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J.L. Ralston and the First World War

The Origins of a Life of Service

Daniel Byers

James Layton Ralston was a major figure in the military and political history of Canada in the first half of the twentieth century. He is remembered particularly for his role as minister of National Defence in the Second World War, during which he was forced to resign by Prime Minister Mackenzie King over his support for conscription for overseas service.¹ Yet by the 1940s Ralston already had a long and rich career. He served in the First World War, rising to command the 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders). He later headed a Royal Commission that reviewed veterans' pensions in the early 1920s, and was minister of National Defence for four years in the late 1920s, the Liberal Party's finance critic in the early 1930s, and finance minister for the first ten months of the Second World War – during which he set in place the foundations for Canada's financing of that war.²

Despite Ralston's place in these events, little is known about his background, and what motivated him as a public figure. His papers in Ottawa contain little material of a personal nature. All that has tended to be reviewed in any detail is a set of letters that he and his brother wrote home to their parents during the First World War.³ There is more to be gleaned from this correspondence and this is not the only available

Abstract: James Layton Ralston is well-known in Canadian history for his role as minister of National Defence during the Second World War. Yet he had a long and distinguished career before the 1940s. This article reconstructs Ralston's early life, up to and especially during the First World War, when he rose to command the 85th Battalion (Nova Scotia Highlanders). For Ralston the war confirmed a sense of concern for and service to others with which he had apparently been raised from an early age. A study of his experiences during the war also tells us much about his many strengths of character, and hints at some of the less positive personal traits that would come to cause him difficulty in later years – as well as the origins of his devotion to veterans, and his views towards conscription that shaped his later positions as a public figure.

source which describes Ralston's early life. This article reconstructs Ralston's early career from these various sources, and highlights his participation in the First World War. As a study of these years reveals, the war had a major impact on Ralston and his family, in the same way it dominated the lives of hundreds of thousands of other Canadians. For Ralston, especially, his experiences tell us much about his many strengths of character, while they also hint at some of the less positive personal traits that would cause him difficulty

in his later years as a public figure. In particular, the war confirmed in him a notion of concern for and service to others, with which Ralston had apparently been raised from an early age, and to which he was unwilling and perhaps even unable to resist responding for the rest of his life.

Little is known about Ralston's life before the First World War. He was born and raised in Amherst, Nova Scotia. His father, Burnett William Ralston, was a well-known businessman, a member of the first town council in 1889, and he later served a term as mayor. He was also the local postmaster for 20 years up to and during the First World War. Ralston's father's family had come to the area from Scotland in the 1820s, and his mother's family had helped to settle Amherst. Both seem to have been devout Baptists. Ralston preserved one account of his paternal great-grandfather walking for several days across Nova Scotia with a friend to attend the Church's Maritime Convention in 1838. His maternal grandfather had also been a prominent deacon in Amherst's First Baptist Church, and for many years his mother was business manager of *Tidings*, the official magazine of the Women's Missionary Aid Society of the Maritime provinces.⁴

As G.A. Rawlyk notes in his study of Maritime Baptists in this period,

local adherents had responded to challenges to the relevance of religion that were created by Charles Darwin's theories on evolution by emphasizing a broader Christian duty to serve society.⁵ Ralston's behaviour later in life, both personally and publicly, indicates that he was raised in this tradition. For example, he was among the first members of the Halifax Rotary Club when it was created in 1913, in the early days of the international organization that still today advocates "Service Above Self." In 1921 he joined James Davidson, a fellow Rotarian from Calgary, on a four-month trip to help spread the movement to Australia and New Zealand. He remained active in Rotary for the rest of his life.⁶ Ralston's private correspondence also hints at his father's hopes (and perhaps pressures) that his oldest son would go on to greater success than he had in public life.⁷ This again seems to have ingrained into Ralston the importance of public service.

"Layton," as his family knew him, was born in 1881, the first of four sons, and was educated at the local Amherst Academy, before studying law at Dalhousie University. He became a partner in his uncle's law firm in Amherst in 1903, and married Nettie McLeod in 1907.⁸ Nettie was also from Amherst, and Ralston had known her since childhood.⁹ The couple's first and only child, Stuart, was born the following year.¹⁰ By the beginning of the 1900s, Layton had entered the political scene, running to replace his uncle as the federal Liberal MP for the local riding of Cumberland in 1908. Unfortunately, this election saw one-third of Nova Scotia's seats shift from Liberal to Conservative control and Layton's bid was



Layton Ralston with his newborn son, Stuart, circa 1908.

Library and Archives Canada (LAC) e10994318

unsuccessful.¹¹ He was later elected as a provincial MLA for the same district in 1911, and re-elected in a wartime campaign in 1916. By 1911, Ralston was considering leaving Amherst for the greater opportunities that seemed to be offered in the Canadian West. But ultimately his sense of duty to his family, his friends and his community influenced his decision to remain in Nova Scotia. In 1912, Ralston moved to the provincial centre of Halifax to join his life-long friend Charles ("Charlie") Burchell, along with the province's former attorney-general and the city's current federal Liberal MP, A.K. Maclean, to form one of the more important law firms in the city.¹²

The Halifax to which Ralston came as a 31-year-old lawyer in 1912 was experiencing a time of transition.

The city had been established to support trade, and as a military garrison and naval base, and had flourished in times of conflict on the north Atlantic, including the US Civil War. Its fortunes began to fade in the late 1800s, along with the rest of the Maritimes, as steam replaced sail with Montreal and New York attracting the most lucrative fast shipping services, and Confederation and the national policy of John A. Macdonald drew economic activity away to central Canada. British rapprochement with the United States to meet increasing challenges in Europe then drew away the Royal Navy in 1904, when the naval yard closed, and the British Army garrison, the last in Canada, soon followed in 1905-6. Yet Halifax began to experience a revival. It became a local industrial centre, and a commercial centre for goods being shipped to and from other parts of Canada.¹³ By 1911, it was the eighth largest city in the country, with a population of 46,619, having grown 14 percent in the previous decade. The total population, including its surrounding county, was 80,257.¹⁴

The rising prosperity of Halifax offered many opportunities for a young and hard-working lawyer such as Ralston. The practice of law in most of Canada at the time was largely conducted with little to no formal training, and was reserved to a relatively small and close-knit group of men. The establishment of the Dalhousie University Law School in 1883, however, was a harbinger of change.¹⁵ As part of the first generation of professionally-trained Dalhousie graduates, Ralston possessed skills and knowledge that were highly sought after by the Halifax business community.¹⁶

By 1914 Ralston was on his way to becoming a prominent figure in Halifax.

Just as Ralston's life was becoming relatively established on the personal front, however, the First World War broke out. He was almost 34 years old and, with a wife and son and no military training or experience, he did not follow the lead of many Canadians and rush off to volunteer. Instead, he went through several agonizing months of doubt as he sought to serve both his family and his community. As he noted in a letter to his parents in November 1914, he could afford to volunteer since doing so would not put other people out of work, or unduly harm his family's financial situation. And he saw that such a decision would provide leadership to others, while at the same time he worried that remaining at home might make him seem afraid to serve. Yet he also sensed that public sentiment was tending to hasten people into service, and, as he put it, "I am not going to let myself be stampeded into wronging Nettie and Stuart for whose comfort and happiness I am responsible, unless the other duty is in truth the greater one."¹⁷

Still, Ralston tried to satisfy both impulses by training in the fall of 1914 as a civilian member of the Dalhousie University contingent of the Canadian Officers' Training Corps.¹⁸ The COTC had been founded just before the war to provide military training to students in Canadian universities. It expanded rapidly after August 1914, and many members of the general public joined contingents.¹⁹ Ralston earned certificates qualifying him for the rank of lieutenant and then captain at the Royal School of Infantry in Halifax in the summer of 1915.²⁰

Ralston's letters in this period also suggest how his sense of duty led him to respond to what he felt were the needs of the community, over those of

himself and his family. Thus he took on many additional responsibilities. In one week in February 1915, for example, he did two hours of military drill with the



Layton's wife Nettie, in one of her few surviving photographs, at the beginning of the 1930s. LAC e10859106

COTC, while serving as chairman of his local church's musical committee, working on two court trials, attending sittings of the Nova Scotia provincial assembly, preparing two separate speeches for the Halifax Rotary Club and the city's Board of Trade, and readying himself to participate in a debate at the local Canadian Club. By chance he found himself arguing against the need for conscription as part of Canada's war effort.²¹

Two events seem to have finally brought Ralston to volunteer for overseas service. The first was the decision of his brother Ivan to volunteer. Ivan was also trained as a lawyer, and had found his way to Montreal a few years before the war to work for the Montreal Trust Company. At 25 years old, he was the youngest of the four Ralston brothers, and had suffered a back injury playing football in his earlier years.²² As a result, both Layton and

his parents were quite concerned when Ivan chose to enlist with the Canadian Grenadier Guards, a Montreal militia regiment, in October 1914. Yet, as Ivan explained in a letter to his father, he was not simply getting caught up in events, but taking part out of the sense of duty instilled by his parents. "If the call comes," he noted, "I feel that you will be proud that I am ready to take my share of the burden."²³ Ivan trained with the Canadian Grenadier Guards over the winter of 1914-1915, and then joined the newly-formed 60th Battalion, which was connected with the Victoria Rifles of Canada, as a captain in command of "B" Company in mid-1915. He went overseas with the battalion in November.²⁴

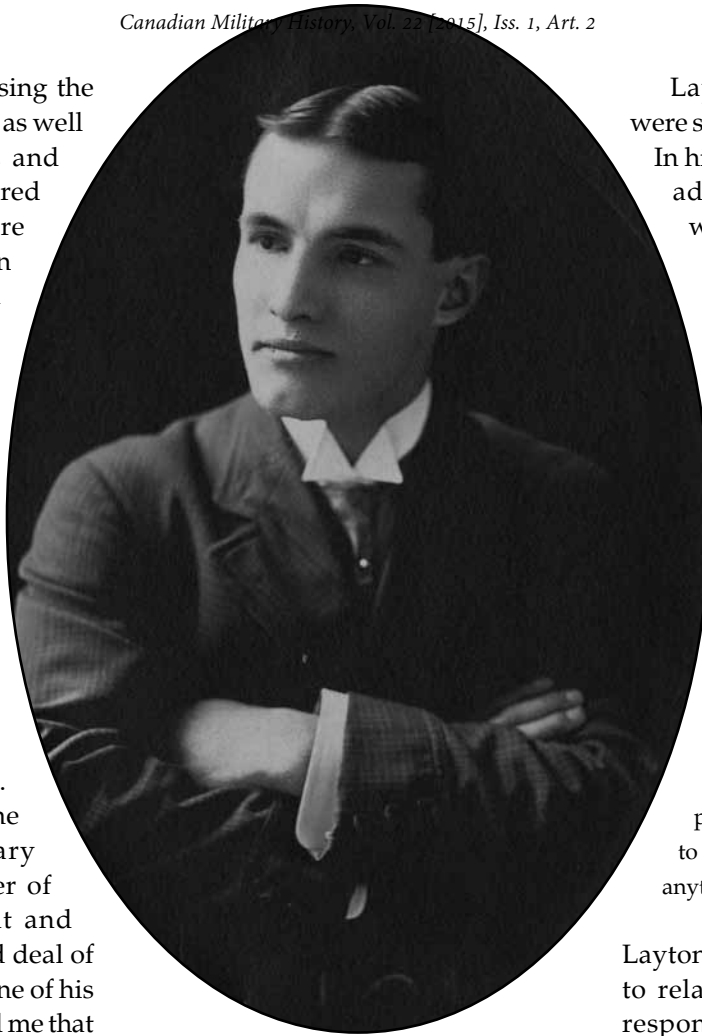
The second development that influenced Ralston's decision to volunteer was a movement by prominent Nova Scotians to raise a Scottish-style highland battalion to represent the province in the burgeoning national military effort. Given his social position in Halifax, Ralston felt that he could no longer justify his decision not to serve. "I am afraid," he wrote to his parents, "that people are beginning to think that those who are in more or less public positions and who should be preaching by example are content to...suggest with much fervour that everybody but themselves should go."²⁵ The 85th Battalion began recruiting in September 1915, and within a few weeks was 200 men over strength. It was so successful that military officials soon authorized supporters to raise a full highland brigade of four battalions.²⁶

Like his brother, Layton became a captain involved in raising and training one of the unit's companies. His organizational skills and capacity for work were recognized early on by his superiors, and by February 1916 he had become the battalion's adjutant, a position second in importance only to the battalion commander. Layton

was responsible for supervising the daily routine within the unit, as well as discipline and training, and ensuring that orders delivered from higher authorities were carried out. As historian Kenneth Radley concludes in describing such duties, the adjutant was essentially the “chief executive officer” of a First World War battalion.²⁷ Layton seemed to be a good choice for the position, and in October 1916 he went overseas in that role with the 85th, almost exactly a year after Ivan had left Canada.²⁸

Ivan led the way in establishing the Ralston family’s reputation in France. As Layton reported after he reached England in January 1917, “I have met a number of officers from his regiment and they all seem to think a good deal of Ivan. One of the chaps was one of his seconds in command and told me that he would go with Ivan anywhere.” Layton later added that “The more I hear of him from outside the prouder I am of him. Everybody has a good word for him and some people have even two good words.”²⁹ In early June 1916, Ivan had been made acting second-in-command of his battalion, an appointment that likely saved his life, as the four remaining officers in his company died during the Battle of Mount Sorrel in the Ypres Salient. Ivan was slightly wounded in the hand by a shell fragment at around the same time. In writing home to his parents, he acknowledged that he had been wounded once before, but not seriously enough to formally report it.³⁰

In August 1916 Ivan was awarded the Military Cross for his actions while helping to halt a German attack on Hill 60 in the same Ypres sector. According to the citation, he was “twice buried by shell fire... [but] refused to leave the front line”



Ivan Ralston before the First World War.
LAC e10994314

for 48 hours until he knew that the position was secure.³¹ He went on leave to England a few weeks later, and King George V pinned the medal on him in a ceremony at Buckingham Palace. Like many other soldiers he downplayed his accomplishments, arguing that he had been singled out simply for enduring what every soldier experienced on the Western Front, and that if he deserved recognition then so did every person in his company.³² In fact, the entire 60th Battalion was specifically recognized by the army commander for its performance at Hill 60, as a result of the actions of Ivan’s company.³³ In early 1917 he was sent to London to take the Senior Officers’ Course, to prepare him to take command of a battalion.³⁴

Layton and his 85th Battalion were sent to France in February 1917. In his first months as the battalion adjutant, he showed signs of worrying excessively over his duties. As Ivan commented in one letter, Layton was “probably as busy as he can be thinking that the whole war depends on him working until midnight instead of a respectable hours [sic].”³⁵ A few weeks later, Ivan added:

He and I have some great arguments as to his duties. He practically runs the whole battalion and seems to think that he is supposed to do so. I told him yesterday that his principal work seemed to be to keep the Colonel from having anything to worry about.³⁶

Layton does seem to have learned to relax and delegate some of his responsibilities over the next few months. After the 85th reached the front lines in France, Ivan noted that

I am glad to say that Layton is taking time to get lots of fun out of things. I was over one night last week and found him watching a baseball game. After the game finished we had a couple of hours chat. Then a few days later he was riding by here to see one of their officers in hospital, and I went with him. I prevailed upon him to stay here for dinner.³⁷

Arguably, Layton’s later success as a battalion commander was at least partly due to his ability to adopt this less anxious attitude towards his duties. In January 1918, when he attended the same Senior Officers’ Course that Ivan had taken a year earlier, he made a point of leaving camp every weekend to visit London and spend time going to shows and sight-seeing with various acquaintances. Although

he took notes on the subjects that were discussed, he recognized that the real lessons of the course came from sharing ideas and experiences with fellow seconds-in-command and commanding officers. As he wrote to his parents, "Practically all [participants] have been to France for periods extending from 3-4 months to 6 months and all with ideas to exchange. The benefit to be derived is as much from the conferences as from the Instructors themselves."³⁸

By then, the 85th Battalion had been fully engaged in operations for months as part of the Canadian Corps. When the unit first arrived in France³⁹ it was intended to replace the 73rd Battalion, as part of a plan to reduce the number of units from Montreal in the front lines.⁴⁰ But this could not be done immediately. During the Battle of Vimy Ridge in April 1917, the 85th was attached to

4th Canadian Division as a reserve battalion, to carry out various support duties. Other Canadian units fell just short of capturing some of their final objectives during the first few hours of the attack on 9 April, and the 85th was ordered to complete the task by attacking the right flank of Hill 145. They did so against heavy opposition, capturing the height where the Vimy Memorial now stands.⁴¹

The Ralston brothers ran into each other as the 85th was mopping up that evening. In Layton's words:

I was there in the dark when an officer leading a small party came up and said who are you. I replied with the number. He came close and saw who I was but I didn't recognize him for ½ a minute. I thought the coincidence was remarkable for we two to be occupying that line side by side neither knowing the other was there.

Ivan looks real well in the dark at least and he sounded very well indeed.⁴²

As Ivan described the event in his own letter, he was helping to consolidate his 60th Battalion's positions when he ran into a party of men and "asked who they were. To my surprise it was Layton who answered...I went up to him but strange to say for some minutes he didn't recognize me." It was not that remarkable for two brothers to run into each other in the Canadian Corps, even while serving in different units. But for these two men to find each other at that particular moment was certainly notable. As Ivan added, "He and I both had our work and I only had a second with him."⁴³

In the following months, the two brothers found themselves serving side by side on several occasions. Layton's 85th Battalion

Lieutenant-Colonel Layton Ralston (right) talks with Captain A.D. Archibald (on crutches) who lost a leg at Cambrai.

Canadian War Museum. 19970013-01.1



became part of the 4th Division's 12th Brigade soon after Vimy, while Ivan eventually found himself in the 87th Battalion of the 11th Brigade, after the 60th Battalion was broken up in May 1917 as part of the reorganization of Montreal units.⁴⁴ They visited each other at their respective headquarters several times,⁴⁵ and managed to schedule leave together in September 1917, during which they visited the Scottish highlands and their family's ancestral home. They also shared Christmas dinner in a dugout at the front that December.⁴⁶

By mid-1917 Layton was establishing a reputation of his own for courage and devotion to duty. According to one staff officer with whom Ivan spoke, Layton would have been recommended for an award after Vimy had he not arrived so recently at the front.⁴⁷ One soldier in the 85th later remembered Layton as being "courageous beyond words," and deliberately risking his own safety in the face of shells and machine gun bullets during operations to help calm his men.⁴⁸ At the end of June he was recommended for the Distinguished Service Order for just such leadership, along with the tactical skills that he showed while supervising an attack on the town of Eleu dit Leauvette during the operations that followed Vimy. After taking over for the wounded second-in-command of the battalion, he was hit in the arm by a stray shell fragment (the first of four battlefield wounds he would suffer during the war), but refused to leave the lines because the 85th was short of officers. Like Ivan, Layton received his DSO personally from King George V.⁴⁹ He was also mentioned in despatches for his work at a critical point during the Battle of Passchendaele when the 85th was facing repeated counterattacks. At one stage their right flank was left open, and to fill the gap Layton organized all of the unit's cooks, orderlies, batmen, clerks, bandmen

and other service personnel, along with the men who had been left out of battle deliberately in case of heavy casualties, into an improvised company to hold the position.⁵⁰

By then, Layton had been confirmed as second-in-command of the 85th Battalion, while Ivan was second-in-command of the 87th. At one point, the two brothers found themselves serving as acting commanders at the same time.⁵¹ In late April 1918 Layton replaced



Ivan in uniform. LAC e10994316

Lieutenant-Colonel A.H. Borden as commanding officer of the 85th Battalion as the latter's health had apparently deteriorated since the unit arrived in France.⁵² At the end of July, Layton proved that even as the battalion's commander he was unwilling to remain behind the lines. When Lieutenant Cyril Evans failed to return from a raid on the night of 29/30 July, Layton led a party, accompanied by another officer and a few men from the battalion's Lewis gun section, to search for him. Under fire from trench mortars, machine guns, rifles and grenades, Layton entered the wire of the German front lines and rescued the wounded man. For his actions, he was recommended for a Victoria Cross. Higher authorities refused to sanction the recommendation, for the very correct reason that as the unit's commanding officer he should not have been risking his life in that way. Yet the incident suggests the strength of Layton's loyalty to his men, and his unwillingness to place his own interests (or in this case even his safety) above what he considered to be his duty to others.⁵³

Meanwhile, for Ivan things did not move along quite so well. As a transfer from another unit, he was left out of consideration for promotion when the commanding officer of the 87th Battalion died of infection from a wound in the spring of 1918.⁵⁴ At the same time, Layton had begun to suggest that Ivan join him in the 85th Battalion. That June, Ivan officially became second-in-command to his brother, despite previously being senior in rank to Layton.⁵⁵ Having two brothers become commanding officer and second-in-command of the same unit was not a common occurrence in the Canadian Corps or in most other forces during the First World War.⁵⁶ Their parents worried about their safety while serving together in the same unit. Yet as Layton told them, the chances of a



Ivan's grave (on left) in Hillside Cemetery near Le Quesnel, France. The woman in the photograph is almost certainly a member of the Duval family, who watched over the graves of Ivan and other Canadian soldiers for many years after 1918. It is believed the photograph was taken by Stuart Ralston during his 1929 visit to France.

least one of the two men surviving would actually be greater because the commander and his deputy were never permitted to participate in the same operation, to guard against the loss or incapacitation of both senior officers: "[Ivan] has worried that you dear people would feel we are too close together if anything happened, but as a matter of fact I rather hope it will prove the other way around... it might prove better than to have us in different battalions where the chances are we would both be in it."⁵⁷

This rationale would have made the tragedy no less painful for the Ralston family when the 85th Battalion participated in the Battle of Amiens a few weeks later, beginning on 8 August 1918. On the second day of the battle, Layton received his second wound of the war when a sniper's bullet went through his right foot and into his left leg and severed his hamstring as he visited the front

lines for the morning stand-to.⁵⁸ He was evacuated, and Ivan took over as commander. The following day Ivan directed an attack on a machine gun position that was holding up the 85th's advance. Leading from the front in the same manner as his brother, Ivan was struck just above the heart by a bullet and killed instantly.⁵⁹ It was a sign of the intensity of combat at Amiens that Ivan's replacement as battalion commander lasted only ten minutes before being evacuated with a mortal wound from another machine gun bullet, and the captain commanding the company in the attack was killed shortly thereafter. One of the infantry sections that captured the position was reduced to three men before even reaching the gun.⁶⁰

In losing Ivan, the Ralstons shared the agony of countless other Canadian families. In some cases, the circumstances were even similar.

Ivan's former brigade commander, Victor Odlum, was second-in-command of the 7th Battalion when its commander was killed in the early stages of the Battle of Ypres in April 1915. He took over, only to watch as his brother, who was a sergeant in the same unit, was reportedly "obliterated by a shell."⁶¹ And H.D.G. Crerar, who served under J.L. Ralston as chief of the general staff and later commanded First Canadian Army in Northwest Europe during the Second World War, lost the younger of his two brothers on active service in the Middle East in 1917. Malcolm Crerar was ten years younger than Harry, almost the same difference as between Ivan and Layton.⁶²

When Layton received the news of his brother's death, he began his letter to his parents "The sun has gone out of life in an instant..." He tried to comfort them by noting that Ivan had died in the way he would

have wanted: in battle, without suffering, and fighting for a cause in which he believed.⁶³ Layton later described from his hospital bed how he had been told that the 85th Battalion honoured Ivan and another fellow officer by departing from procedure to bury them in hand-made individual caskets, and in special graves dug by a burial party led by a sergeant known to the Ralston family. Several officers and over a hundred men from Ivan's former Montreal units attended the service.⁶⁴ Layton worked with his parents over the next few months to design a small memorial plaque for the site, and as soon as he could after the fighting ended in late 1918 he went in search of Ivan's grave to place the marker. There he also met the burgomaster of the local town of Caix, whose family had taken it upon themselves to watch over the graves of Canadians who were buried nearby, and Layton arranged to have them continue to care for Ivan's grave in the future. The Duval and the Ralston families remained in touch right up until Layton's own death in 1948.⁶⁵ In 1929, Layton's son Stuart travelled to Europe, and made a point of deviating from his group's planned itinerary to visit the Duvals and Ivan's burial site.⁶⁶ A year later, Layton took his wife Nettie there, while they were in London for the Naval Disarmament Conference.⁶⁷ When Layton's first grandson was born in 1946, Stuart named him Ivan in honour of the boy's great uncle.⁶⁸

Yet for Layton, as for so many other soldiers from Canada and elsewhere, the war continued. On 1 October he was wounded for a third time, in the face by a piece of shrapnel during the final stages of the Battle of the Canal du Nord. Doctors ultimately decided not to remove



Layton as commanding officer of the 85th Battalion. LAC e10994317

the shrapnel, and Layton returned to his unit with adhesive plaster and a bandage covering the left side of his face. For this and his general conduct in guiding operations he earned a bar to his DSO.⁶⁹ Ralston's experience is a stark reminder of the intensity of combat during the Last Hundred Days offensive against a tenacious and skilful German defence. The Canadian Corps suffered its heaviest casualties of the war during this period.⁷⁰ The 85th lost 105 men killed and 520 wounded during the month of September 1918 (which included two major actions, at the beginning and the end of the month), compared to 27 dead and 115 wounded during the Amiens push in August 1918, 149 dead and 290 wounded for the month of November 1917 at Passchendaele, and 53 dead and 116 wounded at Vimy in April 1917. Another 18 men were killed and 54 wounded in the first eleven days of November 1918.⁷¹

In late October, Layton received his fourth and final wound of the war. This time he was struck, as he described it, in his "right buttock," when a piece of shrapnel,

went in from the right side towards the centre and didn't quite come out [again]. The surgeon gave it the necessary assistance on the operating table 15 minutes after I landed here, so it is only a matter of lying down and sitting down carefully and delicately. I haven't tried the sitting down as yet.⁷²

The wound had to be cleaned daily, and operated on again after it was found to be infected. Layton recorded that he spent another 15 minutes in "refined agony having it cleaned out and packed," and he did not rejoin his unit until after the conclusion of hostilities.⁷³ In the end, Ralston was evacuated in the early stages of major

operations two out of the three times that he was seriously wounded in 1918, which suggests one reason why he was fortunate enough to have survived the Last Hundred Days. In addition, it reminds us of the many soldiers who endured being wounded repeatedly and yet were returned to the lines to face further dangers throughout the war.⁷⁴

His last stay in hospital was longer than the other three times he had been wounded and this likely encouraged Layton to record his thoughts about the other wounded men he saw around him. He did so in a pocket diary that he kept irregularly during the war, and that suggests how much he was moved by what he witnessed. He was acutely sensitive to the fact that many men were suffering more than him. One had lost both legs and one eye, and suffered a shrapnel wound in his arm, but as Ralston put it "seems

cheery." Another had been shot in the neck and was paralyzed from the shoulders down, while a third had had his "Shoulder and arm laid open to the bone front and back halfway down." Layton was unimpressed when a visiting chaplain failed to provide more than the standard obligatory words to comfort such men.⁷⁵

Earlier in the war, Layton had described more than once the difficulty of writing letters home to the families of soldiers who had been wounded or had died under his command. In one case he wrote,

It seems after all so little compared to what they have suffered and I am under the constant fear that people will feel that letters of this kind are more or less formalities. They aren't with us because we feel that these boys are bound up with the regiment

and it is like a break in the family when we lose one.⁷⁶

Ralston was remembered years later for taking the time as commander of the 85th to write personal letters to the families of every member who was killed in action.⁷⁷ This sense of duty – and responsibility for the welfare of those under his authority – perhaps helps to explain the chronic overwork and attention to detail for which he was criticized later in his career. During the inter-war years he was unrelenting in his defence of veterans' rights. As head of the Royal Commission on Pensions and Re-establishment in 1922-1924, he is remembered for having crossed the country to allow veterans to state their case, and preparing a detailed, well-reasoned report that recommended a number of changes.⁷⁸ Comments about his readiness to

do anything he could to aid fellow veterans run throughout his personal correspondence, and seven out of the 179 boxes that make up his papers at Library and Archives Canada are devoted to more than 300 cases where he supported individual men or their families in appeals before the country's pension authorities in the 1930s.⁷⁹ Such feelings also clearly shaped Ralston in his determination to live up to what he saw as a new set of commitments that were made to the next generation of soldiers who went off to fight again in 1939.⁸⁰

One last issue that arises from Ralston's experience of the First World War concerns his views about conscription for overseas service. Certainly, he supported the policies of Prime Minister Robert Borden's Conservative government when it decided to impose compulsory service in 1917, at the cost of a bitter

Officers of the 85th Battalion, Hyon, Belgium (just outside of Mons), 1918. The photo was taken on 21 November when the battalion was billeted in the town. Layton is seated in the middle row, fourth from the right. To his right is Brigadier-General J.H. MacBrien who commanded the 12th Brigade in which the 85th served. MacBrien was later chief of the general staff for much of the 1920s, including a short period during Ralston's first term as minister of National Defence.



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wartime federal election and opening up huge divisions within Canadian society.⁸¹ Ralston did so publicly as well as in private. In a telegram that was featured prominently in the *Halifax Herald* a few days before the election of December 1917, he stated that "I strongly favor the immediate operation of the Military Service Act, and hope Nova Scotia will heavily support candidates pledged to that policy."⁸² Yet Ralston seems not to have blindly supported conscription. The wording of his public declaration suggests that, much as in his decision to enlist in 1915 and the other ways he tried to live his life in service to his community, he may have been influenced by concern about how other people would see his actions. He framed his more private views on conscription in terms similar to those of many soldiers at the time. As he explained to his parents in June 1917, the infantrymen overseas merely wanted someone else to take on some of the burdens of combat, and conscription should be imposed to help show those men who remained at home that they were needed in France. He did add, however, that "I cannot believe that the demonstrations in Quebec represent the sentiments of the people at large but if they do so much the worse for Quebec."⁸³ Furthermore, he openly disagreed with his father when in July the latter echoed the federal Liberals' policy under Wilfrid Laurier that one last effort should be made to pursue voluntary recruiting before bringing in conscription. Layton acknowledged that recruiting had not been handled as well as it could have by the military and political authorities, but argued

COLONEL RALSTON OF NOVA SCOTIA PEACE CONFERENCE

Commander of the 85th Battalion Accompanied Sir Arthur Currie to Paris, When the Canadian General Gave the Peace Delegates a Report of the Progress of Demobilization.

(BY JOHN W. DAFOE.)

PARIS, Feb. 14—There has been a tentative agreement between the Allies and German representatives as to furnishing food to Germany, but this arrangement is dependent upon the acceptance by the Germans of the armistice terms to be submitted. Germany wants immediately thirty thousand tons of porkstuffs and a quarter of a million cases of condensed milk. Following this there will be a second order for two hundred thousand tons of wheat, and twenty-five thousand tons of pork products. In addition, Germany will require between March and August four hundred thousand tons of wheat, with large quantities of other grains, maize and forage. Germany's urgent food requirements is an inducement which will compel her peaceful acceptance of the new terms to be submitted.

Canada has a direct commercial interest in the impending settlement, because there is an understanding that twenty per cent. of the meat products shipped to Germany from the reserves in Great Britain are to be Canadian.

Thus the expected submission by Germany as to the conditions will mean the shipment in a couple of months of the bacon surplus which has accumulated in Canada.

COLONEL RALSTON AT CONFERENCE.

Sir Arthur Currie was petitioned by representatives of the soldiers to appoint to the Canadian body in attendance at the peace gathering some person specially concerned with their interests and, in reply, the promise was given that an appointment satisfactory them would be made. The choice of Sir Arthur Currie



COL. J. L. RALSTON.

was the fulfillment of this plan, but his duties as Commander of the Canadian Forces in the field had prevented his attendance in Paris until yesterday.

Sir Arthur, accompanied by Colonel Ralston, Commander of the 85th Battalion, a Nova Scotia officer, who has distinguished himself in the war attended Thursday's meeting of the conference and gave a report of the progress of demobilization, which is proceeding according to plan, with the prospect that there will be a speeding-up of the time table originally fixed.

that because conscription was now necessary it should be proceeded with.⁸⁴ When his father continued the debate in later correspondence, Ralston finally stated in a another

letter in September that "I guess we aren't far apart after all only that what father suggests is what should have been done long ago,... whatever will win the war the quickest is the immediate want."⁸⁵ Thus, in the same way as for many English-Canadian Liberals who eventually broke with Laurier over the issue in the fall of 1917, Ralston came to see conscription as necessary more in the context of the events of the time than out of a deep sense of personal conviction.

Ralston seems to have learned much from his experiences in the years afterward. He became much more familiar with Quebec, moving to Montreal in 1930 to join a legal practice in the city, and spent the next nine years becoming a prominent corporate lawyer and getting to know most of the province's major political and business leaders, both English and French. For a while he even took French lessons.⁸⁶ During the Second World War he seemed to be more sensitive to the views of Quebecers. He supported a major effort to improve the position of francophones within the Canadian military beginning in April 1941 as a way to break down some of the feelings against voluntary enlistment. He pressed military leaders for progress on the file throughout 1941 and into 1942.⁸⁷ Despite the assumptions that are sometimes made about Ralston's personal feelings about conscription, for most of the Second World War he remained willing to limit compulsory service to home

defence for as long as the need was met for men overseas. Only in late 1944 when it seemed that all other options had been exhausted did he become convinced that there was

no longer any choice but to compel conscripts to serve overseas. Yet again, he was apparently influenced more by what he felt were the desires of the majority of the public, and the principle of living up to the commitments that he felt that he and other Cabinet ministers had made to Canadian soldiers earlier in the war, than by personal loyalty to the idea or calculations of the political implications of such a policy.⁸⁸

After the fighting came to an end in November 1918, the 85th Battalion found itself billeted in Belgium. Ralston made a point of commemorating the second anniversary of the unit's arrival in France by holding a memorial parade in February 1919, where the names of all 624 men of the unit who had been killed in action or had died of their battle wounds were read.⁸⁹ His qualities as a senior commander were recognized when he was assigned to serve briefly as acting brigade commander.⁹⁰ Political representatives from Nova Scotia had actually been pressing since that summer to have him promoted to brigadier, as one of the most obviously talented candidates to help increase the presence of qualified senior officers from the Maritimes in the Canadian Corps.⁹¹

Before leaving Europe Ralston joined Lieutenant-General Arthur Currie as the latter's guest on a visit to the Paris Peace Conference, where he was able to gain entrance to the Plenary Session. While on a stopover at Lens, he walked the battleground with Currie, and in Paris he met Field Marshal Sir Douglas Haig. But he expressed embarrassment when his parents reported the trip to a local newspaper and the resulting story made it appear as if he had accompanied Currie as an official advisor. He had shown similar discomfort at press coverage of his awards for bravery a month earlier.⁹² Ralston was modest,

however. At the end of the war he was again mentioned in despatches and awarded the CMG, in both cases for his performance generally over the past two years.⁹³

In April 1919, Ralston was appointed to sit as part of the court-martial that followed the Kinmel Park riots by Canadian troops who were frustrated at the slow pace of their demobilization. Shortly afterwards his own unit was selected to return home, and he left to rejoin the 85th. In early June 1919, the battalion arrived back in Nova Scotia, with Ralston at its head.⁹⁴

Ralston never lost the sense of service that his early life instilled into him, and that the First World War had sharpened. As a result, when Mackenzie King asked him to join the Liberal government in the mid-1920s, despite reservations about what it would do to his private life and his family Ralston agreed.⁹⁵ He was unable to resist similar calls that kept him at the centre of federal politics for much of the next 20 years, until his sense of duty to Canadians and to the soldiers under his authority finally led to his dismissal as minister of National Defence at the height of the debate over conscription in November 1944.

Notes

For helping to strengthen this paper I would like to thank the anonymous reviewer for *Canadian Military History*, as well as participants in the session where it was first presented at the annual Military History Colloquium of the Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies in May 2011. I am also grateful to Laurentian University for aiding my research with a Start-Up Grant for new faculty.

1. For an introduction to the issue of conscription during the war, and two contrasting points of view on the political events that led to Ralston's resignation, see J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), pp.133-238, and C.P. Stacey, *Arms, Men, and Governments: The War*

Policies of Canada, 1939-1945 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1970), pp.397-482.

2. On Ralston's role as head of the Royal Commission on Pensions and Re-establishment, see Desmond Morton and Glenn Wright, *Winning the Second Battle: Canadian Veterans and the Return to Civilian Life, 1915-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), pp.166-77. James Eayrs and Stephen J. Harris provide overviews of the position of the Canadian military in the 1920s and Ralston's role as its minister, in James Eayrs, *In Defence of Canada: From the Great War to the Great Depression* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1964), and Stephen J. Harris, *Canadian Brass: The Making of a Professional Army, 1860-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988). J.L. Granatstein deals with Ralston's role as minister of finance and later minister of National Defence in the Second World War in *Canada's War: The Politics of the Mackenzie King Government, 1939-1945* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1975).
3. These letters are available in Library and Archives Canada [LAC], MG 27, III, B11, Papers of James Layton Ralston [Ralston Papers], vol.2, "Correspondence, Ivan S. Ralston to parents 1914-18," and "Correspondence, J. Layton Ralston to parents 1914-19." For ease of citation, letters from these two files are referred to in the rest of this article as "Ivan to parents" or "Layton to parents" (and in Ivan's case, a few letters were also written solely to his father or mother, or to "Mack" – Ivan's and Layton's brother, T. Mackenzie Ralston).
4. Ralston Papers, various newspaper clippings in vol.149, "Family – JLR, Ralston, Mrs. B.W., re funeral – correspondence, clippings and lists of donors of flowers and cards, Aug[.] 1942," as well as vol.1, "Diaries of William Ralston, 1826 and 1838," vol.2, "Correspondence, Ivan S. Ralston to parents 1914-18," typed transcript of newspaper clipping entitled "Montreal Officer Killed at Front," and vol.24, "L' Miscellaneous 1935-36," J.L. Ralston to Miss Esther I. Layton, 8 January 1936. According to the 1881 Census, Layton's father was a 25-year-old merchant at the time of Layton's birth in 1881. Ten years later, he was listed as a "Propr[ieto]r of Grocery" (searches for Ralston, B.W., Province of Nova Scotia, Census District of Cumberland, Sub-District of Amherst, LAC, Census of Canada, 1881, <www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/census-1881/001049-119.01-e.php>, and Census of Canada, 1891, <www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/census-1891/001081-100.01-e.php>, both accessed 22 October 2011). On Ralston's family history, see also John Robinson Campbell, "James Layton Ralston and Manpower for the Canadian Army" (M.A. thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1980), pp.6-7. The few pages at the beginning of Campbell's thesis are currently the most

- detailed study available on Ralston's early life and career.
5. G.A. Rawlyk, *Champions of the Truth: Fundamentalism, Modernism, and the Maritime Baptists* (Montreal and Kingston: Centre for Canadian Studies of Mount Allison University/McGill-Queen's University Press, 1990), pp.33-37. I would like to thank my colleague, Dr. Todd Webb, for pointing me to this source.
 6. The Halifax Rotary Club was founded by Ralston's close friend and law partner Charles Burchell. Information related to Ralston's role in Rotary was obtained through Rotary Global History Fellowship website <www.rghf.org>, and the general Rotary website (particularly <www.rotary.org/en/mediaandnews/morepublications/rotarycanada/pages/bigjim.aspx>, both accessed 25 October 2011. Also two e-mails to the author from Denise Gaffney, Archives Assistant, History and Archives Department, Rotary International (History@rotary.org), both 28 March 2012. Ralston recorded the details of his 1921 trip in three unlabelled pocket diaries for that year that can be found in vol.1 of his Papers.
 7. In addition to various hints that appear in the First World War correspondence of both Layton and Ivan, cited in note 3 above, their father Burnett described his hopes for both men very openly in Ralston Papers, vol.30, "Ralston, J.L. Correspondence. Personal. 1942-46," B.W. Ralston to "Mack & Mayme" (Burnett's second son, T. Mackenzie, and his daughter-in-law), 9 May 1910.
 8. All information on Ralston's early career that is not cited separately in this paragraph is drawn from LAC, Record Group [RG] 24, Records of the Department of National Defence, vol.1813, File 4-15E, copy of article by "J.F.C." on "The Minister of National Defence," *Canadian Defence Quarterly*, January 1927, p.134, as well as Campbell, pp.7-9, B.M. Greene, ed., *Who's Who in Canada, 1940-41* (Toronto: International Press Limited, 1941), p.ix, and various items in Ralston Papers, vol.30, "Ralston, J.L. Biographical Data 1944-46."
 9. Ralston Papers, vol.2, "Correspondence J.L. Ralston to son, Stuart, 1917," Layton to Stuart, n.d. [late January 1917].
 10. Stuart's birth date is given as 24 July 1908 in Ralston Papers, vol.152, "Family – SBR, Ralston, J. Layton, correspondence (old) and clippings collected by Stuart B. Ralston, 1932, 1936-1940, 1945-1947," Stuart B. Ralston to Arthur L. Barnstead, Provincial Secretary, Province of Nova Scotia, 15 August 1940.
 11. After having swept all of the province's 18 seats with 52.9 percent of the vote in 1904, the Liberals retained 51.0 percent in 1908 but lost six seats, in an election in which despite holding their own across the country the Liberals began to suffer some of the consequences of having been in power for more than a decade. See in particular J. Murray Beck, *Pendulum of Power: Canada's Federal Elections* (Scarborough: Prentice-Hall of Canada, 1968), pp.106-19, as well as Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, vol.2, *Murray-Buchanan, 1896-1988* (Tantallon, NS: Four East Publications, 1988), pp.37-38, Oscar Douglas Skelton, *Life and Letters of Sir Wilfrid Laurier*, vol.II, 1896-1919, edited and abridged by David M.L. Farr (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1965), pp.89 and 106-7, and Robert Craig Brown, *Robert Laird Borden: A Biography*, vol.I, 1854-1914 (Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1975), pp.136-39.
 12. Campbell, pp.8-9. For examples of Ralston's father's views that helped convince him to remain in Nova Scotia rather than move to Western Canada, see the letter cited in note 7, above, and for Burchell's similar arguments see Ralston Papers, vol.16, "'B' Miscellaneous 1935-45 (2)," Burchell to Ralston, 10 November 1911. Further information on Burchell can be found in C.W. Parker, ed., *Who's Who and Why*, vol.5, 1914 (Toronto: International Press, 1914), p.147, and on Maclean see Beck, *Politics of Nova Scotia*, pp.40-41 and 50.
 13. On Halifax's history, and especially its development in this period, see Thomas H. Raddall, *Halifax: Warden of the North*, rev. ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), pp.204-5, 216-17, and 230-34, as well as Brown, pp.15-16.
 14. *Fifth Census of Canada*, vol.I, *Areas and Population by Provinces, Districts and Subdistricts* (Ottawa: King's Printer, 1912), pp.66 and 554.
 15. For example, as late as 1881 there were still only 245 barristers in all of Nova Scotia (Brown, p.17). On the early training and experiences of two distinguished members of the previous generation of Halifax lawyers, see P.B. Waite, *The Man from Halifax: Sir John Thompson, Prime Minister* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), especially pp.16-18, 29-30, and 50-58, as well as Brown, pp.11-12 and 17-27. On the founding of the Dalhousie University Law School, see also Waite, *Thompson*, pp.122-24, and Waite, *The Lives of Dalhousie University*, vol.1, 1818-1925: *Lord Dalhousie's College* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994), pp.137-41.
 16. Brown notes the importance of lawyers to companies operating in newly industrializing Halifax on p.22.
 17. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 29 November 1914.
 18. It is not clear exactly when Ralston took up this training, as the first letter to his parents in his correspondence in vol.2 of his papers is dated 29 November 1914, and in it he refers to being involved in the COTC. Ralston also mentioned his training in letters of 24 January, 21 March, and 18 July 1915.
 19. For further information on the founding of the COTC and its expansion during the First World War, see Daniel Thomas Byers, "The Canadian Officers' Training Corps: Support for Military Training in the Universities of Canada, 1908-1935" (M.A. Thesis, Wilfrid Laurier University, 1993), pp.1-92.
 20. These certificates are located in Ralston Papers, vol.2, "J.L. Ralston, Certificates of Military Instruction, 1915-16."
 21. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 28 February 1915.
 22. According to Ivan's Attestation Paper, his birthdate was 2 February 1890 (LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, box 8079, file 34, "Ralston, Ivan Steele" – also available by searching online at <www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/databases/cef/001042-100.01-e.php>. Other information on Ivan's early life is available in Ralston Papers, vol.2, "Correspondence, Ivan S. Ralston to parents 1914-18," excerpts from various newspapers on Ivan's career and his death in 1918, all located at end of file.
 23. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to father, 22 October 1914.
 24. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to mother, 1 and 16 June, 4 July, 2 August, and 23 November 1915, and excerpts from various newspapers at end of file. Also G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1964), p.550.
 25. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 18 July 1915.
 26. Ralston Papers, vol.20, "'D' Miscellaneous 1939-48," summary history of "The Nova Scotia Highland Brigade," enclosed with letter, Colonel A. Fortesque Duguid, Historian C.E.F., to J.L. Ralston, 26 April 1946. Also M. Stuart Hunt, *Nova Scotia's Part in the Great War* (Halifax: The Nova Scotia Veteran Publishing Co., Limited, 1920), pp.99 and 122, and Lieutenant-Colonel Joseph Hayes, *The Eighty-Fifth in France and Flanders* (Halifax: Royal Print & Litho Limited, 1920), pp.22-26.
 27. Kenneth Radley, *We Lead, Others Follow: First Canadian Division 1914-1918* (St. Catharines: Vanwell, 2006), p.189.
 28. On Layton's appointment as adjutant, and the 85th's move overseas, see Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 14 and 28 November 1915, and 5 and 23 October 1916, as well as Hayes, p.30. Ralston's appointment as adjutant is noted in "The Minister of National Defence," p.134.
 29. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 25 January and 8 June 1917.
 30. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to mother, 10 May, and Ivan to parents, 11 June 1916.
 31. David K. Riddle and Donald G. Mitchell, compilers, *The Military Cross to the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1915-1921* (Winnipeg: The Kirkby-Marlton Press, 1991), p.280. Also Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to mother, 6 September 1916, and various newspaper excerpts at end of file.
 32. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to mother, 6 September, and Ivan to parents, 7, 21, and 27 October 1916. Also unattributed newspaper excerpt at end of file, titled "Ivan Ralston Will Get Cross From The King." Desmond Morton and Tim Cook

- both note how other Canadian soldiers downplayed awards in a similar way, in Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), p.247, and Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918* (Toronto: Viking Canada, 2008), p.213.
33. Nicholson, p.154.
 34. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to parents, 8 January 1917.
 35. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to parents, 11 November 1916.
 36. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to parents, 15 January 1917.
 37. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to parents, 22 July 1917.
 38. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 14 January 1918. On Ralston's trips to London and other activities during his course, see also vol.1, large purple pocket diary for 1918 (hereafter cited as "Diary"), various entries for January to March 1918.
 39. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 5 and 23 October 1916, and 5 and 11 February 1917, and LAC, RG 9, Series III, vol.4944, War Diary, 85th Canadian Battalion (hereafter "War Diary, 85th Battalion"), 4-15 February 1917. Also Hunt, pp.99-101, and Hayes, pp.29-34.
 40. Patrick H. Brennan describes the reduction of Montreal battalions in 1917 in detail in a paper titled "Giving New Brunswick its Due (at Last): The Geographical Re-assignment of Infantry Battalions in the Canadian Corps during 1917-1918," 23rd Military History Colloquium, Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, London, Ontario, 5 May 2012; Nicholson, p.225, and Hayes, p.66, also discuss it briefly.
 41. For the story of the 85th Battalion and the taking of Hill 145, see Hunt, pp.102-5, Hayes, pp.41 and 46-54, Nicholson, pp.259-60, Cook, pp.133-36, and Pierre Berton, *Vimy* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), pp.261-74.
 42. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 15 April 1917.
 43. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to parents, 15 April 1917. The incident is also described in Hayes, p.57.
 44. These developments are traced in Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to parents, 30 January, 5 and 12 February, 12 March, 1 and 22 April, 20 May, and 27 June; Ivan to Mack, 12 May; Ivan to mother, 10 June; and Layton to parents, 25 January, 22 April, 19 May, and 24 June 1917.
 45. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to parents, 22 April, 20 May, and 10 and 22 July, Ivan to mother, 10 June, and Layton to parents, 22 April, 8 June, and 22 July 1917. Also vol.2, "Correspondence J.L. Ralston to son, Stuart, 1917," Layton to Stuart, 16 and 19 May 1917.
 46. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to parents, 16 and 23 September, and 24 December, and Layton to parents, 17 and 23 September 1917.
 47. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to Mack, 12 May 1917.
 48. RG 41, Records of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, transcripts for the 1964-65 radio show "In Flanders' Fields," vol.16, "85th Battalion," tape no.2, pp.3-4. Also quoted in Cook, p.522, and Patrick H. Brennan, "Good Men for a Hard Job: Infantry Battalion Commanders in the Canadian Expeditionary Force," *Canadian Army Journal* 9, no.1, (Spring 2006), p.22. I am indebted to Brennan's article for leading me to the references to Ralston in the RG 41 transcripts, where a second former soldier also echoed the comments about Ralston leading from the front and regularly risking enemy fire in tape no.3, p.15.
 49. On Ralston's DSO, see David K. Riddle and Donald G. Mitchell, compilers, *The Distinguished Service Order to the Canadian Expeditionary Force and Canadians in the Royal Naval Air Service, Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force, 1915-1920* (Winnipeg: The Kirkby-Marlton Press, 1991), p.88, as well as "The Minister of National Defence," pp.134-35, Hayes, pp.76-77, Nicholson, p.282, and Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 1 July, 17 August and 23 September, and Ivan to parents, 3 and 10 July, 20 August, and 23 September 1917.
 50. "The Minister of National Defence," p.135, Hayes, pp.92-95, and Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 6 January 1918.
 51. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 22 July and 2 and 17 August, Ivan to parents, 22 July and 1 and 20 August, and untitled newspaper excerpt at end of file from the *Chronicle* [Halifax], 7 September 1917.
 52. War Diary, 85th Battalion, 1, 3, 25, and 26 April, and 13 May; Ralston Papers, vol.1, Diary, 1, 3, and 25 April, and 3 May; and vol.2, Layton to parents, 26 April, and Ivan to parents, 28 April 1918. Also "The Minister of National Defence," p.135, and Hayes, p.112.
 53. Unfortunately, Evans died of his wounds a few days later. For various aspects of the story see War Diary, 85th Battalion, 29 July 1918; RG 41, vol.16, "85th Battalion," tape no.3, p.17, and tape no.5, p.16; "The Minister of National Defence," pp.135-36; and Hayes, pp.116 and 252.
 54. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Ivan to parents, 12 and 19 May 1918.
 55. Ralston Papers, vol.1, Diary, various entries, 14 May to 6 June; vol.2, Ivan to parents, 28 May and 9 June, and Layton to parents, 2 and 10 June; War Diary, 85th Battalion, 6 June 1918; and Hayes, p.114.
 56. As one local newspaper reporter in the two men's hometown of Amherst described it, the situation was "Unique in the military history of Canada, possibly of the British Empire." Ralston Papers, vol.2, "Correspondence, Ivan S. Ralston to parents 1914-18," unattributed newspaper excerpt entitled "One Brother Killed, The Other Wounded".
 57. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 2 June 1918.
 58. Ralston Papers, vol.1, Diary, 9 August, and vol.2, Layton to parents, 11 August 1918.
 59. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 11 August P.M. (Ralston added the "P.M." to indicate that this was the second letter he had written that day – the first is cited in the previous endnote). Also letter of 18 August 1918, and Hayes, p.122.
 60. War Diary, 85th Battalion, Appendix "L.C.," August 1918, "Report on [Operation] 'L[andoverry]. C[astle.] Operations between 8th August, 1918 and 13th August, 1918," p.2; RG 41, vol.16, "85th Battalion," tape no.3, p.8; and Hayes, p.122.
 61. Geoff Jackson, "Victor Odlum's Career as a Battalion Commander in the Great War," 22nd Military History Colloquium, Laurier Centre for Military Strategic and Disarmament Studies, Waterloo, Ontario, 7 May 2011.
 62. Malcolm died in an airplane crash while serving in the Royal Flying Corps in Palestine, while Harry rose to senior staff positions as an artillery officer in the Canadian Expeditionary Force in France during the war. Paul Dickson, *A Thoroughly Canadian General: A Biography of General H.D.G. Crerar* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), especially pp.8 and 55-56.
 63. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 11 August P.M. 1918.
 64. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 25 August and 22 September 1918.
 65. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 15 September, 13 and 21 October, and 9 and 15 December 1918, as well as 24 March, 6 April, another undated letter later in April, and 11 May 1919. For later references to the Duvals, see Ralston Papers, vol.20, "'D' Miscellaneous 1934-38," handwritten note recording information from a visit to them in France on 4 January 1938, and vol.20, "'D' Miscellaneous 1939-48," various correspondence with the "Délignières" family (Duval's granddaughter), 16 February 1946 to 5 May 1948.
 66. Ralston Papers, vol.3, "Corres[pondence]. J.L. Ralston to son, Stuart. 1929," Layton to Stuart, 28 April and 25 June 1929.
 67. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, and Nettie to Layton's parents, both 18 February 1930.
 68. Ivan's birth on 27 May and Stuart's naming him after his great uncle are recorded in Ralston Papers, vol.25, "'Mac' and 'Mc' Miscellaneous. Corres[pondence]. 1940-47," J.L. Ralston to Ernest MacQuarrie, 12 June 1946, and vol.20, "'D' Miscellaneous 1939-48," J.L. Ralston to Robert Doncaster, 27 December 1946.
 69. War Diary, 85th Battalion, 2 October; Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 6 and 13 October 1918; "The Minister of National Defence," p.136; Hayes, p.163; and Riddle and Mitchell, *The Distinguished Service Order*, p.87.

70. See in particular Shane B. Schreiber, *Shock Army of the British Empire: The Canadian Corps in the Last 100 Days of the Great War* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger, 1997), pp.131-32, and Cook, p.552.
71. War Diary, 85th Battalion: Appendix "A," April 1917; Appendix 9, August 1918; unnumbered appendix listing casualties, September 1918; and Appendix XII, "Casualties for Month of November, 1918," November 1918. Also Hayes, p.103.
72. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 27 October (source of quotation) and 3 November, as well as War Diary, 85th Battalion, 24 October 1918, and Hayes, p.184.
73. Ralston Papers, vol.1, Diary, 28 October (source of quotation), as well as War Diary, 85th Battalion, 19 November 1918, and Hayes, p.225.
74. For example, out of a group of 52 men from Kitchener, Ontario who were studied by Mike Wert, 46 reached the front lines at some point during the war, 10 were killed or died of wounds, and 31 were wounded or fell victim to disease at least once. At least 5 were wounded more than once (and in one case, three times) by enemy fire, and only 5 survived the war unscathed. See "From Enlistment to the Grave: The Impact of the First World War on 52 Canadian Soldiers," *Canadian Military History* 9, no.2, (Spring 2000), pp.44-46 and 54-55.
75. Ralston Papers, vol.1, Diary, various entries, 24 October to 2 November 1918 (quotations are from 27 and 30 October).
76. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 14 January 1918. Ralston also made similar comments in letters of 11 November 1917 and 7 April 1918.
77. RG 41, vol.16, "85th Battalion," tape no.2, p.3, and Brennan, "Good Men for a Hard Job," p.24.
78. Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, pp.166-177.
79. These files are listed in LAC, Finding Aid no.533, pp.9-20.
80. For example, see R. MacGregor Dawson, *The Conscription Crisis of 1944* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961), pp.29-31.
81. For an overview of the events see Granatstein and Hitsman, pp.60-99.
82. "From the Trenches Major Ralston APPEALS To Nova Scotians At Home," *Halifax Herald*, 14 December 1917, p.3. Campbell, pp.13-14, also discusses the telegram, as well as Ralston's views towards conscription during the First World War more generally.
83. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 8 June 1917. For conclusions by historians on the similar views of other Canadian soldiers, see Cook, pp.367-71, who puts the election into the larger context of the men having just completed fighting the horrific and costly Battle of Passchendaele, as well as Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, pp.244-45, Granatstein and Hitsman, p.80, A.M. Willms, "Conscription 1917: A Brief for the Defence," *Canadian Historical Review* 37, no.4, (December 1956), reprinted in Carl Berger, ed., *Conscription 1917* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, n.d.), p.11, A.M.J. Hyatt, "Arthur Currie and Conscription: A Soldier's View," *Canadian Historical Review* 50, no.3, September 1969, p.286, and Morton, "Polling the soldier vote: the overseas campaign in the Canadian general election of 1917," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 10, no.4, (November 1975), pp.49-50.
84. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 15 and 22 July 1917.
85. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 10 September 1917.
86. Ralston Papers, vol.1, large black diaries for 1930 and 1931, and particularly entries from 25 September 1930 to 6 November 1931. For mention of Ralston's French lessons, see especially 10 November 1930 and 26 February 1931.
87. See Ralston Papers, vol.46, files titled "French-Canadians, Gen. (Secret)" and "French Representation in the Army, Gen. (Secret)." Granatstein and Hitsman, pp.160-61, come to different conclusions about Ralston's views towards these same initiatives.
88. This conclusion comes out of my doctoral thesis on the Army's administration of conscription in the Second World War, which is currently being revised for possible publication. See Byers, "Mobilizing Canada: The National Resources Mobilization Act, the Department of National Defence, and Compulsory Military Service in Canada, 1940-1945" (Ph.D. thesis, McGill University, 2001), particularly Chapters 4-5. The bulk of Campbell's M.A. thesis also discusses Ralston's feelings and actions related to conscription, from 1939 to 1942, and comes to somewhat similar overall conclusions. On Ralston's actions during the 1944 conscription crisis, see also Granatstein and Hitsman, pp.210-21, Stacey, pp.440-60, and Dawson, pp.14-54.
89. War Diary, 85th Battalion, 9-10 February 1919, and Appendix 1, February 1919: "Table of Officers and Other Ranks killed and died of wounds from February 10th. [sic] 1917 till February 10th. [sic] 1919". Also Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 1 and 14 February 1919, and Hayes, pp.232-33.
90. War Diary, 85th Battalion, 2 and 15 March; Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 9 March 1919; "The Minister of National Defence," p.137; and Hayes, pp.233-34.
91. Brennan, "Giving New Brunswick its Due."
92. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, 1 and 14 February and 18 March 1919.
93. The CMG was the Companion to the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George, used to honour people who render extraordinary or important non-military service in a foreign country.
94. Ralston Papers, vol.2, Layton to parents, April (no specific date on letter), War Diary, 85th Battalion, 10 and 18 April 1919, "The Minister of National Defence," p.137, and Hayes, pp.236-37 and 239-42. On the riots in Kimmel Park and elsewhere, see also Desmond Morton, "Kicking and Complaining': Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-19," *Canadian Historical Review*, 61, no.3, (September 1980), pp.334-60.
95. Campbell, pp.19-23, and H. Blair Neatby, *William Lyon Mackenzie King, 1924-1932: The Lonely Heights* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), pp.165-66.

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From the Editor-in-Chief

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a Canadian who married a British Army doctor, and accompanied him on his posting to Singapore in 1940. She joined the Australian Red Cross, and continued as a Red Cross representative when she was interned at Changi Jail, in appalling conditions, following the Japanese conquest of the island in 1942. To escape from the wretched conditions, the prisoners fantasized aloud about their favourite meals, and Mulvany collected the recipes which she published after the war to raise funds for the benefit of former prisoners who were still hospitalized as a result of their experiences.

In the CWM section Laura Brandon has produced another in a now sadly long list of obituaries marking the passing of Canadian war artists, in this case Bruno Bobak. It is an inspiring story. An enlisted man with no formal artistic training but abundant talent, he won recognition in a Canadian Army art competition. He was able to take officer training and, on obtaining his commission, became an official war artist, with an assignment to the 4th Canadian Armoured Division during its operations in Northwest Europe in 1944-1945.

Roger Sarty
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