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A Portrait of Raymond Brutinel as a Young Man (Part II)

The Future Canadian Corps Machine Gun Commander as a Business Entrepreneur in the Canadian West, 1908–1914

CAMERON PULSIFER

Abstract: The following carries on from an article on Brutinel's prewar life in Edmonton, Alberta that appeared in the previous issue of Canadian Military History. That account dealt with his arrival in Edmonton from France, the reasons for his immigration, and his adaptation to life in the newly-created Alberta capital. This included an initial involvement with the Edmonton French community, his editorship of the French language Le Courrier de l'Ouest, and his eventual breaking away from these pursuits into a career of business entrepreneurship. The following is specifically concerned with this latter phase of his career, in which, at the height of the 'Laurier boom,' he enjoyed great success. Included are his role as an agent for a syndicate of wealthy Montreal capitalists, his work as an explorer for coal deposits, and his promotion of numerous community development schemes, intended both to assist with community improvement and to earn money for his Montreal backers. These are recounted to clarify for the first time the kinds of activities that preoccupied Brutinel before the war and to help to illustrate his experiences and the capacities he developed and subsequently brought to his service as an officer with the Canadian Corps on the Western Front.

RAYMOND BRUTINEL is well known today as the founder of the two Canadian Motor Machine Gun Brigades of the First World War, and, from April 1917 to the end of the war, as commander of the Canadian Machine Gun Corps. In these positions he initiated innovative and much-emulated techniques in armoured mobile

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warfare and in the tactical use of the machine gun. Trusted and respected by Lieutenant Generals Sir Julian Byng and Sir Arthur Currie, the corps' two most esteemed commanders, he played a significant role in determining the manner that the Canadian Corps waged war. Little has been known about his life before he joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), the kinds of experiences he had, the challenges he faced, and the influences he encountered that may, in retrospect, provide insight not only into the nature of the young man, but also that of the future machine gun commander.

A previous article bearing the same introductory title discussed the future machine gun commander's coming to Edmonton from France and his career as editor of the city's French language weekly newspaper, *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*. Based largely on his writings for *Le Courrier*, it delineated his positions relating to a host of divisive political, social, and religious issues that disturbed his native country and that cumulatively influenced his decision to come to Canada. In providing insight into his stance on these issues, we obtained invaluable and hitherto unrevealed insight into the young man's personality and character, moral qualities, and political leanings at this formative period of his life. In 1908, however, he left the editorship of *Le Courrier* to immerse himself in the then-booming western Canadian business scene.

The following will be chiefly concerned with an examination of this side of his life in Edmonton, again based upon reports in the *Courrier*, other Edmonton newspapers, and a number of well-executed local histories. New light will be shed on the specific transactions in which he was involved, the qualities that he brought to the world of business, the strengths and weaknesses that he exhibited, the successes that he attained, and the failures that he no doubt regretted. These were all important life experiences whose influences Brutinel would have carried with him into his roles as Motor Machine Gun Brigade and overall Canadian Machine Gun Corps commander. It will also serve to illuminate the undertakings of at least this one ambitious business entrepreneur during this period when the Canadian economy, and that of the west in particular, was experiencing an unaccustomed period of apparently unbounded economic boom.

Brutinel's departure from *Le Courrier* in February 1908 was, it reported, "for reasons of too much other work."¹ The paper did

1 *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, (hereafter *Courrier*), 5 May, 8.

not specify what this work was, but in truth, over the past year or so Brutinel's interests had been shifting toward business. This entailed taking advantage of the numerous opportunities for personal enrichment that that seemed to present themselves within the booming local economy of the time. Initially, his efforts in this direction had been in association with fellow French immigrants, who were endeavouring to obtain the necessary capital resources from their home country. From the summer of 1907 on, however, Brutinel was increasingly associating himself with a group of wealthy Anglo-Canadian capitalists, all of whom were major investors in the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway (GTP), which was about to be pushed through Edmonton and its hinterland.

This second major transcontinental line had been approved by the Laurier government in 1903. The Canadian Pacific Railway, which had gone through Calgary in 1883 and from there on to Vancouver, served mainly the southern part of the province. The booming economic conditions that prevailed during the twentieth century's first decade convinced Laurier's government that the west could support another railway serving the more northerly part of the province. From Winnipeg, it would proceed through Saskatoon and from there to Edmonton, then on through the Yellowhead Pass in the Rockies. Its ultimate destination was Prince Rupert on the Pacific coast. Perceived as a good deal at the time it was, in fact, fraught with risks, particularly as another transnational railway, the Canadian Northern, was pushing through the same area at the same time. By 1919, with the western economy in a free fall, financial disaster struck. With both lines facing bankruptcy, they were taken over by the government and formed into the Canadian National Railways. In the years 1908–09, however, the Grand Trunk Pacific seemed to hold great prospects and to be a highly lucrative investment opportunity.²

The railway's backers included some of the wealthiest and most influential businessmen in Canada. Among them were E.B. Greenshields, the prosperous dry goods merchant, director of a number of major Canadian companies, and a senior member of the Montreal financial elite; Robert Mackay, a Liberal senator and another wealthy Montreal merchant with numerous company directorships; William Molson Macpherson, head of the Molson's Bank; and John T. Ross,

² The classic work is G.R. Stevens, *Canadian National Railways: Towards the Inevitable 1896–1922*, vol. 2 (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1962).

head of the Quebec Bank. These men were interested in enhancing their investments in the railway by two major means. The first was keeping the railway's locomotives supplied with coal, a huge task and a major expense. Being able to tap local supplies of coal rather than having to bring them in from afar would be a huge money saver for the railway, and a great money earner for whomever discovered and got the rights to sell the locally-produced coal to the railway. The second means they saw of earning money was through taking advantage of the expected increase of land prices and opportunities for business development that they expected would occur along the railway's route. This included supplying infrastructure needs, such as electricity, water, and urban transit, to the numerous needful communities that they were sure would spring up.

Brutinel succeeded in getting himself hired as this group's agent in Edmonton. His task was to seek out money-earning opportunities and ensure that they prospered. It is not clear how he convinced this determined group of capitalists to hire him, especially as his background in such activities was slight. He was, however, not given to underestimating his own talents, and doubtless conviction, eloquence, and native charm, helped carry the day. His work, for the most part, proved to be highly satisfactory and before long it would earn him a fortune.

His first task on behalf of his Montreal employers was to find and acquire for them the necessary quantities of coal with which to supply the locomotives. To this end Brutinel transformed himself into a mineralogical explorer. Rumours had long circulated that rich seams were to be found in the future Coal Branch area, which lay in the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains, about 200 kilometres west of Edmonton. Until then, however, there had been no impetus to undertake the necessary exploration and mineralogical field work needed to ascertain how rich these deposits were. In anticipation of the arrival in the area of two new transnational railway lines, from about 1905 on, increasing numbers of exploratory teams ventured into the area. Beginning in 1907, one of these was headed by Raymond Brutinel.

In their historically well-informed guide book, *Exploring the Coal Branch*, Daniel Kyba and Jane Ross devote quite a bit of attention to Brutinel's exploratory activities. Indeed, they term

him the “father’ of the Alberta Coal Branch.”³ He was, they write, “well equipped with horses, provisions and all the latest competitive intelligence his corporate clients [could] provide.” Working frequently with fellow citizens of France (probably, most notably, Armand de Bernis, a French-born settler who was the proprietor of a ranch outside of Edmonton) he and his colleagues became known to fellow prospectors as “the Frenchmen.”⁴ Brutinel’s first discovery of a major exploitable coal resource occurred on 5 August 1907, soon after his return from his expedition to France. This was at the confluence of the Pembina and what was then known as the Little Pembina Rivers. The latter would eventually be renamed the Lovett River after the Montreal syndicate’s ambitious legal counsel, H.A. Lovett. Brutinel would make a second major find on 20 October, in the same area about at the spot where the future mining community of Lovett would grow up.⁵

In all, Brutinel laid claim to about 50,000 acres of property, containing three major seams of coal ranging from six to sixteen feet thick.⁶ Here he and his backers located what they named the Pacific Pass Coal Mine. It, in turn, was owned by the Pacific Pass Coal Company Limited, whose board of directors consisted of the Montreal syndicate of business entrepreneurs who had hired Brutinel. In 1909, they would be joined by J.W. McConnell, owner of numerous high profile corporations, an astute investor, and one of the most eminent Montreal business tycoons. McConnell’s biographer tells us that the company held a forty-two-year lease on the property, with an assured market (presumably the GTP) of 75,000 tons of coal a year. Its capital consisted of two million dollars in bonds and five million in stock although it was a closed corporation with no public offering of shares. McConnell enthused to the press that the company’s coal field contained “virtually unlimited quantities of bituminous coal of good quality.”⁷

³ Daniel Kyba, Jane Ross, *Exploring the Historic Coal Patch: A Guide to Jasper’s Front Ranges* (Calgary: Rocky Mountain Books, 2001), 84.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 140.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁶ A.A. Den Otter, “A Social History of the Coal Branch,” Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Alberta, 1967, 9.

⁷ William Fong, *J.W. McConnell: Financier, Philanthropist, Patriot*, (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2008), 77.

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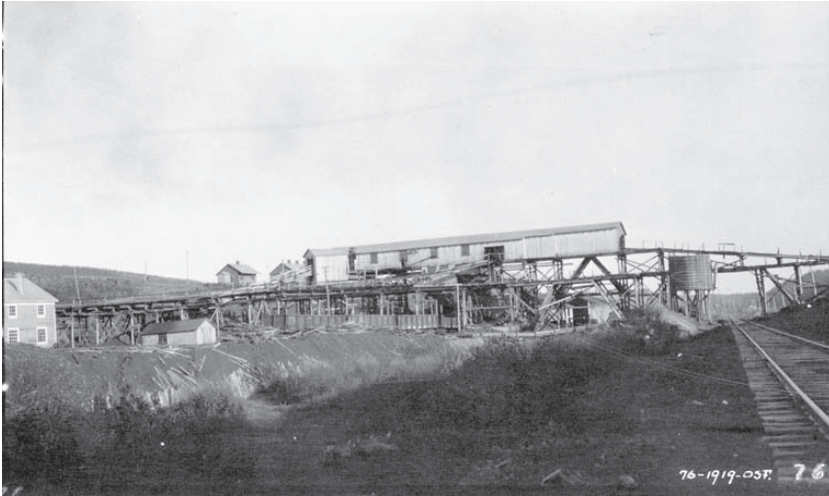
General view of Pacific Pass Coal Mine, Alberta, June 1912. [Library and Archives Canada PA-017334]

On 20 January 1909, Brutinel informed *Le Courrier* that the “financial arrangements of the new partnership are completed” and predicted that it would “contribute on a vast scale to the mining industry in our province.” The deposits he had found lay about ninety kilometres south of the proposed route of the GTP, however, necessitating the building of a branch line to gain access to them. This he expected to be completed in time to “be able to put its coal on the market by the next winter.”⁸ Brutinel’s optimism was misplaced, however, as the GTP did not announce the construction of the branch line into the coal fields until 1911. By this time, it should be noted, a deal had been worked out whereby it would be subsidised by the Alberta government at a rate of \$20,000 per mile to a total of \$1,600,000. Shipments of coal from the Pacific Pass mine at last began in late 1913.⁹ In the meantime, by at least 1911, Brutinel and his colleague Bernis had joined their former employers as directors of the Pacific Pass Coal Company.¹⁰

⁸ *Courrier*, 21 January 1909, 6.

⁹ Den Otter, “Social History of the Coal Branch,” 18–19.

¹⁰ Fong, *McConnell*, 77; *The Montreal Gazette*, 7 March 1911, 12. Here an article on a dispute over shares in the company refers to both Brutinel and Bernis as being members of the board.



Another view of the Pacific Pass Mine at Lovett, Alberta, 1919. [LAC PA-100260]

In their recent biography of Brutinel, Dominique and Jacques Baylaucq mention that besides his work in the Coal Branch, the young entrepreneur was also involved in exploring the route that the owners of the GTP first proposed for it to follow through the Rocky Mountains to the Pacific. This ran from Lake Brûlé, north of Jasper, Alberta, to the mouth of the Skeena River on the British Columbia coast. But the “real purpose of his mission,” they state, “was to buy all available land in proximity to future railway stations and settlements in order to resell at a later date, making a sizable profit.” Brutinel, they declare, had “become a ‘speculator.’”¹¹ This activity was, in fact, performed on behalf of the second of the two means by which the Montreal syndicate of investors proposed to enrich themselves through their interest in the railway. Brutinel’s role has not been fully documented, but whatever form it took, it needs to be noted that the returns that were expected on these investments never materialised. Instead, as historian Frank Leonard has shown in his close study of the operations of the GTP in British Columbia, the company’s attempt to get a return from these newly established rail-side communities as quickly as possible turned into one of many

¹¹ Dominique and Jacques Baylaucq, *Brutinel: The Extraordinary Story of a French Citizen Brigadier-General in the Canadian Army*, (France: Privately Published, 2010), 17.

mismanagement problems that vexed the railway's operation and were to contribute to its ultimate failure.¹²

Once more, the question arises as to what qualified Brutinel to act as an explorer for coal as well as the various other tasks he undertook on behalf of the Montreal syndicate. Although his education at a Jesuit run high school in France was probably rigorous, there is nothing in his background that indicates training in the kinds of skills—geology, mineralogy, soils analysis, or surveying—that were usually demanded for the sort of work he carried out. It does seem to be the case that he gained his position with the Montreal syndicate under the designation of mineralogist, although whether they understood this to be a professional qualification is not clear.¹³ He was, it must be said, often quite vague on this matter and sometimes left the impression that he had formal qualifications when he did not. His name appears only twice in *Henderson's City Directory* for Edmonton. In that of 1910, he is listed as a “general contractor;”¹⁴ in that for 1912, as a “financial agent.”¹⁵ In 1914, on the other hand, in *Lovett's Montreal Directory*, he is listed as an “electrical engineer.”¹⁶ On his attestation paper that he completed on joining the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 2 November 1915, he gives his “trade or calling” as “Engineer.”¹⁷ He in fact possessed no professional qualifications in any of these areas.

Yet, in the field of mineralogy, he not only favourably impressed the members of the Montreal syndicate, but also two well-qualified minerals specialists, Charles Fergie and Eugene Coste. The former was a noted coal expert from England who had worked in the Nova Scotia fields and whom the syndicate hired to manage the Pacific Pass mine. Coste was a mining engineer and one of the early developers of oil mining in Alberta. In 1911, these two specialists would jointly recommend Brutinel for membership in the Canadian Institute of Mines and Metallurgy, of which he would become a life member in

¹² Frank Leonard, *A Thousand Blunders: the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and Northern British Columbia* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2010), 20–25, 271.

¹³ In listing the directors of the Pacific Pass Coal Company, William Fong, in his biography of McConnell, identifies Brutinel as “a Frenchman working as a mineralogist in Calgary [sic].” *McConnell*, 77.

¹⁴ *Henderson's Twin City Edmonton and Strathcona Directory, 1910*, 187.

¹⁵ *Henderson's City of Edmonton Directory for 1912*, 334.

¹⁶ *Lovett's Montreal Directory for 1914–1915*, 982.

¹⁷ Library and Archives Canada (hereafter LAC), RG 150 Accession 1992-93, Box 1212-39, Raymond Brutinel File.

1923.¹⁸ The Baylaucqs note that he worked with Coste in drilling for natural gas in the Medicine Hat area, and that the two “had interests in oil in the Calgary area, on behalf of the Canadian Pacific Railway.”¹⁹ Such accomplishments indeed suggest that Brutinel was a quick study and an autodidact of considerable talent. Time and again he proved himself to possess the capacity not only to perform well in a field for which he lacked professional qualifications, but also to convince true specialists that he possessed authoritative knowledge in their field of expertise. Whether he had the professional qualifications for a job did not seem to concern him, and, seemingly, their lack did not prevent him from performing various roles at the highest levels.

Brutinel’s new life held prospects for the kind of financial enrichment that his editorship of *Le Courrier* almost certainly did not. From the time of his leaving the newspaper in 1908 until the outbreak of war in August 1914, his time was almost entirely taken up with work related to projects initiated by him, usually on behalf of the Montreal syndicate. As a number of these involved the community of St. Albert, he and his family moved there in September 1909.²⁰ He had a new brick house built that included such conveniences as central heating, running water, and electricity. It stood on a 160 acre lot on the banks of the Sturgeon River near the main road leading southeast to Edmonton.²¹

Probably what stimulated this move most was a project that Brutinel was developing to build a railway link between St. Albert and Edmonton. This he intended to become the first stage of a network of similar lines that would fan out between Edmonton and a number of outlying communities. Such links had been talked about by locals for some time to provide speedier communication and shipment of goods between the urban and rural centres and to allow for passenger traffic back and forth. Many believed that St. Albert, with the Sturgeon River and a number of sizable lakes nearby, could well turn into a summer resort area or even a select suburb for wealthy residents of

¹⁸ LAC MG 30 E333 Vol. 3, 3, Powley Papers, untitled biographical notes on Brutinel, n.d. .

¹⁹ D. and J. Baylaucq, *Brutinel*, 17.

²⁰ *Courrier*, 2 September 1909, 1.

²¹ D. and J. Baylaucq, *Brutinel*, 17.

Edmonton.²² As this was one of the more ambitious of the enterprises in which he became involved, it will be described at some length here in order to provide some detail and texture as to the nature of these undertakings and the manner that he handled them.

The ultimate approving authority for the aspiring railway builder's plans was the Alberta legislature. However, as Brutinel had bought the rights from a previous developer who had had similar plans, but had failed to implement them, technically he did not need the approval either of Edmonton's or St. Albert's municipal councils to proceed. But, as there were many issues to be resolved relating to fares and linkages to Edmonton's own existing city railway system, he sought to get the approval of both before approaching the legislature. Negotiations between Edmonton city council and Brutinel began on 31 May 1909.²³ Hopes were high for quick progress, as both sides wanted the lines to be built. But it was not long before major problems emerged. Twice before the city had had experience with private franchise holders proposing to build similar railway systems. Neither worked out. Having been twice burned, this time council determined to get it right. Numerous lengthy and tiring review sessions resulted in which members pored over every detail of Brutinel's proposal. In the end, they concluded that it left the city much too vulnerable.

A major concern was that Brutinel's line needed to proceed through the city, and at places even link up with tracks of the city's own street railway. Council worried this would present their street railway with too much competition. There were even concerns that Brutinel's scheme would result in the city losing control over its own streets. At the heart of the problem was uncertainty. Something about Brutinel's proposal caused councillors to worry. As the *Bulletin* put it on 10 September 1909: "If it were certain that the agreement meant only what it seemed to mean it would probably have met little opposition. But of this the public were altogether unconvinced and the skepticism was the root cause of the popular disapproval of the bargain."²⁴ By 20 September, city council had withdrawn its original approval. Brutinel concluded that his only choice now was to circumvent council and

²² See Raymond F. Corley, Douglas V. Parker, *Interurban to St. Albert: the Edmonton Interurban Railway* (Edmonton: Havelock House, 1995), 1–2; St. Albert Historical Society, *The Black Robe's Vision: A History of St. Albert District*, Vol I (St. Albert: St. Albert Historical Society, 1985), 318.

²³ Corley and Parker, *Interurban to St. Albert*, 1.

²⁴ *The Edmonton Bulletin* (hereafter *Bulletin*), 10 September 1909, 4.

go directly to the Alberta legislature. Beginning work on the project would be delayed until at least the next year.²⁵

The problems he encountered with Edmonton city council did not prevent Brutinel from continuing negotiations with its counterpart in St. Albert. Here matters went much more smoothly and, after receiving the approval of the ratepayers, the town's council agreed to Brutinel's proposal for the railway on 6 November. But another factor was now coming into play. In January 1910, Brutinel proposed to the St. Albert town council that, in addition to the railway, he also be granted a franchise to provide electricity to the town which hitherto had been dependent on gas.²⁶ The town council decided it needed some time to consider this latter proposal. The power plant was to be located at the site of yet more coal mines that Brutinel and his associates of the Pacific Pass Coal Company proposed to establish at the site of some coal deposits that they had recently discovered just over a kilometre to the southwest of St. Albert itself. There is no record of precisely when the company acquired these deposits, or whether Brutinel had played any role in locating them. There was practically no discussion about them in the local press until on 15 September 1910, *Le Courrier* carried an article pronouncing them the "most important in the region" and asserting that the coal was "of an excellent quality." Quoting Brutinel, the paper reported that \$500,000 would be spent on them over the next months.²⁷ On 26 September 1910, the company announced that the proposed plant at the site of the mines would supply the electrical power needed not only for the electrification of St. Albert, but for operation of the radial railway as well. This was the first reference to the latter being electrically powered.²⁸

Meanwhile, on 16 March 1910, Brutinel's application for the necessary charter came before the railway committee of the provincial legislature. However, the charter that Brutinel was asking the committee to approve addressed none of the concerns that Edmonton city council had with his scheme. It still gave the company the right to build a line directly through the city, which left open the possibility

²⁵ Corley and Parker, *Interurban*, 3; *Bulletin*, 9 September 1909, 1.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

²⁷ *Courrier*, 15 September 1910, 1.

²⁸ *Bulletin*, 26 September 1910, 1; *Bulletin*, 16 March 1910, 5; also Corley and Parker, *Interurban*, 4.



Portrait of Brutinel in Edmonton. [Musée
Héritage Museum CA MHM 2014.22.16]

of its competing with the city's own street railway. Alarm was such that members of city council took the opportunity to appear before the same committee to demand that their concerns be addressed. Although they wanted the line to be built, they declared, they did not want Brutinel's company granted rights that would jeopardise the city's own interests. The doubtlessly perplexed members of the railway committee gave the contesting sides a week to resolve their differences. Brutinel and the city returned to the drawing board for more prolonged discussions.

Greatly exceeding the deadline laid down by the legislative committee, it took until 17 May, before city council approved a new deal by a unanimous vote. There is no need to go into detail about it here. Suffice to say there were many compromises, including over the two contentious issues previously mentioned. Brutinel's line was allowed to go through the city, but only on predefined routes. Also, his line could only carry passengers travelling from outside to inside the city, and inside to outside; it could not carry any whose journey was limited to within city boundaries.²⁹ Although the city seemed to be happy with the deal, Brutinel had reservations. "The agreement as it now stands is the best that we can get, but it isn't much good," he announced, asking council to let it stand for a week, while he went

²⁹ Ibid., 4–6.

to Montreal “to confer with [his] associates before we consent to enter upon it.”³⁰

On 20 June, still not having heard back from Brutinel, the city held a vote of its ratepayers to pass judgement on this so-called “Brutinel by-law.” The measure passed with a solid majority of 1414 in favour, and 286 against.³¹ Evidently considering it very carefully, Brutinel and his associates did not pronounce in favour of the deal until 26 September. Work on the line between St. Albert and Edmonton would, they announced, begin in March 1911, with completion expected in June. It was on this occasion that they announced the line would be powered by electricity generated by the plant at the mine near St. Albert.³² Soon after this, in late October, St. Albert ratepayers voted in favour of Brutinel’s electrification deal, with town council approving it by a unanimous vote on 11 November.

Brutinel now had to return to the Alberta legislature to receive final approval, both for the radial railway and also for the electrification of St. Albert. The committee approved the railway deal with little difficulty on 8 December.³³ When the proposal to provide electricity for St. Albert came up on 14 December, however, the committee rejected it out of hand. The rates the company wanted to charge were simply too high, it ruled, declaring that the “town should be saved from its own act” of having endorsed the agreement. The committee imposed a new, much more restrictive deal, offering only a five year non-exclusive franchise, and leaving open the option for the lieutenant governor in council adjusting the rates “from year to year.”³⁴ These terms were such a far cry from what had been originally negotiated with the St. Albert town council, that Brutinel and his associates concluded that there was no point in proceeding with the electric lighting proposal. And, before long, it became clear that their interest in the railway proposal was beginning to falter as well. Their new hesitation suggests the two projects were more intimately linked in their eyes than had been explained to the citizens of St. Albert or Edmonton. Details are not available, but it seems highly likely that the company saw an essential connection between

³⁰ *Bulletin*, 18 May 1910 8.

³¹ *Bulletin*, 21 June 1910, 2.

³² *Bulletin*, 26 September 1910, 1.

³³ *Bulletin*, 8 December 1910.

³⁴ *Bulletin*, 14 December 1910, 1.

the earnings received from supplying St. Albert with electricity and the successful operation of the interurban railway line. It is interesting that they did not respond to the legislature committee's rejection by offering lower rates.

The editors of another prominent Edmonton newspaper, the *Capital*, still remained hopeful. On 7 November, it reported that the company's "general manager," Raymond Brutinel, was to leave for Montreal in a couple of days, and that upon his return he would make some "definite announcements."³⁵ The announcement, when it came, proved not to be what the *Capital* wanted to hear. On 23 February 1911, while still in Montreal, Brutinel announced that the interurban railway project would be cancelled. He confirmed the news when he returned to Edmonton a month later.³⁶ The *Capital* editors were outraged, and continued to fulminate about Brutinel and his company's decision for days. Because the legislature had turned down the deal to supply St. Albert with electricity, it bristled on first hearing the news: "Mr. Brutinel's company have abandoned all their pursuits in the Edmonton district."³⁷ The next day it had concluded that the taxpayers of St. Albert had been given a shoddy deal, enthusing that "the members of the legislature have a diploma coming to them ... for it would certainly have gone very badly with St. Albert to have to pay light and power rates high enough to make a corporation of this size a paying proposition."³⁸ In its final fusillade, on 31 March, it remarked on Edmonton's unfortunate experience with "franchise hunters," and Brutinel was singled out as "the most energetic promiser of them all." After taking up a good deal of the city's and the legislature's time, Brutinel decided in the end that he "did not intend to build any radial railway and that as far as he was concerned the city might take the agreement, on which the city council and the legislature and ratepayers had spent so many hours, and shove it in the ice box."³⁹

To jump ahead somewhat in chronology, it is worth pointing out that, in March 1911, the St. Albert Collieries were incorporated into the Canadian Coal and Coke Company, which immediately became

³⁵ The *Edmonton Capital* (hereafter the *Capital*), 7 February 1911, 1.

³⁶ *Courier*, 23 February 1911, 8; *Capital*, 23 March 1911, 3.

³⁷ Ibid. 1.

³⁸ *Capital*, 24 March 1911, 4.

³⁹ *Capital*, 31 March 1911, 4.

the biggest company of its sort in Canada. The agglomeration was under the control of the leading Montreal financier, J.W. McConnell, who had succeeded in propelling himself to the forefront of the operation. Besides the St. Albert mine, the merger included the Pacific Pass Mine, the Lethbridge Collieries, and a concern located at Beaver Mines, Alberta. An article in the *Étoile de St. Albert* of 25 March 1914, reported that \$15,000,000 in capital had been put into each of these operations. It also listed Brutinel as one of the new company's board of directors.⁴⁰

Brutinel's involvement with the Edmonton-St. Albert railway line ended in October 1911, when he succeeded in selling the rights to another group of investors. He declared that his days of involvement with the project were over. The investors he referred to were, in fact, the leaders of the Franco-Canadian Mortgage Company, who were based in Edmonton, Calgary, and France. Some indeed had been fellow members with Brutinel of the *Amical Français*. This group succeeded in negotiating new arrangements with the two communities, which, given the earlier frustrations of dealing with Brutinel and associates, were now probably much more disposed towards reaching a deal. By July 1913, a line was finally completed. Its one car, which was operated by an electric-gas motor rather than exclusively by electricity as Brutinel had proposed, made its first trip on 8 October 1913. Particularly after it was linked up with Edmonton's street railway system in 1914, it proved to be very popular, with an extra car being added on weekends. Disaster struck on 1 April 1915, however, when fire completely destroyed the barn in which the car was housed along with the car itself. The line never resumed operation.⁴¹ It must be emphasised that by this time Brutinel was well out of the picture, despite the implications of one popular Edmonton chronicler that he was linked with the unfortunate 1915 events.⁴²

For a time, however, Brutinel was enthused about another prospective railway deal. This involved an unused Canadian Northern Railway line running from Edmonton to Lake Wabamun, about ninety-six kilometres west of the city, that he proposed to take over and electrify. "If Mr. Brutinel is successful in negotiating this scheme,"

⁴⁰ *L'Étoile de St. Albert*, 25 March 1914, 3.

⁴¹ On this see Corley and Parker, *Interurban*, 8–10; *Black Robe's Vision*, 318–322.

⁴² A.W. Cashman, *More Edmonton Stories: The Life and Times of Edmonton Alberta* (Edmonton: Institute of Applied Art, 1958), 122–123.

noted the *Bulletin* of 2 June, it “will mean the expenditure of a large sum of money.” Lake Wabamun, it observed, was “now considered to be the coming summer resort of the city.”⁴³ There is no evidence of this scheme ever getting beyond the planning stages. Another venture that did come to fruition, however, was the establishment of a so-named “Great Northern” tannery. The *Courrier* of 26 October 1911 reported that Brutinel was one of a number of “*hommes des affaires*,” mostly of French background, who invested in it.⁴⁴

Probably the single largest development project in which Brutinel became involved was well away from Edmonton. As noted, Prince Rupert in British Columbia was slated to become the GTP’s western terminus. The community was located on the small Kaien Island at the mouth of the Skeena River and separated from the coast by only narrow channels of water. Clearing and development work had begun as recently as 1907. Supporters of the railway fully expected that, after the line’s completion, Prince Rupert would become a rival to Vancouver as an important arrival and departure point for Pacific Ocean commerce. Plans for developing the town, which started from practically nothing in 1907, reflected this optimism.⁴⁵ As keen followers of the fortunes of the GTP, the potential for profitable development was not lost on Brutinel and members of the Montreal financial elite with whom he had become associated. On 30 March 1910, the Edmonton *Capital* referred to an article in the Prince Rupert *Optimist* announcing that Brutinel had acquired Prince Rupert’s Tsimpsen Light and Power Company. It held the franchise for providing the new community with gas, light, power, telephone, telegraph and street railway systems.

The *Capital* reported that the citizens of Prince Rupert were not happy with the Tsimpsen Company as it had been originally established, summarising the *Optimist*’s report to the effect that the “franchise ... was in permanent danger when in the hands of chartermongers.” The new ownership offered new hopes as they “bought it with the idea of developing their power and their supply of gas, light, etc., at reasonable prices.” The *Optimist* had “extended a

⁴³ *Bulletin*, 2 June 1910, 5.

⁴⁴ *Courrier*, 26 October 1911, 1.

⁴⁵ See Leonard, *A Thousand Blunders*, 127–164; R. Geddes Large, *The Skeena: River of Destiny* (Skeena River: Heritage House Publishing, 1996), 156–163.



4 views of Prince Rupert, B.C. [Library and Archives Canada PA-095095]

neat compliment to Mr. Brutinel,” reported the *Capital*, in declaring “that they know a builder when they see one.”⁴⁶

Only one of the directors of the company in question had been a member of the syndicate with whom Brutinel first became involved. But they came from the same world of Montreal finance capitalism and they doubtless had connections at many levels with the members of the earlier group. The diversity may well indicate the ease with which Brutinel was beginning to move within this world. In June 1911, by which time the company had been renamed the Prince Rupert Hydro-Electric Company, it advertised a large issue of stock amounting to \$5,000,000, and bonds totalling \$3,000,000. The issue was floated by Corporation Agencies Limited of Montreal, a financial firm recently founded by H.A. Lovett and C.H. Cahan, both leading Montreal corporate lawyers. Lovett was the lawyer for the Montreal syndicate for whom Brutinel had acted in Edmonton, and, indeed, after whom the community of Lovett in the Alberta Coal Branch was named. Cahan (later a federal cabinet minister under Conservative Prime Minister R.B. Bennett) had only recently moved to Montreal from Halifax. He was one of the founders of the hugely profitable Royal Securities Corporation and had obtained many prestigious board appointments. He was also the chief legal advisor to perhaps the

⁴⁶ *Capital*, 30 March 1910, 1.

most ambitious of all the era's promoters and financial adventurers, Max Aitken (later Lord Beaverbrook).⁴⁷

Both Lovett and Cahan served, along with Brutinel, as members of the Prince Rupert Hydro-Electric Company's board of directors. All three emphasised their connections with energy-related concerns in announcing their role as directors. Cahan listed himself as president of the Western Canada Power Company, centered in Vancouver, that was one of the largest of its sort at the time. Lovett advertised himself as the director of the "Porto Rico" Railway, reflecting his and his associate's heavy investments in Latin America. Raymond Brutinel identified himself as director of the "Pacific Pass Coal Fields Ltd."⁴⁸ P.F. Hayward, general manager of Western Canada Power, and L.A. Herdt, a consulting engineer, were two other members.

Brutinel first appeared before a meeting of the Prince Rupert city council in August 1910. He proposed to them that his company be granted a contract to provide the community with gas, water development, hydro-electricity, and—shades of St. Albert—an electrically powered street railway. He would have gas running though the mains to the city by November he promised. His firm would work, he assured them, on behalf of the welfare of the community and "in harmony with the people." Indeed, he insisted, their intention was "to help build up Prince Rupert from a philanthropic standpoint," which would give them a "permanent investment and [be] good business." The precise balance to be maintained between philanthropy and good business he did not elaborate upon, however.⁴⁹

Despite his best efforts, however, Brutinel failed to convince council to accept his proposals in 1910. A year later he was back, making fundamentally the same pitch. This, it should be noted, was a couple of months after the company had announced its sale of stocks and bonds. Still, matters did not unfold in the manner that Brutinel would have preferred. Indeed, it would seem that the company had got involved in a more complex situation regarding the supply of power to Prince Rupert than they had probably initially

⁴⁷ G.P. Marchildon, "The Role of Lawyers in Corporate Promotion and Management: A Canadian Case Study and Theoretical Speculation," *Business and Economic History*, 2nd Ser. Vol. 19, (1990), 193–197.

⁴⁸ One place where the advertisement appeared was *The Daily Telegraph* (Quebec), 5 June 1911, 8.

⁴⁹ Reports of Brutinel's presentations to Prince Rupert's city council can be found in *The Prince Rupert Daily Optimist*, 18 August 1910, 1 and 19 August 1910, 1.

foreseen. The city, in the meantime, had acquired its own rights to use the water from some local lakes to generate hydroelectric power. But the situation remained unresolved as to who would actually supply the power at the best price. Contemporary accounts held that Brutinel's Prince Rupert Hydro-Electric Company still controlled the most valuable water rights in the area. It certainly did not abandon its ambitions, although evidently resigned to becoming one potential supplier of water rather than the only designated supplier. Yet even at this stage of the proceedings, it would appear that they had not yet obtained the legal permission that was needed from the British Columbia government actually to tap the rivers' water supply and begin transmitting the energy. A provincial Privy Council Order granting them the authority to do so was not issued until April 1914.⁵⁰

In the meantime, the directors of the company had associated themselves with a syndicate of local Prince Rupert business entrepreneurs who decided that there was more money to be made in developing a patch of land to the south to serve as an industrial suburb of Prince Rupert. This was to be located at Port Edward, which was on the mainland about fifteen kilometres southeast of Prince Rupert, and through which the GTP would go on its way to the town. The syndicate argued the Port Edward site would prove to be a profitable investment because it possessed the requisite waterfront space for the location of warehouses, elevators, and other infrastructure necessary for an industrial site, whereas Prince Rupert itself did not. Road and sea traffic would connect the two. Port Edward's "rapid and prosperous growth and development can be confidently looked forward to," enthused an engineers' report completed on the projected development in 1912.⁵¹

The same report recorded that Prince Rupert Hydro-Electric Company had already procured building lots at Port Edward and had started work upon the construction of a 1,500 horsepower diesel oil engine plant. This they intended to use to generate the electrical power that they would sell to both Prince Rupert and Port Edward until water power could be tapped from the nearby lakes and rivers. Then the diesel plant would be used as a standby facility. Once

⁵⁰ Province of British Columbia, Privy Council Orders, No. 441, 1 April 1914, available: www.bclaws.ca/civix/document/id/arch_oic/arc_oic/0441_1914.

⁵¹ R.H. Thompson, *Engineers' Report on Port Edward Townsite and Harbor* (Prince Rupert: Ritchie, Agnew and Co., 1912), 23.

the water power was tapped, the company estimated they would be able to supply 80,000 horsepower of energy. Their total expenditures on the two facilities would be \$560,000 and they expected to have the diesel oil plant in operation by the fall of 1913.⁵² “The cheap power, which will be obtainable right on the town site from the Prince Rupert Hydro-Electric Company, low taxation, cheap water rates, railway and steamship transportation,” proclaimed the engineers’ report, “should tend to make these new manufacturing sites most attractive to all firms who propose to erect branch manufacturing plants or initiate new industries to serve the northern markets.”⁵³

The company was sure that the electricity needs of Prince Rupert would soon far exceed the amount of power that could be supplied by the city’s own generating facility. But by 1913, the bottom was beginning to come out of the Laurier economic boom. The Grand Trunk Pacific was experiencing serious difficulties and the ambitious dreams that many had for Prince Rupert were fading. The town went through some difficult times and initiatives such as those put forward by Brutinel and other developers lost momentum.⁵⁴ The British Columbia local historian and ethnographer, R. Geddes Large summarised the results of the efforts of Brutinel and his partners’ as follows: “The [Port Edward] town site was put on the market and sold in March 1913 ... the town and power house both ‘died a-borning’. And today [in 1957] the reinforced concrete building still stands, a monument to frustrated speculation.”⁵⁵ Whether, in the end, the Prince Rupert Hydro-Electric Company ever succeeded in its plans to supply hydroelectric power to Prince Rupert has not been explored by this researcher. Even if they did, however, it is doubtful that Brutinel played a major role. As noted, the company only obtained the rights to provide this power in April 1914 and only three months afterward, Brutinel was off to war.⁵⁶

Brutinel’s life in western Canada before he joined the Canadian Expeditionary Force was clearly a very full one. After spending a

⁵² Ibid., 14.

⁵³ Ibid., 18.

⁵⁴ See Geddes Large, *Skeena*, 160–163.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 163.

⁵⁶ The author would like to thank Jean Elers-Page and the staff of the Prince Rupert Archives for their diligent work in digging many of these references out on his behalf. Also, the work of Jane Naisbitt and Lara Andrews of the Canadian War Museum’s Military History Research Centre is, as always, beyond praise.

couple of years adjusting to life in his new homeland and editing *Le Courrier de l'Ouest*, he became involved in a life of business entrepreneurship in Edmonton and points west of there. He had come from France primarily to escape a political and religious situation that he considered to have become unduly fractious. At the same time, a number of his fellow countrymen had already located there and he probably had heard from them of the opportunities that could be seized. His leaving high school to go to sea probably speaks of a certain restlessness in his nature, and there could well have been something attractive to him about starting life on the kind of frontier that Edmonton and its environs constituted at that time. The qualities that he brought with him, and doubtless honed on the spot, of shrewdness, business savvy, self-confidence, personal authority, a willingness to take risks, and a capacity favourably to impress persons of authority, facilitated his being able to make the most of these opportunities. Indeed, they brought him success in ventures that, had the First World War not intervened, may have carried him to the pinnacle of the Canadian corporate and economic ladder.

For the first couple of years in Edmonton, Brutinel concentrated upon participating in and furthering the interests of the city's French community. Gaining the position of editor of *Le Courrier* gave him a position from which to do so and a voice of influence in that community. Whether he had notions of moving into the business sphere and thereby enriching himself financially when he first moved to Edmonton is not clear. He was, though, an energetic and ambitious man and he certainly does not seem to have been the type who would miss opportunities for doing so if they presented themselves. These appeared with the anticipated arrival in the area of the Grand Trunk Pacific Railway and the interest taken in it by the group of wealthy and ambitious Montreal-based capitalists with whom Brutinel became associated. The members of this group, all financial speculators in the railway, were eager to enhance their portfolios by taking advantage of whatever economic spinoffs it generated. Brutinel's work on their behalf brought him into the world of full-blown capitalistic entrepreneurialism.

In other words, Brutinel and his backers threw themselves energetically into the spirit of the Laurier boom. It was in the Canadian west that this extraordinary period of enterprise, speculation, and growth, sometimes referred to as the 'wheat boom,' had perhaps its most noticeable impact. The intense economic activity that it

generated resulted in much that was good for the region, but, as with all booms, it also resulted in much that can now be seen to have been flimsily conceived, shady, exploitative, and corrupt. Brutinel and his Montreal backers were clearly tough and clever businessmen, looking to make the most of any project that they undertook or deal that they entered. Doubtless sometimes they came close to crossing, or possibly even crossed, the line as to what could be considered fair and above board business practice. Kyba and Ross allude to their “many capitalizations” having been “often inflated” with their holdings being worth far less than in reality than they claimed.⁵⁷ Nor was the business rectitude of the Grand Trunk Pacific, whose operations helped to generate much of their entrepreneurial activity, beyond question.⁵⁸

Evidently, judging from the decision of the Alberta legislative committee and the charges levied in the *Capital* newspaper, the fees that Brutinel and his group proposed to charge for the electrification of St. Albert were excessive. While this may have been aggressive business practice, it cannot be construed as illegal. After all, St. Albert rate payers had approved the deal as had the town council by a unanimous vote. Only a close study of the records associated with the various transactions (if they exist) that Brutinel and the Montreal syndicate undertook would reveal for sure if there indeed had been any malfeasance on their parts. It is worth noting that there were no charges of overt illegality in any of the Edmonton newspapers, although, as seen earlier, the *Capital*, in its reporting on the on-again, off again proceedings having to do with the interurban railway, certainly accused Brutinel of acting unfairly in his dealings with the city.

Certainly, though, serious questions must be asked about the role of Brutinel and his associates in promoting the Prince Rupert Hydro-Electric Company. The stock and bond issues that they floated on behalf of this company do seem excessive. There were, after all, competing bids for supplying the power including one initiated by the city itself. Furthermore, the company had not yet even received official approval for tapping the water supplies needed to generate the power. Perhaps more than anything else that Brutinel was involved in, this venture is overly redolent of the high hopes and high risk

⁵⁷ Kyba and Ross, *Coal Branch*, 139.

⁵⁸ Leonard, *A Thousand Blunders*; Stevens, *Canadian National Railways*, 205–206.



G.T.P. train (614) for Winnipeg, Manitoba at Prince Rupert, B.C., 1915. [Library and Archives Canada PA-011231]

adventurism that characterised the underside of the Laurier boom. Given the general collapse of expectations for the Prince Rupert economy in the years immediately preceding the First World War, and its failure ever to achieve the high expectations that were once entertained for it, one must wonder about the fate of investors who actually bought into the company.

On the other side of the coin, the entrepreneurs with whom Brutinel had initially become involved identified hitherto untapped coal resources and established some productive coal mines. These helped to fuel the region's economy into the post-Second World War years and constituted one of the first major steps made towards making Alberta the great producer of fossil-fuels based energy that it is today. Coal was then, of course, one of the major means of fuelling the world economy and environmental concerns were virtually unheard of. And while, by today's standards, the mines furnished those who worked in them a bare pittance in wages for often exhausting work, they nonetheless provided paid employment for a substantial workforce that otherwise would not have existed.⁵⁹ The creation of these mines must rank as the major significant result of Brutinel's and his associates' endeavours in the Alberta hinterland.

⁵⁹ Kyba and Ross, *Coal Branch*.

Indeed, of all the endeavours in which Brutinel became involved, his most substantial achievements lay in the mineralogical field and his subsequent role as an owner and developer of the coal mines that resulted from his findings. This was where he made his most lasting contribution and also where he made most of his money. On the other hand, the list of his failed projects is relatively long. These were such entrepreneurial endeavours as the radial railway between St. Albert and Edmonton, the proposed electrification of St. Albert, the envisioned railway to Lake Wabamun, and the supplying of hydroelectric power to Prince Rupert. These projects were large-scale, complex, heavily capitalised, and politically fraught. Perhaps more than anything else, they owed their inspiration to the spirit of the boom and the high expectations and hopes that it engendered. In the end, cold reality intervened and none of them materialised. Certainly the Edmonton *Capital* newspaper took Brutinel severely to task for over-promising and under-delivering.

Of course, all of this frenzy of business activity mostly took place while Brutinel was in his late twenties. He was only thirty-two when the First World War intervened and brought it all to an end. He entered into this world with full energy doing all he could to advance the interests of his Montreal syndicate backers and also, of course, his own. The foregoing indicates that at times he had something of an adventurist attitude, many of his initiatives being over-optimistic. While creating a great deal of initial excitement and expectations, many of these projects in the end came to nothing. Some investors and others involved no doubt lost money or wasted a great deal of time and energy, although a closer analysis than has been attempted here would be required to determine to what extent this occurred. Looking on it generously, one can say that he was young and ambitious, and seeking to take advantage of all the opportunities that presented themselves, with such attitudes being very much in keeping with the spirit of the times. Surely too, he believed that besides his own and his syndicate of backers' interests, his projects would benefit the communities in which he worked, as well they might have if they had been completed. His role in the development and running of a number of enterprises in the coal industry can be seen as one of substance and long term significance. Certainly his Montreal employers were impressed by his work, and encouraged him to move to Montreal 1913, where they willingly made room for him at their boardroom

tables. Only the outbreak of the First World War prevented his becoming more intensely involved in their world.

Brutinel may have bitten off a bit more than he could chew in many of the areas in which he became involved in the west. He cannot, however, be accused of lacking plans, energy, or ambition. These years of intense endeavour in a variety of fields, rather successful or not, would have constituted valuable learning and life experience, which he would have taken with him into service with the Canadian Corps. The intelligence and daring that he exhibited in Alberta were fully on display during his years as motor machine gun brigade and overall Canadian Machine Gun Corps commander. By then however, these qualities were accompanied by greater maturity and the exercise of due diligence than had perhaps been the case during his heady days as an entrepreneur. Valuable lessons would have been learned in the management of complex problems which could be put to good use as a senior officer in the Canadian Corps, as well in the field of banking, in which he achieved great success in France after the war.

Brutinel took his business associates' advice and relocated to Montreal in 1913. That city had become more and more the centre of his business life. Indeed, the Baylaucqs comment that by this time he had grown distant from the French community in Edmonton. He had become completely bilingual, they record, and tended to view the Edmonton French community as "entrenched in colonisation and memories of the past."⁶⁰ Brutinel's "cash and assets" at the time of his move, he informed Pawley later, amounted to a little over \$1,000,000 (about \$23,000,000 in today's currency), a significant measure of financial success by the standards of this, or any other time.⁶¹ He purchased a big house, 413 Rosslyn Avenue in Westmount and made preparations to move his family there in the summer of 1914. These plans were to be disrupted by developments in Europe.

The heir to the Austrian throne, the Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and his wife, were assassinated in Sarajevo on 28 July 1914. This set in motion the chain of events that led the major European countries to begin preparing for war. France began to mobilise on 1 August and Germany declared war on that country two days later. Britain, with Canada in tow, declared war on Germany and Austria on 4 August.

⁶⁰ D. and J. Baylaucq, *Brutinel*, 15.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 18.

By then the French government was already putting out calls for those living abroad with French citizenship and who were obliged to take up military service when called, to return home to join their units. Brutinel had entered the army in 1901 under a conscription law enacted in 1889 and updated in 1892, which decreed that those conscripted should serve three years in the active army, and then remain subject to call out for twenty-two years thereafter. As his army service was drawing to an end, however, a new law was passed in 1905. It obliged all able-bodied men to serve two years with the active force and then to remain subject to recall for twenty-five years afterwards.⁶² By either measure, Brutinel was obliged to serve.

The *Edmonton Bulletin's* edition of 4 August, carried a translation of the official French call for men to return to arms. "All Frenchmen living in Canada who have funds enough for the journey are to proceed without delay to France to rejoin their regiments," it read. "The Consular agent at Calgary has instructed those who are without sufficient funds to prepare to leave, but to wait for final instructions."⁶³ The result was a mass exodus of French citizens from Edmonton. The *Bulletin* quoted a sign in a French patisserie that read: "Owing to leaving to go to war, this store will be closed or is for sale."⁶⁴ On 6 August *Le Courrier* reported Brutinel's old friend and business associate, Armand de Bernis, was leaving along with a number of others whose names the paper was unable to obtain.⁶⁵ On 13 August it announced that fifty more French reservists had left, and another fifty on 20 August, which testifies to the substantial number of conscription-age French citizens who had taken up residence in the Edmonton region in the years prior to the outbreak of the First World War.

Now living in Montreal and a rising star in the Montreal corporate world, Brutinel was faced with the prospect of returning to his old unit, the 53e *Régiment d'Infanterie de Tarbes*. This would entail his moving from the higher ranks of the Canadian business elite, to the position of senior non-commissioned officer or officer cadet in the French Army. His response was to meet the challenge proactively.

⁶² Douglas Porch, *The March to the Marne: The French Army 1871–1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 25–26, 192–196.

⁶³ *Bulletin*, 4 August 1914, 5.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁶⁵ *Courrier*, 6 August 1914, 8.



Brutinel, with his back to the camera, salutes as the Governor-General, the Duke of Connaught, descends from one of the vehicles made for transporting the officers, during his inspection of the Automobile Machine Gun Brigade at the Rockcliffe Ranges, Ottawa, 23 September 1914. [Canadian War Museum CWM 19910109-128-A8]

He placed an order with the Colt factory in Hartford, Connecticut, to purchase twenty of their latest model machine guns to take with him back to France. He later claimed that his interest in this weapon had been sparked by his readings while in Edmonton about its use in the Russo-Japanese War. But this is the first reference in the sources used for this account to his interest in the weapon that would become his major preoccupation for the next five years. As noted, however, these sources are largely public in nature and are not the type that would reveal everything that occupied his attention in the privacy of his study. Certainly the evidence shows that he knew a great deal about the machine gun from the beginning of his service with the Canadian Expeditionary Force, although his views at this time on many matters concerning the weapon were much more conservative than probably he would like to recall later on. Certainly though he had come to see machine guns as being of sufficient importance that he was prepared to put a sizable sum of his own money into buying a supply of them. Presumably he believed that he would be associated with them in some capacity after he rejoined the French Army. Indeed, it may well be that he figured his gift of these guns would ensure him a more elevated spot in the French military hierarchy than he had attained in his previous service.



Brutinel, at the left, chats with the Governor-General, the Duke of Connaught during the latter's inspection of the Automobile Machine Gun Brigade, Rockcliffe Ranges, Ottawa, 23 September 1914. [Canadian War Museum CWM 19910109-128-A4]

Brutinel would, of course, not serve with the French Army during the war. Rather, sometime in early August he met up with the one-time minister of the interior in Laurier's Liberal government, Clifford Sifton. Whether Brutinel knew this influential figure previously is not clear, but certainly Sifton was the minister in charge of immigration to Canada at the time that Brutinel and many of his French colleagues arrived. Sifton had since left the Liberal Party, had pursued a lucrative business career, had become a supporter of the Conservatives, and a Sam Hughes loyalist. At their meeting, the two concluded that Brutinel's services would best be put to use within the expanding CEF. The machine guns he acquired for the French Army would instead be taken into service by a new unit that he and Sifton would form and contribute to the CEF, the Automobile Machine Gun Brigade Number 1.

As noted, the research for the foregoing survey of Brutinel's life in Edmonton unfortunately uncovered nothing about the development of any specifically military ideas on his part. This may itself be significant, as he was very busy man embroiled in a large number of developmental and business ventures. The survey does, however, tell us a lot about his experience as an enterprising French emigrant to Alberta and his approach to doing business in the world of finance and entrepreneurship. Certainly nothing undertaken in these years

would have prepared him for the high-intensity fighting that became such a characteristic of the First World War. Nonetheless, the lessons he learned and the capacities he exhibited, especially in his business life, including perseverance, hard work, ambition, the ability to keep superiors happy, and to master complex fields of endeavour in relatively short order, were qualities that would serve him well during the years he spent as a commander with the Canadian Corps.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cameron Pulsifer worked as a historian at the Canadian War Museum (CWM) from 1991 to 2007. During much of this period his responsibilities included editing CWM contribution to this journal. He made many contributions of his own and has also published extensively elsewhere. He is currently a Curator Emeritus with the CWM.