹¹ The only part of the US model they did not favour was the career phase transition after graduation.

The West Point Academy guaranteed no military employment after graduation. As a result, the school saw many of its better graduates pursue civilian occupations rather than become career soldiers and contribute to the effectiveness of the US Army.¹² The Canadian government wanted to avoid a similar problem and sought access to British postings and advanced military training courses for Canadian officers that were superior to anything in the United States, making a military career in Canada's forces much more attractive.

The final decision to create a professional school of arms in Canada came from the newly-elected Liberal prime minister, Alexander Mackenzie, who entered office in November 1873.¹³ After some consideration and planning, his minister of militia and defence, William Ross, entered a bill in Parliament the following May.¹⁴ It read:

An institution shall be established for the purpose of imparting a complete education in all branches of military tactics, fortification, engineering and general scientific knowledge in subjects connected with and necessary to a thorough knowledge of the military profession and for qualifying officers for command and staff appointments. Such institution to be known as the Military College,



A view of the Royal Military College of Canada from Fort Henry, circa 1914.

and to be located in some [sic] one of the garrison towns of Canada.¹⁵

Essentially, the bill called for the combination of the West Point model and the higher level English military schools into a four-year program. This, Ross felt, would meet Canadian needs for an all-arms school that could turn out any type of officer the new dominion required.

Lieutenant-General Sir Edward Selby Smyth, the British officer seconded to command the Canadian militia, commented in his annual report in 1878 that for the British Empire, the military college would be “another link in the chain that binds us altogether.” Some politicians, however, later complained that the military college was nothing more than “a place where a few young fellows, who have more money than brains, play soldier for four years at the expense of the Canadian tax-payer.”¹⁶ Still, the college ably responded to the serious test of the South African War, and continued to evolve as a professional military institution through the first decade of the 20th century.¹⁷ Anticipating the demands a total war would place on the college, however, was another matter entirely.

RMC and the Great War

The First World War irrevocably changed every aspect of Canada’s military and RMC was no exception. Prior to the war the institution relied on the War Office in London to provide a British Army colonel as the commandant along with several other experienced officers for the majority of the faculty and staff positions. Canadian officers assumed the remaining positions, though they often had less career experience than their British colleagues. The First World War forever altered this traditional paradigm. Shortly after hostilities commenced in August 1914, most of the British Army cadre was recalled to active duty and the Canadian uniformed faculty and staff followed soon afterwards. The sudden depletion of its most experienced faculty and staff put a serious strain on the ability of the college to continue educating and training young gentlemen for war service, but this is exactly what the Canadian government expected from the college. The demands of war even pushed RMC to increase its annual number of recruits and graduates, a requirement that would further alter

the very organization and culture of the college as the war progressed.

Colonel Lancelot Richard Carleton arrived at Kingston from England in 1913 to assume the office of commandant of the Royal Military College, replacing another British officer, Colonel J.H.V. Crowe, who had held the post since 1909. Colonel Carleton was an experienced infantry officer from the Essex Regiment who had served in South Africa, had passed staff college at Camberley, and had been an instructor at RMC Sandhurst in 1907. He was familiar with military education and administration, and brought with him to RMC a considerable amount of personal operational experience from the South African War. He was a fitting commandant for the college but he was recalled to England for war service in December 1914. Without a suitable replacement immediately available he was forced to leave his staff adjutant, Major Charles Noel Perreau, in charge as acting commandant until either the War Office or Ottawa could find a successor.

Major Perreau also had some operational experience. An infantry officer with the Royal Dublin Fusiliers, he had fought in the South African

War.¹⁸ Still, he was considered too junior to fulfill the requirements of the office of commandant and he lacked some of the administrative and political experience that the position demanded. With the increasing demands of the war, Major Perreau expected his tenure as acting commandant would be brief, figuring that he too would soon return to England for war duty with his regiment while another perhaps more venerable senior officer might be found to lead the college.

In June 1914 there were 22 members on the college's superior staff, nine of whom were officers in the British army and seven who held commissions in the Canadian Permanent Force or part-time militia.¹⁹ The remaining six were civilians.²⁰ The professor of civil survey, Major A. J. Wolfe, Royal Engineers, returned to England at the end of June on the expiration of his regular exchange posting with RMC. Four other British officers assigned to Kingston who were on leave in England when the war broke out simply did not return to RMC and rejoined their regiments instead. Thus Major A. Bryant of the RMC general staff, Major R.C. Hammond (professor of military engineering), Captain P.A. Meldon (professor of tactics and artillery), and Captain F.A. Heyman, (instructor in survey and signaling), were all immediately lost, leaving gaping holes in the faculty at the start of the fall 1914 term. Major Perreau protested up the chain of command through Ottawa to London, but his complaints fell on deaf ears.

The near destruction of the British Expeditionary Force in the autumn 1914 campaign created a desperate need for officers to replace casualties, and among other measures the War Office in London quickly recalled all the British Army staff from RMC. Before the end of the year Major Perreau lost another three



Colonel Lancelot Richard Carleton was the commandant of RMC at the outbreak of the First World War. His tenure in Kingston was cut short when he was recalled to England for war service in December 1914.



Major Charles Noel Perreau assumed the post as acting commandant but remained in the position until 1919.

of his British officers, all recalled for war service. That left besides, Major Perreau himself, only two experienced British officers at RMC, Lieutenant M.V. Plummer, Royal Field Artillery, (instructor in military topography and administration), and Captain S.A. Thompson, Northamptonshire Regiment, (superintendent of Infantry and Gymnasia).²¹

The Canadian military staff then began to leave. Canada had dispatched the 1st Canadian Division to England in October 1914, and plans were already underway for the deployment of a second, and possibly third, Canadian division. This rapid expansion of the CEF meant that all capable and qualified Canadian officers were needed. Those already assisting the war effort through duty at RMC felt a greater moral and patriotic compulsion to leave their safe posts at the college and join the men deploying for combat service overseas. Though perhaps understandable from a personal perspective, one could easily argue that abandoning the college to fill positions in the field army did more harm than good to the CEF over the long term. Yet there is no evidence to suggest that the Department of Militia and Defence concurred at the time, or took any immediate action to put a stop to the exodus of faculty and staff from RMC.²²

Within the first few months of 1915, the two remaining British officers and most of the Canadian army officers on the college faculty left for overseas service. Then the instructor in civil engineering was lost when Mr. O.T. Macklem took a commission in the CEF and went overseas with the 2nd Canadian Division. John Herbert Dawson, the instructor in mathematics, also took a commission in the CEF and left. Dawson had been an instructor at RMC since 1901, while serving first as an officer with and then later commanding the 14th Prince of

Wales Own Rifles militia regiment in Kingston. He held a master's degree in mathematics from the University of Toronto, and had been pursuing post-graduate work at Harvard University until poor health caused his return home. In 1915 while still teaching at RMC he organized the 59th Canadian Infantry Battalion for overseas service, and left for England with his new unit later that year.²³ The loss of Dawson was particularly hard for RMC, as mathematics was the very foundation of the college and a replacement of his quality and experience would not be easily found.

With little or no hope of obtaining additional British or Canadian officers to train the gentleman cadets in the foreseeable future, provisions were made to reorganize the entire faculty and staff. Major Perreau greatly increased the civilian complement and devolved increased responsibilities onto the non-commissioned officers who supported the daily administration of RMC. Throughout this reorganization Major Perreau remained in the office of the commandant, and his good work to keep the place functioning earned him the gratitude of both the War Office and the Canadian government. In 1916, he was officially appointed as commandant and promoted to full colonel, though the decision to keep him in Canada for the duration of the war effectively ended any hope he had of a career in the postwar British Army. Though later promoted to brigadier-general and awarded a modest title, Perreau's only postwar command was that of a territorial brigade in England.²⁴

Colonel Perreau almost single-handedly ensured the continued survival and efficiency of RMC throughout the war. Under his guidance the college supplied a small yet steady stream of officers for advanced training in England and eventual combat service in Flanders and France. In four years under



The demands of the war made it difficult for RMC to retain qualified instructors. Captain P.A. Meldon (top), professor of tactics and artillery, along with three other British instructors returned to England before the start of the Fall 1914 term. Besides Perreau, this left only two experienced British officers at RMC: Captain S.A. Thompson (above) remained to serve as superintendent of infantry and gymnasia, while Lieutenant M.V. Plummer held the post of instructor in military topography and administration.

his leadership, RMC educated and trained almost 500 gentlemen cadets.

From 1916 onwards the majority of the faculty and staff at RMC were civilians. However, a few military members did remain, and the college managed to acquire a couple of returned officers who were no longer fit for frontline duties. In August 1916 Captain H.C. Wotherspoon arrived from the 46th Durham Infantry to become the staff-adjutant, while Captain Horace H. Lawson came to instruct in engineering. Lawson graduated from RMC in 1910, and was a Canadian government surveyor when the war broke out. He served overseas as a lieutenant in the Canadian Field Artillery, but was wounded and invalided back to England in early 1916. After a short stint as an instructor at the Royal School of Artillery, he arrived at RMC as instructor and company commander.²⁵

Horace's fellow classmate, Major Arthur Douglas Fiskien, returned to the college in late 1917, and his arrival was perceived as a true blessing. Fiskien had served in France and Belgium with the 20th (Central Ontario) Infantry Battalion.²⁶ A tough and experienced frontline combat commander, Fiskien had been wounded at Fresnoy in May 1917 and then twice again at Passchendaele while breaking up a German counterattack. This latter display of personal gallantry earned Major Fiskien a well-deserved Military Cross, but his wounds removed him from any further frontline duties. After arriving at RMC Major Fiskien was assigned to teach tactics and trench warfare, a new yet vital subject for the gentlemen cadets then passing through the college.²⁷

The concept of manning the faculty with well trained and experienced British Army officers had proven essential to the success of cadet training, and when the war came the loss of this asset was



During the war RMC benefitted from the experience of combat veterans who could no longer serve at the front due to their injuries. Major A.D. Fisken (left) is one example. He served with the 20th Battalion at Fresnoy and Passchendaele, being awarded the military cross for gallantry, before being wounded and sent home. At RMC his experience was put to good use teaching tactics and trench warfare.

Cadet Selection and Entry

Applicants sitting for the RMC entrance exam at the turn of the century were expected to sit for two sets of examination papers, ten mandatory and five others that were optional. The mandatory set required the potential recruit to demonstrate their specific knowledge in fields such as chemistry, mathematics, engineering, English, and French. The second set of papers could increase the chances of acceptance and included fields such as Latin, geometrical and free hand drawing, and even military drill. As difficult as it may have seemed, to be considered eligible for acceptance at the college the applicant had to score only 33 percent, a grade easily accomplished with a little studying or the timely assistance of a cramming coach.

The selection and entry criteria for RMC had been under serious attack for some years prior to the First World War. Senior officers in particular felt that the entrance requirements were too lax, making official complaints to the RMC External Board of Visitors as early as 1900, regarding what they perceived as embarrassingly low standards. Still, the examination and selection criteria remained largely unchanged, making it appear to the army that little if any skill was needed to get into what many political and military patrons wished to be an elite national institution.²⁹

In early 1914 Colonel Carleton sought approval from the minister of militia and defence in Ottawa to raise

the pass requirement to at least 50 percent, as well as consider a number of other revisions.³⁰ The principals of several Canadian preparatory schools and colleges whose students applied for admission to RMC supported Carleton's recommendations, and these gentlemen met with college officials soon after the war began to formalize new practices and procedures for entry pending the minister's approval.³¹

First, there was a desire to move the timing of the RMC entrance exam from May to June to better coincide with the end of studies of the public schools from which RMC's candidates were drawn. This would have the effect of increasing the pool of potential applicants by making the application process more convenient. Second, when Major Perreau assumed command of RMC he obtained permission from the minister to revise the exam's syllabus.³²

Perreau reduced the total number of papers written for the entrance exam from 15 to ten, and made all subjects compulsory. Chemistry, geometrical drawing, free hand drawing, and drill were stricken from the list, while Latin became mandatory. It was expected that these alterations would give the examiners a better idea of the academic ability of the potential candidates. Unfortunately, though the content of the exam was improved to meet the requirements of the college, the mark needed to pass remained at 33 percent.

The sudden urgent need for qualified officers in both the British and Canadian armies had a large impact on the entrance requirements. Between August and December 1914 there was an exodus of cadets over 18 years of age, but not yet graduated, who chose to depart RMC and enlist immediately in the CEF. It made no sense to some to wait perhaps another year or two to

keenly felt. Yet fortunately the exodus of the British officer nucleus did not condemn the institution to irrelevance, or worse, total failure. Colonel Perreau was able to find Canadian officers to replace those who left for overseas and some of these late additions, such as Major Fisken, proved invaluable to the college's wartime curriculum. This transformation of the faculty and staff from being mostly British to being mostly Canadian was also a reflection of a much greater transformation underway across the Canadian Army writ large. Gone were the days of British-influenced equestrian, lance, and sword drill, replaced with Canadian-influenced gunnery, rifleman, and trench warfare skills.

By increasing the civilian faculty and staff at RMC during the war, moreover, Colonel Perreau created a new educational paradigm that ensured all future officer development would be a combined civil-military affair.²⁸ The result of this initiative was generally positive. Instead of being perceived purely as a military run "war" college, RMC became more of a national institution in the postwar years that produced not just better soldiers, but better Canadian citizens as well.

graduate from RMC with a diploma of studies and commission when one could simply walk from RMC across the Kingston causeway into town and enlist as a CEF officer at the local recruiting station. Besides, the early perception by all was that the war in Europe would be decided by Christmas 1914, and one hoping for a postwar military career in Canada was likelier to succeed if he had operational experience. Between August 1914 and May 1915, 83 cadets withdrew from the college or had their graduation accelerated in order to take commissions and fight overseas.³³

As a result of the withdrawals, the entrance standards were relaxed again in January 1915 to allow a special admission of 28 candidates into the college to make up the numbers depleted by war conditions. The supplementary candidates were selected from those who had failed the 1914 entrance examination along with a few other civilians from chartered universities deemed acceptable for entrance. The move was not considered wise by Perreau, who wrote in his annual report to the minister:

Although the twenty-eight so admitted have done their best, they have been greatly handicapped in missing five months of the college term, and I consider it advisable not to again resort to this expedient to complete the number.³⁴

Despite Colonel Perreau's concerns, the government constantly pressured him to help meet the growing needs of the CEF. By the second year of the war the number of officer casualties was staggering.

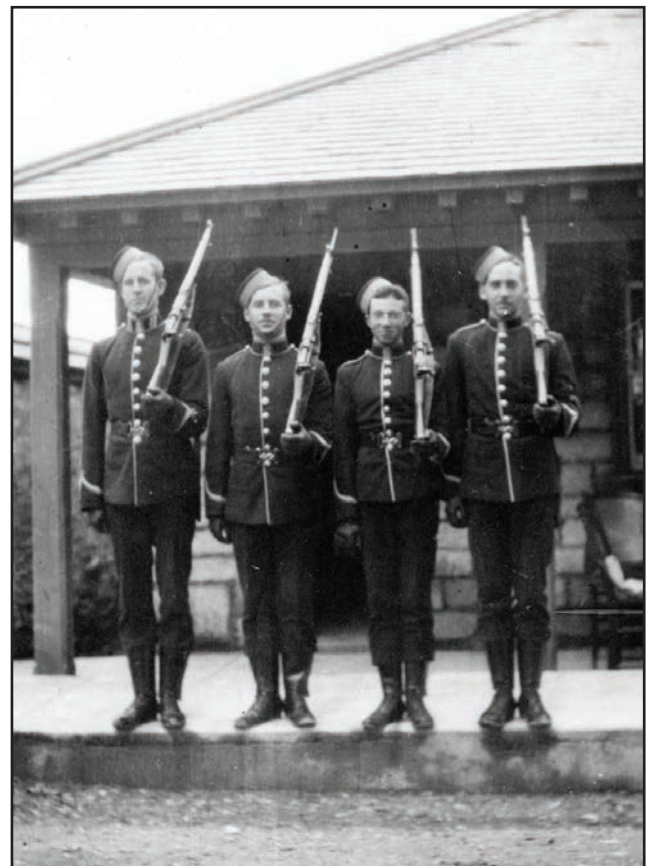
As of December 1915, a total of 5,832 officers had enlisted in the CEF, most of whom were by then serving in France. Of these, 480 had been killed in action or wounded, of which 366 were in the infantry battalions and artillery brigades.³⁵ Another Canadian infantry unit serving with the British Expeditionary Force, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry (PPCLI), had lost 38 of its veteran officers in combat in the short span of seven months.³⁶ By the end of Canada's first year of war, its existing professionally trained and experienced officer corps had been all but eliminated in the constant fighting on the Western Front.

The imperative to replace these losses put considerable strain on RMC, which at the end of 1915 supplied only 26 more officers to overseas forces, with a further 32 officers taking their commissions in May 1916.³⁷ These were good results considering the increasing lack of resources available, but they must have seemed paltry when compared to the number needed to replace casualties. Thus, the standards for entrance were not raised in light of the obvious necessity to encourage young men to apply. In January 1916 a special entrance examination was held and another 22 cadets were admitted to the college on 1 February. Though RMC received a sufficient number of candidates in 1917, it went canvassing again to chartered

universities in 1918, offering another 19 places to young men who had not written the entrance examination.³⁸ Though there is no written record of animosity between those cadets who had to sit for the exam and those who did not, one can easily imagine the resentment that some must have felt for those who were simply let into the college without any academic pre-testing.³⁹

The Curriculum

The aim of instruction at RMC was to ensure the cadet would have a knowledge of the duties and methods of all the arms. This required an extensive and varied academic and practical curriculum. The end result was a highly competent officer who upon graduation was ready to pursue more specialized courses in his trade, while bringing to that trade a general understanding of the other combat arms.



Four cadets on guard duty stand at attention outside what is now called the "Old Guard House." The building now serves as the Museum office. During the First World War all cadets went through the routine of guard duty and the posting of sentries just as if they were soldiers in an infantry battalion.

The course of studies at RMC in 1914 tended to concentrate more on scientific and engineering methods than the traditional classical education British officer schools. The timetable for the year consisted of 3,828 hours of instruction (see Figure 1.2). Of this, 809 hours (21 percent) went to military topics, 2,226.5 hours (58 percent) to civilian topics, and 792.5 hours (20 percent) to practical lessons.⁴⁰ The basis of the curriculum was mathematics, which received the most concentration (675 hours).

western front. Traditionally, the gentleman cadets were taught to have a firm grasp of the British *Field Service Regulations (FSR)* Volume Two and another manual, "Infantry Training," so that they would be fully interoperable with the British Army. The aim of all tactics training was to ensure that the gentleman cadet was capable of carrying out the duties and responsibilities of a platoon commander in an infantry battalion. He was also expected to have a thorough knowledge

qualify him for squadron, battery, or company command. During his senior year he was taught courses on the principles of strategy, military history, and geography.

In terms of practical work, the cadet was taught to fire a revolver with the left or right hand, high-level rifle marksmanship, and the use of the Lewis and Vickers machine guns. He also still spent a little time on sword and bayonet fighting, as these weapons were still perceived as having significant value for the purpose of building morale and "fighting spirit." Major Fiske, however, disabused both the faculty and the cadets of any notions of swashbuckling heroism, instead getting the future soldiers to focus on being deadly with the rifle, revolver, and shovel handle. Finally, sufficient practical instruction in signaling was provided to qualify a cadet to act as a regimental signaling officer.⁴²

The courses in mathematics and engineering were designed so that the gentlemen cadets could grasp problems that might be encountered in their other military, scientific, and engineering courses. The courses were also designed so that regardless of whether the cadet had entered RMC from a preparatory school or an engineering college, he would graduate with full training in both disciplines. The college faculty established a strong liaison between the various departments that allowed for a good continuity in the course work. This approach simplified the great deal of learning that the officer candidate was expected to master.⁴³

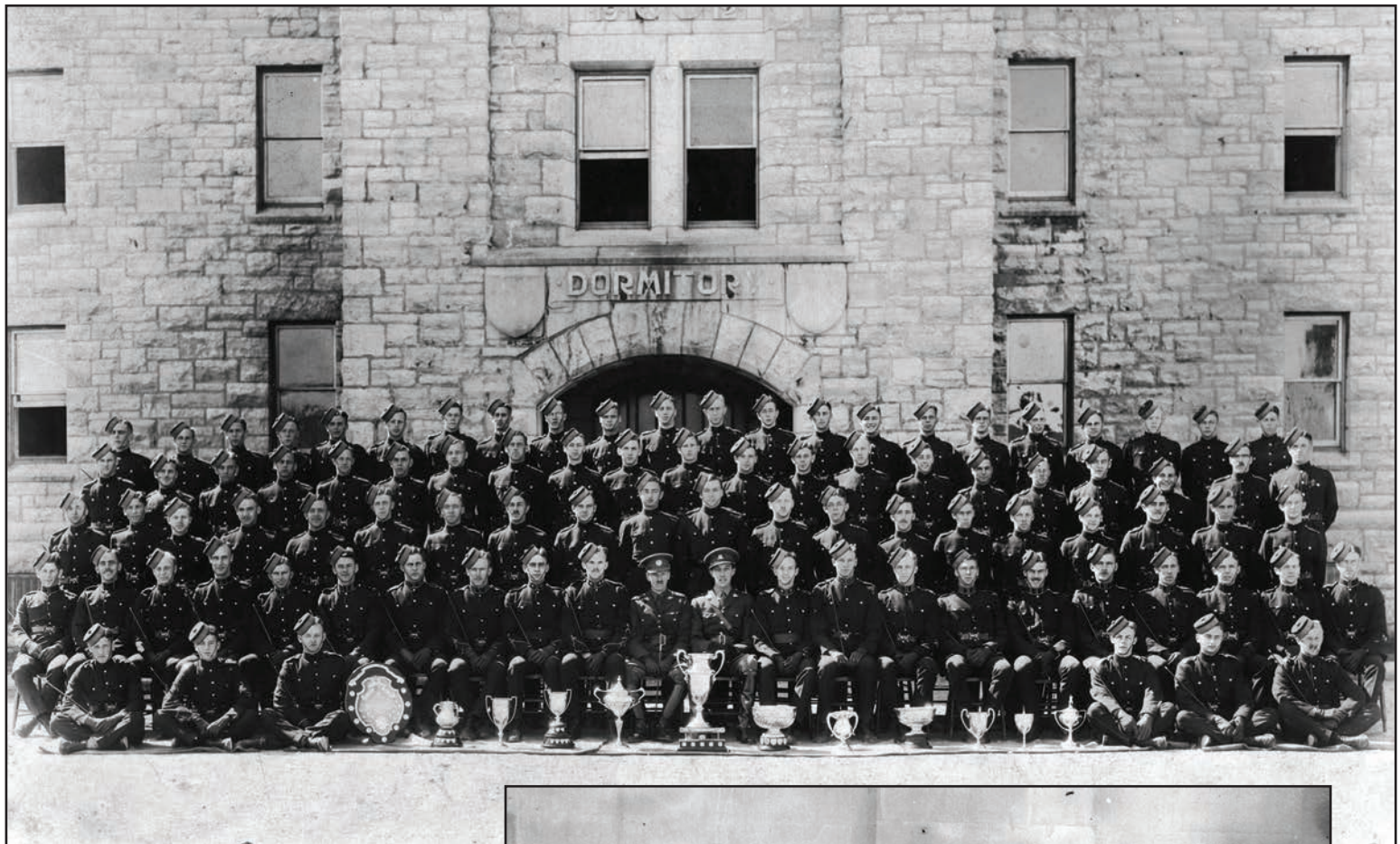
The engineering department was responsible for a variety of courses in military and civil engineering. When the war broke out, civil engineering was dropped for those cadets who were in the second and first classes so that they could concentrate entirely on military subjects. Courses were trimmed further when the college faculty began to shrink and RMC lost

Figure 1.2
The Royal Military College of Canada 1914 Academic Year
Number of Hours Devoted to Study Listed by Subject in the Curriculum⁴¹

Subject	Total Hours
Military	809
Tactics	70.5
Military Engineering	242
Military History	41
Artillery	186
Reconnaissance	80
Field Sketching and Map Reading	140.5
Military Administration and Law	49
Civil	2,226.5
Mathematics	675
Civil Engineering	393.5
Surveying	329.5
Physics	184.5
Chemistry	107
English	171.5
French	258.5
Drafting	8
Geometrical Drawing	99
Practical	792.5
Infantry	164.5
Gymnastics	266
Musketry	62
Signaling	42
Stables and Equitation	215
Workshops	43
Total	3828

The tactics department underwent revolutionary changes due to the evolving nature of fighting that resulted from the industrialized warfare on the

of the organization, supply, and administration of a cavalry regiment, infantry battalion, and machine gun brigade. Additionally, the cadet received courses on military law to



Above: pre-war RMC graduating class.

Right: Wartime NCO instructors at RMC.

most of its engineering professors. However, along with mathematics, engineering remained the base of the officer's training throughout the war and was kept in the curriculum despite the ongoing difficulties in securing adequate instructors to teach the courses.

Similarly, English and French language education was not dropped but it took on a new purpose. Not only was the CEF composed of a mix of anglophone and francophone soldiers, most of its immediate allies also spoke one of these two languages. Therefore, the cadet was expected to be proficient in both English and French in order to convey exact and concise orders and briefings to those serving under him, as well



as communicating effectively with his superior officers. Concise and effective staff reports also required the cadet to be an efficient writer in both languages.

While at RMC, the cadets underwent a demanding physical routine designed to give them the strength and skills to carry out their

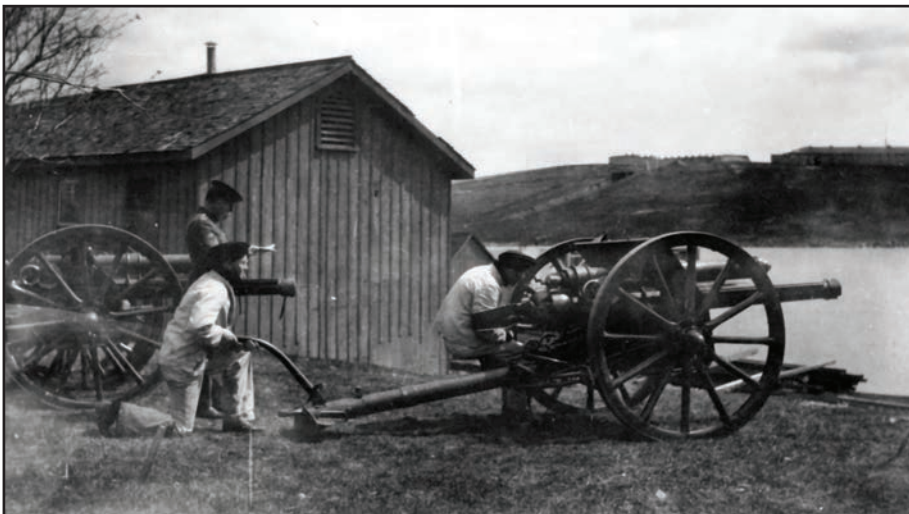
duties in the harsh conditions of the battlefield. Physical training, riding and horsemanship, and sports were not only required but encouraged. The first phase of the training was basic exercises designed to build strength and stamina. Then the cadets moved on to a variety of recreational gymnastics. Cadets engaged in



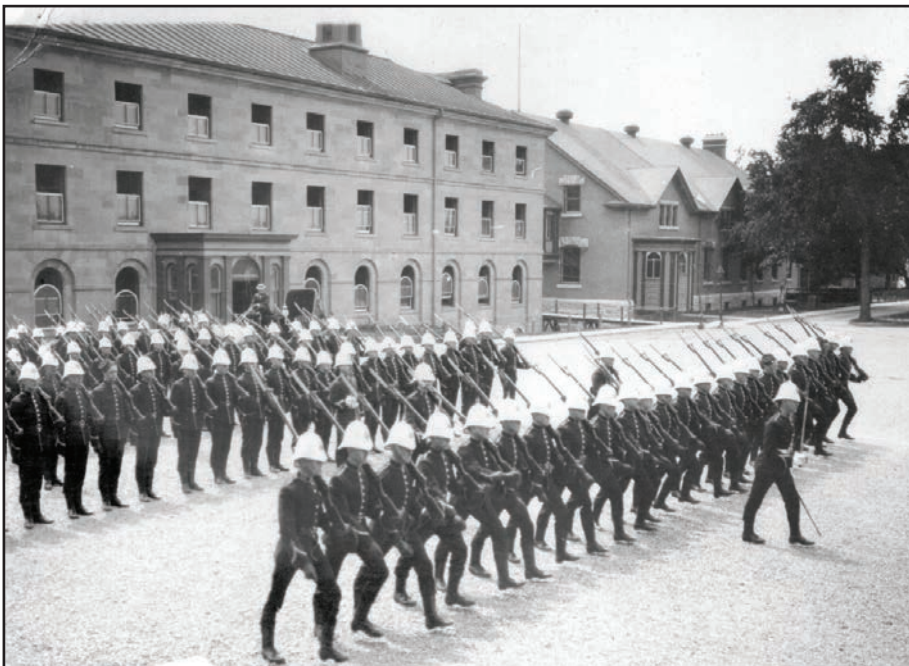
Left: Cadets with Ross Mark II rifles fire at butts that were set up in front of the northeast wall of Fort Frederick.

Centre: Cadets training on the 18-pounder quick-fire field gun.

Bottom: Cadets formed up in front of the Stone Frigate for a parade at RMC. The front rank of the formation has just stepped off as the photo was taken.



boxing, wrestling, bayonet fighting and fencing, riding with and without saddle, polo, and gun running. Cadets also formed teams for hockey, basketball, squash, boating, cricket, tennis, cross-country running, and rugby football. RMC teams had competed regularly against teams from the University of Toronto, Queen's University, and McGill University, but when the war broke out, inter-collegiate sports and out of town games were dropped. Cadets concentrated on those physical activities that would improve their fighting skills and survival on the battlefield, with the more recreational sports, such as cricket and tennis, being removed from the mandatory schedule.



The college faced other challenges. The great need for trained artillery officers in the CEF led to the decision that all the gentleman cadets entering the college in August 1917 would be trained specifically as gunners. The entire class was formed into a four-gun battery and in practical training concentrated entirely on drills for the 18-pounder field artillery piece. From August 1917 until June 1918 the class studied primarily artillery-related skills at the college. Those who were of age or had completed the required year of studies received their commissions and left for the Canadian School of Gunnery in Witley, England, while

the remainder of the group carried on at RMC and did not get the opportunity to report to a battery before the armistice was signed.⁴⁴ However, the increasingly popular view that the war had become very much a “gunner’s war” had had some influence of the training of officers at RMC.

Perhaps the biggest impact of the war was on the length of a cadet’s tenure at the college. Cadets graduating from RMC in the summer of 1914 had completed three years of study at the college and then reported to their various depots for more basic and intermediate combat arms training before being assigned to active service. By 1917, the demands of replacing wartime casualties meant that officers could expect little more than a year’s worth of education and training before being sent overseas. Only after the armistice was signed did RMC begin to return to a more regular curriculum, with the three and later four-year program being reinstated during the 1920s.

The Graduates

In the 38 year period leading up to the First World War, 930 cadets had successfully passed through the college. During the war itself RMC commissioned a further 396 officers into both the Imperial and Canadian forces, the last possible wartime commissions being offered to those who entered the college in August 1917. From this total of 1,326 officer graduates, 914 served in the Great War – almost 69 percent.⁴⁵ Allowing for age and health, essentially every RMC graduate that was capable of serving in the First World War did so.

Though RMC held no monopoly on Canadian military leadership and command at the outbreak of war, the cadets did provide a solid nucleus during the formation of the 1st

Canadian Division’s officer corps. In 1914 12 of 48 officers (25 percent) were RMC graduates. At the end of the war 53 of 233 officers (22.7 percent) who held senior positions in the Canadian Corps were RMC graduates. (see Figure 1.3). When one considers that only 525 (2.3 percent) of the 22,592 officers who served in the CEF were RMC graduates (the remaining 389 graduates served with other allied forces), it is impressive that they held so many senior appointments. There is, moreover, no evidence to suggest favouritism in the appointment of the college’s graduates.⁴⁶

Indeed, despite the needs of Canada’s wartime forces, RMC graduates continued to seek and obtain commissions in the British and Indian armies.⁴⁷ As we have seen nearly 400 gentleman cadets chose this path. It is something of a mystery why such a practice was allowed to continue. Though the need to offer British commissions to RMC graduates could be justified prior to 1914 by the absence of postings in the Canadian tiny regular army, once the war began it made little sense to send much needed junior officers to reinforce British or Indian

units. While marginally qualified or unqualified Canadian colonels and majors from the numbered reinforcement battalions piled up in England, only a few of them were willing to take a drop in rank to get into action in France, RMC was letting their valuable graduates be siphoned off by other Imperial forces. Perhaps those officers who looked ahead to a postwar military career felt it wiser to serve in the British Army rather than the CEF.⁴⁸

A number of the college graduates distinguished themselves in combat and received wide recognition for their actions. Captain William Avery “Billy” Bishop, who had withdrawn from the college in 1914, went on to become one of the war’s greatest flying aces as well as a recipient of the Victoria Cross. Three others, Captain E.D. Carr-Harris, Major F. Travers Lewis, and Major G.A. Torey, were recommended posthumously for, but did not receive, the Victoria Cross. A total of 34 ex-cadets were knighted for their services, 118 received the Distinguished Service Order, and 125 received the Military Cross. A further 62 cadets received foreign decorations and awards.⁴⁹

Figure 1.3
Commanders and Staff Officers of the Canadian Corps, November 1918

	Total number	RMC Graduates
Corps Commander	1	-
Divisional Commanders	4	2
General Officers – Canadian Artillery	7	2
General Officers – Canadian Engineers	6	4
Artillery Brigade Commanders	14	5
D.A.C. Commanders	5	1
Battery Commanders	57	12
Artillery Staff	7	5
Infantry Brigade Commanders	12	1
Infantry Battalion Commanders	48	3
Engineer Battalion Commanders	12	6
Cavalry and Cyclist Commanders	5	3
Staff Officers – Brigade Major and Above	55	9
Total	233	53

Before the end of the war 28 ex-cadets reached the rank of brigadier-general or higher in the British and Imperial forces. Major-General W.T. Bridges, who began his military career at RMC, commanded the Australian Imperial Force in 1914. Cadets G.M. Kirkpatrick and C.M. Dobell both went on to become lieutenant-generals in the British army, the latter also serving as a divisional commander in the Third Afghan War. Brigadier-General D.S. McInnes, who graduated from RMC in 1891, was director of aeronautical equipment and aircraft production during the war and a key founder of the Royal Air Force. William Heneker, a graduate from the late 1880s who commanded a brigade

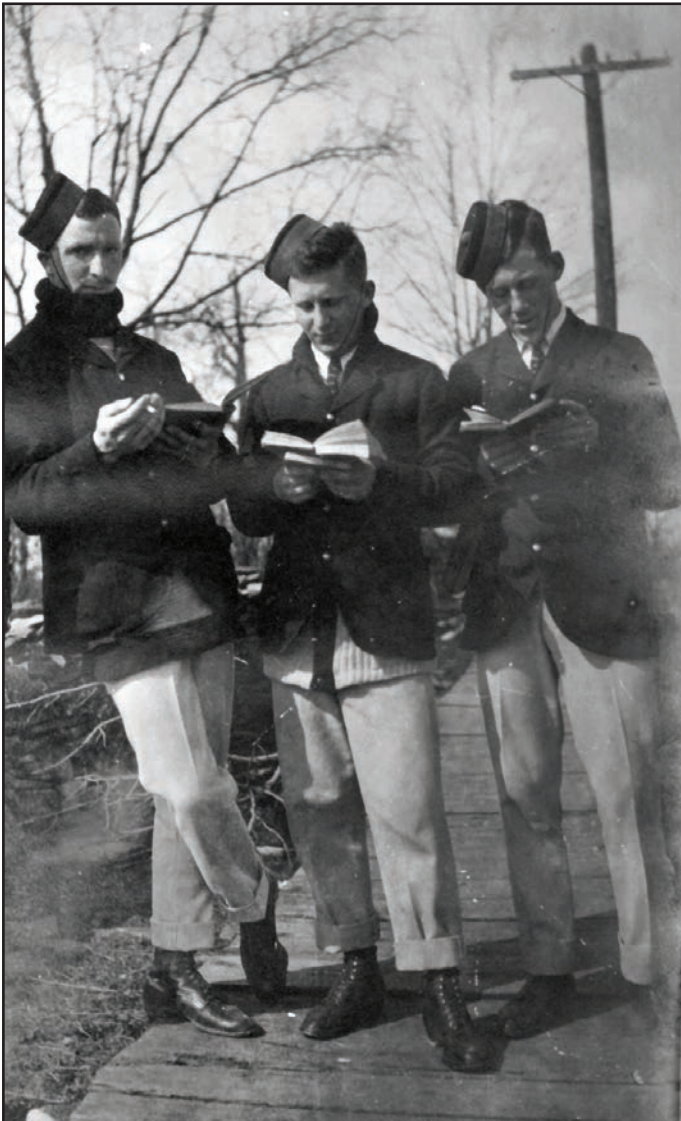
and division on the western front, became a full general and the first commander of the British Army in Upper Silesia.⁵⁰ In just about every branch of every service a gentleman cadet could be found.

The cost of the war was equally great for the college. There were 147 former cadets killed in action, more than ten percent of all graduates who served.⁵¹ Major-General W.T. Bridges, who commanded the Australians at Gallipoli, was killed in action. Brigadier-General D.S. McInnes, was also killed on active service, in 1918. The junior officers suffered even more, especially those from the early wartime classes. For example, of the 37 cadets who graduated in May 1914, 22 were killed in the Great War. Seven

of these were killed in action within the first year. All of the remaining graduates were wounded.⁵²

The Consequence of War

On the afternoon of 17 May 1922, George P. Graham, the minister of militia and defence, made a formal dedication in honour of General Sir Arthur W. Currie, the man who had commanded the Canadian Corps in 1917-19. The great hall in the centre of the Mackenzie Building at the Royal Military College was being officially renamed Currie Hall. The former lecture hall was turned into a shrine dedicated to the exploits of the CEF. The badge of every battalion and



RMC cadets played an important role during the war. The three cadets photographed here during their time at the college all saw war service. At the left is Herbert Maunsell. He was an academic drop from the Class of 1911 to the Class of 1912 and at the end of the academic year 1913-1914 he again failed his final exams necessitating his withdrawal from the College. At the outbreak of the war he was commissioned in the British army in the Royal Warwickshire Regiment and was killed in action at Béthune, France on 1 September 1915. The cadet in the centre is William A. Bishop, an academic drop from the Class of 1911 to the Class of 1912. He withdrew from the College in October 1914 to take a commission in the Mississauga Horse and subsequently transferred to the Royal Flying Corps where he became the highest scoring Allied ace of the First World War. The third cadet is J.P.C. Atwood. He left the College in January 1915 with a Special War Certificate and took a commission with Lord Stratcona's Horse (Royal Canadians). He remained with the regiment for the course of the war being wounded and awarded the Military Cross in the process.



The Mackenzie Building (left) and the Stone Frigate at the Royal Military College. After the war the great hall in the centre of the Mackenzie Building was renamed Currie Hall in honour of the commander of the Canadian Corps. The room is a tribute to the efforts of RMC in the Great War, and a permanent reminder to those who came after of the impact the First World War had on the institution and the cadets who passed through its halls.

service in the Canadian Corps was reproduced on the walls and pillars that line the great room. Upstairs in the balcony, massive oil painting portraits of the CEF generals adorned the walls. The room was a tribute to the contribution of RMC in the Great War, and a permanent reminder to those who came after of the impact the First World War had on the institution and the cadets who passed through its halls.⁵³

For RMC there were personal as well as physical changes. Prior to the First World War, British Army officers almost always held the office of the commandant.⁵⁴ Canada had yet to produce seasoned officers of its own for such an appointment. The Great War changed this. When RMC reopened after the

armistice, Lieutenant-General Sir Archibald C. Macdonell, the former general officer commanding 1st Canadian Division, was appointed commandant, a position he held until 1925. Macdonell had graduated with honours from RMC in 1886, serving first in the mounted infantry and then with the North-West Mounted Police. Macdonell was a decorated veteran of the South African War where he had served as an officer in the Canadian Mounted Rifles. Later, he commanded one of Canada's oldest cavalry regiments, the Lord Strathcona's Horse (Royal Canadians). When the First World War began Macdonell's unit served with the 1st Canadian Division in France and Belgium. In 1916 he commanded the 7th Canadian

Infantry Brigade and then later in 1917 he took over the 1st Canadian Division. A distinguished soldier and one of Canada's greatest generals, he was an appropriate choice for commandant of the college. The decision to appoint an ex-cadet also reflected the confidence the government had in the college system. Only Canadians would hold the office of commandant after the First World War.

The gentlemen cadets who passed through RMC both prior to and during the First World War were shaped by their social and professional experiences at the college. Those entering before 1914 expected to be prepared for active duty in Canada, and potentially service with the British Army abroad.

The education and training reflected the skill sets needed to conduct what today would be classified as peacetime military engagement and small wars and counterinsurgency. After 1914 the curriculum changed as war shaped the institution, and ultimately, the cadets who passed through it. Some effects may have been negative, but as this article demonstrates, graduates arrived for further training and assignments in England well educated for modern war and perhaps a bit more aware of the trials they were to eventually face in France and Flanders. The record supports the argument that officers trained at RMC were likely to serve in action and performed well as junior leaders. That many of them died in such service is but one more indication of the acceptance of personal risk that must accompany professional soldiering.

Finally, the real worth of any organization can only be truly revealed in times of adversity, when its aim is clear and its product is tested. Few institutions are judged as harshly as those whose aim is to produce a warrior, for failure means the unnecessary loss of lives and perhaps worse, defeat at the hands of an adversary. The First World War was the greatest test that RMC had faced since its inception, and this analysis has demonstrated that the college performed admirably. Never designed to provide educated officers on such a large scale, RMC had proved its ability to train professional soldiers despite the conditions and time constraints that war imposed. Those who passed through the college demonstrated repeatedly that their training was on par with any officer who obtained his commission by other means. Despite the severe cutbacks in the Canadian forces during the 1920s and 1930s, future of the college was secure, the country's investment repaid with

the dedication and lives of its young cadets on the Western Front.

Notes

1. For example see Patrick H. Brennan, "Byng and Currie's Commanders: A Still Untold Story of the Canadian Corps," *Canadian Military History*, 11, no.2 (2002), pp.5-16; also Brennan, "Good Men for a Hard Job: Infantry Battalion Commanding Officers in the CEF," *The Canadian Army Journal*, 9 no.1 (Spring 2006), pp.9-28.
2. For example see Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up* (Toronto: Random House, 1993). Chapter five provides a rudimentary social and professional précis of the CEF officer corps. The analysis of the role and effectiveness of the junior officer, especially in combat, is almost completely characterized by the opinions of private soldiers.
3. Existing junior officer leadership and command studies include Isabella Diane Losinger, *Officer-Man Relations in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (MA, Carleton University, 1990); see also various historical case studies edited by Howard Coombs and Craig Leslie Mantle produced by Canadian Forces Leadership Institute, Kingston, Ontario.
4. See Owen A. Cooke, *The Canadian Military Experience 1867-1995: A Bibliography* (Ottawa: Directorate of History and Heritage, 1997). This authoritative guide listed only 174 known published memoirs including private publications, the majority of which were penned by the non-commissioned ranks.
5. There remains some confusion amongst historians regarding RMC's mandate during the First World War. For detailed statement see Government of Canada, Sessional Papers 1914-15, No.35, *Report of the Militia Council of the Dominion of Canada, 1914*, pp.18, 65, and 69.
6. Ibid, pp.26-27.
7. Colonel A.F. Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War, 1914-1919. Volume 1 Appendix* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1938), pp.48-53.
8. R.A. Preston, *Canada's RMC: A History of the Royal Military College* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969), p.213.
9. The radical mindset of Hughes is explored in Ronald G. Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885-1916* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 1987).
10. RMC Club of Canada, *Directory of Ex-Cadets of the Royal Military College of Canada*. (Kingston: The RMC Review, 1935). Of the 48 original senior officers in 1st Canadian Division holding commands from brigade major through to the division commander, 12 had graduated

from the Royal Military College at Kingston.

11. In the British school system, Sandhurst trained the cavalry and infantry officers while the artillery and engineer candidates attended a separate academy at Woolwich.
12. Government of Canada. Parliamentary Papers, 1870, XXV, 635-637, Colonel P. MacDougall, *Account of the System of Education at the United States Military Academy at West Point*. Precip in Militia Report 1873, appendix No.9, pp.221-223. For the American experience see Edward M. Coffman. *The Old Army: A Portrait of the American Army in Peacetime, 1784-1898* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).
13. The Honourable Alexander Mackenzie (1822-1892) was Canada's Prime Minister from 7 November 1873 to 8 October 1878.
14. William Ross (1825-1912), Member of Parliament for Victoria, Nova Scotia, Minister of Militia and Defence (November 1873-September 1874) and lieutenant-colonel in the Canadian Militia.
15. Canada. Acts of Parliament of the Dominion of Canada, 27 Vict. C.36, (Ottawa, 1876).
16. Government of Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, 6 June 1895, pp.2199-2200, William Mulock (Liberal, North York, Ontario).
17. See A.B. Godefroy, "Professional Training Put to the Test: RMC and Army Leadership in the South African War, 1899-1902," *The Canadian Army Journal*, 6, no.:2 (Summer 2003), pp5-13.
18. Public Record Office [PRO] WO 25/76 and WO 339/374. Records of service for Charles Noel Perreau.
19. RMC, *The Stone Frigate: 1914* (Kingston: privately published, 1914). Superior staff included faculty and administration, while subordinate staff included all clerks, cooks, keepers, and quartermaster staff.
20. *The Stone Frigate: 1914*, and *Report of the Department of Militia and Defence, 1914*.
21. *The Stone Frigate: 1914*, pp.10-30; RMC, Commandant's Report 1914, pp.60-66; and Commandant's Report 1915, pp.30-33. See also Preston, *Canada's RMC*, pp.213-214.
22. *Report of the Department of Militia and Defence, 1914 and 1915*. There is no record of dispute over the departure of the Canadian faculty and staff.
23. Library and Archives Canada [LAC], Record Group [RG] 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2370-27, CEF service file for John Herbert Dawson. Lieutenant-Colonel Dawson commanded the 46th (Saskatchewan) Battalion at the front in 1916 and was awarded the DSO at the Somme. He became director of studies after the war at RMC in 1922, but died after only a short period of service in 1926.
24. Colonel Perreau was made a Companion of the Order of St. Michael and St. George

- (CMG), and commanded the 116th (Territorial) Infantry Brigade after the war.
25. LAC RG 150, CEF Service file for Horace H. Lawson.
26. D.J. Corrigan, *The History of the Twentieth Canadian Battalion (Central Ontario Regiment) CEF in the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto, Stone & Cox 1935), p.3. See also Preston, *Canada's RMC*, p.217.
27. LAC RG150, CEF Service file for Arthur Douglas Fiske.
28. This has persisted to the present day. RMC has both a commandant and a civilian principal, as well as civilian academic deans for each of its departments.
29. For example see Government of Canada. Sessional Paper No.19. Department of Militia and Defence for the Dominion of Canada. Report for the Year 1899, Part II, appendix A (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1900), pp. 33-38.
30. *Report of the Militia Council, 1914*. Appendix D. Each year an external board of visitors inspected the conditions and training at RMC and submitted an independent report to the Minister of Militia and the Prime Minister. In 1914, the Board consisted of Colonel V.A.S. Williams, Chairman; Honourary Colonel J.A.M. Aikins, 99th Manitoba Rangers; Major R. W. Leonard, Corps of Guides, Clare L. Worrell, Bishop of Nova Scotia; and Colonel J. S. Dunbar, Assistant Adjutant General.
31. Ibid.
32. *Report of the Militia Council, 1917*, Appendix E: Annual Report of the Commandant of the Royal Military College of Canada, 1916-17, p.30.
33. *Report of the Militia Council, 1915*, Appendix F: Annual Report of the Commandant of the Royal Military College of Canada, p.31.
34. Ibid. p.32.
35. A.F. Duguid, *Official History of the Canadian Forces in the Great War*. (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1938), pp. 438-441.
36. Statistics compiled from Ralph Hodder-Williams, *Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry: 1914-1919: Volume I* (London and Toronto: Hodder and Stoughton Limited, 1923).
37. Not all of these graduates reported to CEF units overseas. Some cadets were still taking commissions in the British and Indian Armies.
38. *Report of the Militia Council, 1918*, Appendix E: Annual Report of the Commandant of the Royal Military College of Canada, p.26.
39. Between August 1914 and September 1918, 464 college numbers were assigned to individuals, though this does not mean that all of these actually attended or graduated from the college.
40. Hours are rounded to the nearest percentage.
41. Canada. Department of Militia and Defence (1915), Sessional Papers of Canada No.35 (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1916).
42. Anon. "The Royal Military College of Canada," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 2 no.3 (April 1925), p.241.
43. Ibid. p.240.
44. H.M. Col. Hague (No. 1295). "A Chronicle of the Class of Seventeen (1917 to 1918)," contained in *As You Were! A Collection of Histories of the Royal Military College, Volume One, 1876-1918*. (Kingston, RMC Review Press, 1985), pp.271-273.
45. Another estimate by W.R.P. Bridger, a professor at RMC from 1917-1942, places the total cadets serving at 982. Figures tabulated from RMC official records of college attendance. See also, Anon. "The Royal Military College of Canada," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, 2, no.3 (April, 1925), pp.239-246; and RMC Club of Canada, *Directory of Ex-Cadets of the Royal Military College of Canada* (1935).
46. See Brennan articles cited in this article. Previous research published by both Brennan and this author has demonstrated that the CEF employed a very utilitarian and pragmatic approach to selecting its commanders, and almost in all cases deferred to experience over patronage.
47. RMC Archives, Record Boards file (unnumbered). Gentleman Cadets Who Have Received Commissions His Majesty's Regular Army, years 1913-1920, 17 pages.
48. Stethem, "Ex-Cadets in the Imperial Forces," contained in *As You Were! A Collection of Histories of the Royal Military College*, pp. 13-17.
49. RMC Archives, Record Boards file (unnumbered). Nominal Roll of Graduates and Ex-Cadets Awarded Decorations and Honours, 1914-1920, p.32. This data also appears in RMC's official history.
50. A.B. Godefroy, ed., *Bush Warfare: The Early Writings of General William Charles Gifford Heneker*. (Kingston, ON: Directorate of Land Concepts and Design, 2009).
51. Preston, *Canada's RMC*, p.233.
52. RMC Archives, Kingston. Numbers are compiled from ex-cadet service files numbered 881 through 944. Of the 46 who entered the 1911 recruit term, nine did not graduate in May 1914. One of the cadets was accidentally killed, another withdrew, and the rest graduated in the second 1914 class.
53. A detailed physical description of Currie Hall and its collection may be found in Mitchell A. Kryzanowski. *Currie Hall: Memorial to the Canadian Corps* (Kingston: Hewson and White Printing, Ltd. 1989).
54. The slight notable exception to this rule was the appointment of RMC cadet No.45, then Colonel F.T. Taylor, to the post of commandant in 1905.

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