

Dan Black. *Harry Livingstone's Forgotten Men: Canadians and the Chinese Labour Corps in the First World War*. Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, 2019. Pp. 504.

Most military historians and authors are drawn to the sharp end of battle: the tactics and weapons; the struggle of generals and the strain of men under fire. And yet logistics and the supply of armies in the field is crucial to every war, and especially the First World War with its massive armed forces. Along the Western Front, the vast armies faced off against each other, with thousand of kilometres of underground trench systems and logistical lines stretching back to the coast. All manner of labour units played a role in building the roads and ensuring they did not dissolve into mud, cutting trees for the insatiable demand for wood, and moving supplies along the crucial arteries from front to rear and back again. In recent years, international scholars have paid more attention to these units, especially the 300,000 paid Chinese labourers.

In his new book, Dan Black, former editor of *Legion Magazine* and co-author of two books on underage Canadian service personnel in the world wars, has uncovered and presented a fascinating story of Canada's connection to these Chinese labourers. Black structures his book around Dr. Harry Livingstone, the grand nephew of the famous African explorer and medical missionary Dr. David Livingstone. From Listowel, Ontario, Livingstone kept a detailed diary of his war effort, which saw him go to China in August 1917 as part of the imperial mission to entice paid labourers to the Western Front. After selecting healthy men who he felt had the constitution to make the arduous trip, the young Canadian doctor traveled with some of these Chinese workers to British Columbia, across Canada and ultimately to their destination in the battle zone.

Of the 300,000 or so Chinese workers who were employed by the French and British, about 81,000 crossed Canada as members of the Chinese Labour Corps. This is a little-known story of the war and Black brings it alive with vivid writing and deep research. Black also peppers the book with unique photographs taken by Livingstone with his portable camera and they are a powerful legacy of documenting the Chinese workers, of which there are few papers, letters or diaries. That said, Black made an effort to locate a few letters from these labourers and he has tried to provide a voice for these workers, often drawn from official records.

There is much to like in this book, but it is too long, with Livingstone's journey to China and back, and the crossing of Canada, and then the Atlantic, spread over 350 pages. In fact, somewhat oddly, the actions of the Chinese on the Western Front in their hard-labour role is only covered in a cursory manner. And yet throughout the book there are fascinating characters and stories. The transfer of the tens of thousands of Chinese across the country in CPR trains in late 1917 and early 1918 is depicted in tremendous detail, and set against a backdrop of fear among military and civilian authorities that the workers would flee the trains for a new life in Canada. This was a time of much Asian racism among Canadians, with a \$500 head tax having already been imposed on Chinese people to keep them out of the country. Black notes that Ottawa waved that head tax on the wartime workers traveling by train, but many of the trains had the windows darkened to prevent the curious from gazing in, while others were locked to ensure the Chinese did not get out. Interestingly, photographs show that other train windows were open and that smiling Chinese workers are visible. What Canadians made of this is unclear, and there was official censorship that killed some of the stories, but not all. At the very least, it is another example of how the First World War demanded extraordinary acts and deviations from the norm.

Black devotes much energy to tracking the movement of the workers, their guards and the medical authorities like Livingstone who were to keep them alive. Nonetheless, periodic illnesses and diseases claimed the unfortunate in the tightly-packed "silk trains"—as they were named—with some succumbing in the temporary camps in isolated places like Petawawa. There are at least fifty Chinese workers' graves across Canada, most of whom died of illnesses, but a few were killed in train accidents that remind us of the danger of the mass movement of people along rail lines.

Other Chinese workers died on the Western Front. While they were not in the front lines, their work along the road and rail network often made them targets for bombers and fighters strafing those rear areas. To keep these Chinese segregated, there was a special hospital for the workers, where missionaries who spoke the language assisted doctors in caring for their patients. After the Armistice, the Chinese workers were employed in the dangerous and unpleasant job of munitions clearing and grave digging. During and after the war, a number of Chinese workers were awarded civilian medals

for their bravery in service at the front, while others engaged in criminal activity. They were little different than the mass of citizen soldiers that swarmed Europe, although Black documents ten Chinese workers who were executed for murder. One wonders what kind of hasty trial they received behind the lines, in a war zone, and with language barriers. Black rounds off the story by tracking another 40,000 Chinese workers who returned across Canada in 1919 and 1920, moving East to West, to return to their homeland. For Canada's contribution in supporting the movement of the Chinese Labour Corps, Ottawa submitted a claim for \$612,848.54, with the paperwork weighing 41 kg.

Black's research and passion for this project have restored this forgotten story of the war. He was involved in the recognition of a Chinese worker, Chou Ming Sham, who was buried in an unmarked grave at Petawawa. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission, upon hearing the story of the Chinese workers in Canada worked assiduously to locate all the graves, and in 2018 they unveiled a headstone for the twenty-five-year-old labourer who died far from his home and who was finally named. With Black's book, many of the Chinese workers are also restored to their place in history, with their trials of travel highlighted and their contributions to victory remembered.

TIM COOK, *CANADIAN WAR MUSEUM*