

A Bank Clerk at War

The Great War Diary of Nova Scotian A.I.M. Taylor, 85th Battalion C.E.F.

by

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Abstract

This thesis is an exploration of the previously unpublished diary of Aleck Taylor, a private of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War. Taylor's methodical daily entries offer a unique opportunity for both qualitative and quantitative analysis of his wartime experiences. Archival research and secondary sources, as well as comparison to contemporaneous accounts inform the discussion of Taylor's world, and enable analysis of his time in training, in combat both under fire, and during the monotony of daily trench life, and his time at leisure. Taylor's entries regarding some of the most pivotal Canadian engagements of the war as well as the humdrum of daily life offer a robust source for microhistory analysis. Examination of Taylor's diary with regard to contemporaries like Will R. Bird and Sydney Frost reveal that Taylor's war experiences were broadly typical, but his reactions to them mark him as being somewhat atypical, placing him within a spectrum of typicality among Canadian soldiers of the First World War. The reserved, bookish Taylor who emerges from his diary does not mesh with the current view of Canadian troops as mischievous, unruly brawlers and troublemakers. Taylor may be representative of many young Canadian soldiers who did not fit this stereotype, but are underrepresented in the current literature.

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Throughout the past three years I have consistently enjoyed furthering this project, though sometimes I could not devote to it the time it deserved. Even when life brought other concerns my way, my interest in this project was unflagging. I am now proud to say that with the aid and support of no small number of individuals, this project has been brought to completion. I owe a great deal of thanks to the friends and family who have helped me on this journey, and especially to those who generously volunteered to read my early drafts, or listen to me enthuse at length about the diary entries of a young man they had never met.

This thesis evolved out of a chance conversation with an historian, and mentor of sorts who never failed to have the answer to even my most obscure of questions. I would like to thank Kevin Robbins for his encyclopaedic mind, and uncanny knowledge of just where to find whatever I needed, even if I didn't know what I was looking for. I would also like to thank Dr. Ruth Bleasdale and Dr. Roger Marsters for generously agreeing to serve as readers on my defense committee.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Canadian soldiers of the First World War were forbidden from keeping personal diaries, lest they fall into enemy hands. Many soldiers disobeyed this order and kept diaries, photographs, and other records of their wartime activities. Though personal war diaries are not rare, the vast majority remain underutilized by academic historians. Such was the case with the diary of A.I.M. Taylor, languishing in the Nova Scotia Archives among correspondence pertaining to the 85th Battalion memorial at Passchendaele. Taylor's diary offers a highly descriptive account of the daily life of an average Canadian soldier during 1917. Taylor's faithful entries record his thoughts and activities from the humdrum of weather, training, and fatigues to the excitement of leisure hours, and matter-of-fact accounts of some of the war's most pivotal engagements. This thesis explores what his diary reveals about the soldiers' experience of the First World War.

Taylor's highly detailed daily entries offer a unique perspective of the Canadian fighting experience during the First World War. Traditional top-down histories have tended to neglect individual experience in favour of grand narrative. Taylor's diary provides a view of life in the trenches, both in rear-echelon areas as well as at the forefront of the allied advance. Taylor's diary informs a much-neglected area of the literature surrounding Canada's First World War experience. The years surrounding the First World War proved to be a pivotal time for Canadians and continue to affect our national and individual identities today. It is important that new studies expand upon the current knowledge base to inform both

social and national histories. Individual experience can inform the literature as much as grand narrative.

Historiography

Recent movements toward social and microhistories have opened realms of previously marginal study to mainstream historiography. Personal histories of “average” people have become more useful in informing the literature surrounding numerous subjects, including the First World War. Tim Cook has been a pioneer in using individual experience to expand larger narratives, and other modern First World War scholars have followed suit. This thesis relies greatly on Cook’s research and methodology in an examination of Private A.I.M. Taylor. Canada’s experience of the First World War has been extensively treated from the national point of view, and those of its war leaders. G.W.L. Nicholson’s official history of the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War¹ takes a top-down view of the field. Nicholson and many authors that followed were happy to focus on the sweeping national narrative, and leave individual soldiers’ voices to be captured by informal regimental histories.²

More recent evolutions in the field have stressed the importance of alternative sources to compliment national narrative. Ground-up studies of the Canadian experience of the First World War are far less prevalent and accessible than traditional alternatives. Until late in the 20th century, the study of the First

¹ G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Queen’s Printer, 1962).

² Tim Cook, *Clio’s Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 63.

World War in Canada was tightly controlled by official historians employed by the Department of National Defence. Restricted access to records ensured control of the academic narrative remained with official historians. As J.L. Granatstein stated, until the 1960s “the number of academic experts in Canadian foreign and defence policy could be counted on two hands – with fingers to spare.”³ Deviation from the national narrative runs the risk of being accused of delving in obscurity, but scholars like Cook and Desmond Morton have managed to carve out a niche. Cook balances narrative prose with testimonies mined from dozens of individual diaries across the entirety of the C.E.F. to great effect. His treatment of soldier’s accounts introduces their voices to the field and expands our view of the Canadian experience.⁴ Desmond Morton also successfully focuses on the soldiers in the trenches, discussing training, morale, treatment of wounded, and returning veterans. A few soldiers’ personal accounts of the war have entered the academic consciousness, such as those of Donald Fraser, George Bell, Sydney Frost and Will R. Bird. Cook’s extensive use of Fraser and Bell as part of the whole aid in discussing Taylor’s experiences with regard to his peers. Frost and Bird’s published memoirs appeared after the war and though highly informative, allow for post-war reflection upon the events related.

³ Jeff Keshen, “Review Essay: The New Campaigns of Canadian Military Historians,” *American Review of Canadian Studies*, Vol. 23 (Autumn 1993): 425.

Cited by Cook, *Clio’s Warriors*, 200.

⁴ Cook’s two volume anthology of the C.E.F. *Canadians Fighting the Great War* represents nearly a decade of research into almost every unit of the Canadian Corps and a wealth of letters, diaries, and other previously unused primary sources from the Canadian War Museum, and National Archives. See Patrick H. Brennan, Review of *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914–1916*, by Tim Cook, *Canadian Historical Review* 90, no. 2 (June 2009): 353-354. *Project MUSE*; Matt Gurney, “Review: At the Sharp End, Shock Troops, Vimy Ridge,” Review of *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1914–1916* and *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War, 1917-1918*, by Tim Cook, *International Journal* 64, no. 1 (March 2009): 286-287. *Sage Journals*.

Frost also ended the war as an officer, placing him somewhat outside of Taylor's social group. Fraser and Bell are more representative of Taylor's contemporaries, and their accounts have been extensively used by Cook to fill gaps in the existing historiography. Taylor, and many more of his unrecognized, or understudied comrades provide useful additions to the historiography of the experience of Canadians during the First World War.

In the years immediately following the First World War, citizens of nations around the world struggled with how to understand the events of 1914 to 1918, and how to rationalize so much loss and destruction. In Canada, as ex-soldiers filtered back from Europe through 1918 and into 1919 first-hand accounts of the war, uncensored by army hierarchy and lacking patriotic newspaper bluster, began to make their way into the public consciousness. The war had united the country in industrial output, patriotic fervor, and a sense of national accomplishment, but had divided it deeply along class, language, cultural and regional lines.⁵ Dual narratives were born, competing for prominence in the national consciousness: the good war, a costly but necessary war fought against the evils of militarism and aggression, and the needless war, a tragic and senseless waste of a generation.⁶ These were formulated and supplied by journalistic accounts, war poets and fiction writers, often penning the history of the individual. They proved to be more evocative than

⁵ Robert J. Talbot, "It Would Be Best to Leave Us Alone": First Nations Responses to the Canadian War Effort, 1914-18,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 45, no. 1, (Winter 2011): 90-120; Andrew Theobald, "Divided Once More: Social Memory and the Canadian Conscription Crisis of the First World War," *Past Imperfect*, 12 (2006): 1-19.

⁶ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 163-172.

the national histories just beginning to be eked out.⁷ Through the early 1920s the good war narrative predominated, informed by surviving veterans trying to bring meaning to their wounds and losses, and a public fiercely unwilling to believe anything that disputed the myth of the war they had constructed.⁸ Combatant nations also began to compile records, and to write lengthy official histories of the war. Canada's official war memory was entrusted to Arthur Fortesque Duguid, a former artillery officer, and fierce champion of the reputation of the Canadian Expeditionary Force. By the end of the decade, Duguid had compiled an enormous amount of source material but no published official history. Only one of his eight envisioned volumes would be published, and that not until 1938.⁹

By the mid-1930s, before Duguid's first volume was published, many unofficial histories of businesses, clubs, communities and battalions had found their way into wide distribution. Unofficial histories like Hayes' *The 85th in France and Flanders*¹⁰ served more as tributes and supplements to the battalion Honour Roll than academic history. At the same time, fictionalized accounts of soldiers' war memoirs sparked the war book proliferation. A growing number of war memoirs and the high-profile court case of Arthur Currie, former commander of the Canadian Corps, opened an era of questions regarding the accuracy of the war's public conception. Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front*¹¹ and Sassoon's *Memoirs of*

⁷ Cook, *Clio's Warriors*, 207.

⁸ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 163.

⁹ Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 623-639; Vance, *Death So Noble*, 167-169.

¹⁰ Joseph Hayes, *The 85th in France and Flanders*. (Halifax, NS: Royal Print and Litho Ltd, 1920).

¹¹ Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* (New York: Knopf, 2018 – originally published 1929).

*an Infantry Officer*¹² stand as examples of the “disillusionment writers” which rose by 1929 and began shifting public sentiment of the conflict away from the fervently patriotic and toward the senseless. Britain’s eventual twenty-nine volume Official Military History, written by serving and former soldiers was vast, comprehensive, and incomplete until 1948, after another world war. France’s 106 volume official record was completed between 1922 and 1939. Germany, Austria, and Australia also produced official histories after the war, completed in 1939, 1938, and 1943 respectively, though some combatant nations, namely Russia and Turkey did not.¹³ Writers of the official histories, often soldiers themselves, and sometimes academics, were charged with compiling accounts which would be readable to the public, factual in nature, and less biased than individual accounts of the war. They would also need to thread a narrow path between the hard statistics, and sometimes politically unfavourable truths. The official narratives were called upon to argue retroactively against some of the most controversial anti-war accounts that appeared in the 1930s. Tales of brutal violence, unthinking cruelty, and death scenes crafted to shock the reader such as those in Harrison’s *Generals Die in Bed*¹⁴ railed against army leadership, and in the eyes of the public, needlessly defamed their returned soldiers, some of whom were now unable to defend themselves.¹⁵

¹² Siegfried Sassoon, *Memoirs of an Infantry Officer* (London: Faber & Faber LTD, 1935).

¹³ John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 2000), 449.

¹⁴ Charles Yale Harrison, *Generals Die in Bed* (New York: William Morrow, 1930).

¹⁵ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 172-194; Andrew Green, *Writing the Great War: Sir James Edmonds and the Official Histories 1915-1948* (Portland OR: Taylor & Francis E-Library, 2005) 1-20; Cook, *Shock Troops*, 638-640.

The outbreak of the Second World War stymied interest in academic studies of the First World War for a time, and when it returned the memory of the war was largely in the hands of a new generation of academics who had not experienced the war. Keegan argued that there were few satisfactory general histories of the war produced, with the British claiming the most successful. Edmonds' *A Short History of World War I*,¹⁶ Falls' *The First World War*,¹⁷ and A.J.P. Taylor's *The First World War: An Illustrated History*¹⁸ are brief, but in Keegan's opinion among the best. Ferro's *The Great War 1914-1918*¹⁹ was the first general history to include a cultural and philosophical discussion.²⁰ Sweeping top-down accounts such as G.W.L. Nicholson's *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919*²¹ were in vogue, and many official war records would not be released for public consumption until the 1960s. In 1975 Paul Fussell put forward *The Great War and Modern Memory*²² as a cultural history analysis of the effects of the First World War on the western world, and the western conception of war. Fussell's work was innovative in the form of an examination of the intellectual legacy of the war, but criticized for drawing conclusions from only a narrow base of Anglo-American servicemen.²³ In the 1990s historiography of the First World War was re-invigorated by a turn to social history, and later microhistories, enriching the field beyond the stagnating top-down histories. New interdisciplinary, and international approaches inform the field on a scale not

¹⁶ Sir James E. Edmonds, *A Short History of World War I* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951).

¹⁷ Cyril Falls, *The First World War* (London: Longmans, 1960).

¹⁸ A.J.P. Taylor. *The First World War: An Illustrated History* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1963).

¹⁹ Marc Ferro, *The Great War 1914-1918* (London: Routledge, 1973).

²⁰ Keegan, *The First World War*, 450.

²¹ G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962).

²² Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975).

²³ Vance, *Death So Noble*, 5.

previously possible.²⁴ Taylor's diary offers a robust opportunity for microhistory, and informs the literature surrounding the daily lives of Great War soldiers. Keegan proffered that private diaries, when paired with reports, archival data, and impersonal material are at their best, and can rise above arguing purely in the anecdotal.²⁵ Taylor's diary, paired with archival data, and set within the context of Cook's boots-on-the-ground survey is a valuable addition to First World War historiography.

Thesis and Source Material

This thesis is based on original archival research stemming from the diary of A.I.M. Taylor, a previously untapped source.²⁶ Taylor's diary contains detailed information regarding his day to day life over almost a year of entries, and speaks to how typical his experiences were compared with those of other Canadian soldiers.

Taylor's diary resides within the fonds of the 85th Battalion Memory Club at the Nova Scotia Archives. For the purposes of this thesis the author captured digital images of each page of Taylor's diary and produced an original transcription of his handwritten entries. The author compared each entry against the corresponding day's entry in the 85th Battalion's official War Diary.²⁷ Records of censuses and vital statistics were consulted to identify some of the persons within Taylor's sphere, and

²⁴ Heather Jones, "As the Centenary Approaches: The Regeneration of First World War Historiography," *The Historical Journal*, 56, no. 3 (September 2013): 857; Cook, *Shock Troops*, 637-640; Keegan, *The First World War*, 454.

²⁵ John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking Press, 1976) 33.

²⁶ NS Archives, 85th Battalion Memory Club, M.G. 23, v. 1 No. 5, *Diary of A.I.M. Taylor*.

²⁷ LAC. War Diary of the 85th Battalion.

fill out his biography prior to his first diary entry. The diary as a whole was then compared with the contemporary narratives of Sydney Frost and Will Bird.²⁸

This thesis closely examines Taylor's diary with the intent of informing the literature regarding the daily experience of a Canadian soldier in the First World War. Carrying the rank of private, Taylor is assumed to be an example of the typical Canadian soldier in the First World War. However, Taylor possessed several traits which made him atypical as well. Comparison to contemporaries reveals a spectrum of typical experiences in which Taylor exists, with his behaviors in response to those experiences revealing his atypicality. Taylor's diary reveals that he is somewhat novel for being a literate soldier, compared to the thousands of illiterate Canadians of the time. In addition to being novel for his ability and willingness to keep a diary, Taylor also complains far less than his contemporaries. Many of Taylor's fellow soldiers left numerous records of complaints about their officers, superiors, the enemy, civilians, or the unfairness of life in the trenches. Taylor never complained to his diary about any of these common sources of grief, but he did save a special place for the weather. Mud and rain appear as frequent sources of strife in Taylor's life. Taylor did not record incidents that evoke the feeling of camaraderie that are held as a universal experience of veterans of the First World War. After leaving his closest friend in uniform behind in England, Taylor appeared to struggle to form new connections. Taylor also refrained from recording any incidence of drinking, gambling, womanizing or other vices in his diary. Soldiers frequently engaged in the

²⁸ Edward Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War: The Memoir of Captain Sydney Frost, MC* (St. John's, NL; Flanker Press 2015); *Will R. Bird, Ghosts have Warm Hands*. (Ottawa, ON: CEF Books, 2002).

pursuit of vices during their leisure time. It is unclear whether Taylor engaged in the pursuit of these vices, but neglected to mention them in his personal diary, or perhaps was himself an abstainer and chose to whitewash the activities of his compatriots. Taylor presented himself as a somewhat atypical soldier, but his experiences appear broadly in line with those of his contemporaries. Taylor's diary stands as a very good example of the experience of the common Canadian soldier during the First World War and is a strong addition to the literature.

This thesis primarily mines Taylor's diary for both qualitative and quantitative observations. Taylor's meticulous entries offer great detail about the minutia of his day. From this it is possible to quantify with reasonable accuracy how he spent his day, and the frequency with which he engaged in certain activities. Many Canadian soldiers produced memoirs in the years following the war detailing their experiences. These provide an important resource in understanding how Canadian troops remembered the war, but often include the results of years of reflection and distortion of memory and rarely include the day to day. Far more than any postwar memoir, Taylor's daily diary offers a glimpse into his life as it was happening. He recorded events ranging from the humdrum of being quarantined for mumps to the terror of being thrown into the assault on Vimy Ridge. Written almost in the moment, Taylor's account of his war experience reflects his immediate thoughts and feelings, without intervening time for introspection, or outside influence. The monolithic works of Tim Cook with regard to Canadian soldiers in the First World War provide context for understanding Taylor's experiences, and a useful source for comparing Taylor against the aggregation of his peers. Desmond

Morton's contributions to the subject are invaluable in placing Taylor's diary within the social history of the war. Deeper comparison and contrast with Taylor are achieved through two well-known post-war memoirs of contemporary soldiers Sydney Frost and Will R. Bird. Frost and Bird, as Nova Scotians who also enlisted as privates, provide excellent contemporary data points for informing a discussion of Taylor's typicality. Archival data and official records allow for construction of a brief prewar biography of Aleck Taylor, and to draw conclusions about the circumstances that led to his decisions to enlist, and to keep such a methodical and rigorous diary.

Chapter Two analyzes Taylor's experiences prior to entering combat in the trenches of the Western Front in April 1917, including a short biography of Taylor's life prior to enlisting. A discussion of the events surrounding the formation of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade will provide context for the atmosphere in which Taylor enlisted. Comparison with his contemporary Will Bird's time with the Highland Brigade at Aldershot Camp will illuminate Taylor's experiences in khaki prior to his diary entries and help place him in relation to other soldiers of the C.E.F. Examination of the importance of soldierly camaraderie and assumed families through the lens of Sydney Frost's memoir will detail Taylor's closest friends in uniform. Taylor's first diary entries at Witley Camp will inform the period of training that was a frustrating and almost universal experience for Canadian soldiers eager to get to France. Taylor's methodical daily entries allow for a much more robust quantitative analysis of his diary than do the diaries of many of his contemporaries. Finally, Taylor's relationship with his closest friends in uniform will afford discussion of the importance of his social support network.

Chapter Three explores Taylor's diary entries from March 31 to November 6, 1917 and discusses how he relates to the traditional paradigm of the typical Canadian soldier in the trenches. The period from March 31 to November 6 represents Taylor's time spent in the Western theatre of the First World War. Specific attention will be paid to the non-combat activities, and humdrum of daily life in the war. Several of Taylor's experiences under fire will be detailed with reference to contemporary accounts of the same engagements. The distinct lack of recorded casualties in Taylor's diary will facilitate a discussion of the presence of death as a constant companion in the trenches of the Western Front, and how soldiers dealt with it.

Chapter Four discusses leisure time activities for Canadian soldiers of the First World War, and specifically Taylor, both in the trenches, and during rest periods away from the line. Prescribed leisure activities such as games, and sports were built into a soldier's working day, but off-duty leisure activities are often more revealing of a subject's character and desires. Changes in the availability and time devoted to certain leisure activities with regard to Taylor's proximity to the front line will be quantified. An analysis of Taylor's personality will compare him to his contemporaries Will Bird and Sydney Frost in an effort to place him on a spectrum of his peers.

Historical Setting

When news broke on August 4th, 1914 that Britain and its empire were at war, Canada was thrust into a situation for which it was wholly unprepared. As a

self-governing dominion of the British Empire, Canada was obliged to join the war effort, but could exercise some control over its level of involvement. Fifteen years previously, the dominion had offered a few thousand volunteers for service in the South African War. In the intervening years Canada had become more populous and more prosperous, and national sentiment was tending toward a correspondingly increased commitment in the current conflict.²⁹

In 1914, Canada was a dominion of just fewer than 8 million inhabitants spread over 77 million hectares from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific including almost all of northern North America except for the neighbouring Dominion of Newfoundland. A handful of population centers dotted the expanse of land, but Canadians were a predominantly rural people with 65 percent of the population living outside of major cities.³⁰ In keeping with a rural population, the country had a rural economy based heavily in agriculture and raw materials like coal, staple crops, and wood. In Britain, the inhabitants of the North American colonies were often imagined as bushmen and cowboys carving a living from rough frontier lands. Nova Scotian Sydney Frost remarked that Scottish villagers were surprised to learn upon encountering them, that the soldiers of the Newfoundland Regiment spoke English, as they had been supposed to be "...either North American Indians or Eskimos, or a mixture of each..."³¹ In reality, recent influxes of immigration had done much to diversify the population of Canada, but the country was still predominantly British

²⁹ Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 22.

³⁰ Richard Clippingdale, *Laurier: His Life and World* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1979), 72-74.

³¹ Edward Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, 71

and Western European in culture and institution. Many Canadians were proudly part of the empire, and at least in English-speaking parts of the country the war effort was embraced in earnest. Not limited to flag-waving, and patriotic oaths, young Canadian men began eagerly enlisting in militia units on August 5th before Prime Minister Borden's government had even committed to sending Canadian military forces overseas. Few in Canada believed that Germany could stand long against a united Europe, and the ranks of militia units were swelled by excited young men expecting a few months of adventure, and to be home by Christmas. On August 6th the Borden government officially authorized the raising of one division of 18,000 men and 7,000 reinforcements, 25,000 men in total, to meet Britain's request for overseas service. This request for a full division far outstripped Canada's small professional army, the Permanent Force, and would need to be filled by militia units.³²

The pre-war mobilization plan for Canada's militia called for a consolidation of local militia units in predetermined military districts across the country, with drafts of trained men being sent from these districts to the largest military base in the country at Petawawa. Sam Hughes, Canada's Minister of Militia and Defence, and prime motivator behind the country's war effort in the first two years of the war, opted to scrap this plan as it was being carried out in favour of his own plan. On the evening of August 6, Hughes sent personal orders to militia commanders across the country requesting every able volunteer to assemble at Valcartier, northwest of

³² Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 21-27.

Quebec City. At that time Valcartier was little more than open, sandy fields on a riverbank, but through a marvel of patronage, scandal, and Hughes' personal determination, a military camp materialized, and the first troops began arriving twelve days later on August 18th. Of the 30,617 men who eventually left Valcartier for England as the First Contingent of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 18,495 were British-born, and of the 9,159 born in Canada many were of British heritage.³³ Young Canadian men, especially those of British heritage were under intense pressure to enlist to defend the empire, and allied Belgium from Germany. By the end of the First World War more than 430, 000 men and women would serve overseas, representing almost every community in the young Dominion.³⁴ One of them was Alexander Irwin Macdonald Taylor. Orphaned at a young age and working as a bank clerk prior to the war, nineteen-year-old Aleck Taylor was swept up by a wave of recruitment fervor and volunteered for the 219th Battalion of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade in March 1916.³⁵

³³ Library and Archives Canada, RG 24, v. 1810, GAQ 2-1, v. 1, Enlistment First Canadian Contingent.

³⁴ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 32-54.

³⁵ LAC. RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9513-2, Digitized Service File of A.I.M. Taylor, Attestation Paper.

Chapter Two: “Drilled all Day for a Change:” Training in England and France, October 1916 to March 1917.

Enlistment in the Canadian Expeditionary Force for overseas service in the First World War brought several dramatic changes to the life of Aleck Taylor. Of the twelve months from his enlistment until he departed for France and the front, his diary details just over two. From the existing literature and contemporary accounts like those of Will R. Bird and Sydney Frost it is possible to draw inferences about Taylor’s first ten months in uniform. As a private in an infantry battalion, Taylor’s experiences were representative of the typical Canadian soldier in the First World War, at least as far as can be gleaned from official documents. The person who emerges from the pages of Taylor’s diary differs somewhat from the image of the typical Canadian soldier that exists in the current body of literature. The current literature depicts soldiers of the C.E.F. as being incredibly brave in combat and unruly mischief makers with poor discipline and a fondness for drink outside of it.¹

The Taylor who emerges from his diary entries stands in contrast to this. He appears to be a quiet, reserved, and bookish individual. Many young Canadians who volunteered for service in the First World War may have shared these characteristics, but did not indicate so in a diary or written record left behind. Compared with contemporaries, Taylor’s broad stroke experiences of the war are typical. Taylor’s perception of, and reaction to his experiences as detailed in his

¹ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 73; Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 33, 386-390; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 337.

diary help to mark him as being personally somewhat atypical. Taylor shared an implicit belief in authority with his contemporary Sydney Frost. His diary contains no entries questioning the correctness of the hierarchy in which he exists, or the justness of the war he is fighting. Unlike many of his contemporaries including Will Bird, Taylor steadfastly avoided complaining about anything more controversial than the weather.² Taylor's diary contains no grievances about the small injustices that many soldiers bore, and which inform so much of Bird's wartime memoir. Taylor recorded the hardships of war in the same matter-of-fact tone he used for all of his entries. Nowhere in his diary did he detail a grievance with any of his officers, non-commissioned officers, or anyone who shared his world, save for the enemy and the weather. There was little that soldiers loved to do more than complain about the army. Taylor either had complaints, but consciously did not include them in his diary, or stoically accepted them as part of life in the army. Either sets him somewhat apart from his contemporaries.

This chapter surveys Taylor's experiences prior to entering combat in the trenches of the Western Front. Archival census data and vital records inform a short biography of Taylor's life prior to enlisting with the 219th Battalion C.E.F. A discussion of the events surrounding the formation of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade will provide context for the atmosphere in which Taylor was caught up in a recruitment drive. Comparison with his contemporary Will Bird's time with the

² Grousing, grumbling, and complaining to anyone who would listen, as well as spreading gossip and rumors were among the most popular soldierly pastimes. See Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 184-185.

Highland Brigade at Aldershot Camp will illuminate Taylor's experiences in khaki prior to his diary entries and help place him in relation to other soldiers of the C.E.F. Analysis of the importance of soldierly camaraderie and assumed families through the lens of Sydney Frost's memoir will detail Taylor's closest friends in uniform. Taylor's first diary entries at Witley Camp will inform the period of training that was a frustrating and almost universal experience for Canadian soldiers eager to get to France. Taylor's methodical daily entries allow for a much more robust quantitative analysis of his diary than many of his contemporaries. Finally, Taylor's relationship with his closest friends in uniform will afford discussion of the importance of his social support network, and the effects of leaving it to enter combat when he would need it most.

Prewar Biography

Alexander (Aleck) Irwin Macdonald Taylor was one of the 430, 000 Canadians who served overseas in the Great War. Though he was born in Nova Scotia, and his family had been Nova Scotian for at least a generation, his middle names reflected the Irish Irwin and Scottish Macdonald heritage of his mother's family. He was born December 11th, 1896 to Elizabeth (née Macdonald), and Andrew Taylor.³ Aleck was seventeen years old in August 1914 and living in Bridgewater,

³ NS Archives, 85th Battalion Memory Club, M.G. 23, v. 1 No. 5, *Diary of A.I.M. Taylor*, Attribution page (insert); LAC. RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9513-2, Digitized Service File of A.I.M. Taylor, Attestation Paper. (The donor attribution page associated with Taylor's diary indicates his birthday is December 11th, 1896 as does a family monument erected to his memory in Camp Hill Cemetery, Halifax. Curiously, his attestation paper states his birth year as 1897, but correctly states his age as nineteen years, two months. An official birth record has not yet been located).

Nova Scotia in the home of his uncle Edward Macdonald.⁴ Tragedy had orphaned Aleck at a very young age. His mother died March 6th, 1897 just months after he was born.⁵ His father followed just over a year later on May 15th, 1898 which resulted in Aleck being raised as a son by his maternal grandparents Alex and Lydia Macdonald.⁶ The Macdonald household in Halifax in 1901 consisted of Alex, Lydia, their son Edward age twenty, Aleck age four, and a domestic servant named Grace. Curiously, Aleck is recorded as a son of the head of the household, rather than a grandson, and his age is misreported as fourteen.⁷ Martial influences were ever-present in Aleck's world during his formative years. He grew up in Ward 5 of Halifax, a neighbourhood in the middle of the steep slope that ran uphill to the imposing citadel fortifications on one hand, and down to His Majesty's Dockyards on the other.⁸ His grandfather worked in a brass foundry, but when he married Lydia J. Irwin in 1871, Alexander Macdonald was a corporal in the Royal Engineers.⁹ Prior to the spring of 1906, Halifax was home to the last garrison of British troops in North America. When they paraded through the streets to embark on the waiting transport ships, a young Aleck Taylor could have watched with fascination as Imperial soldiers marched down his street, not knowing that he would follow the same route to England ten years later.

⁴ LAC, RG 31– Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1911, microfilm T-20362.

⁵ Nova Scotia Archives, Nova Scotia Death Records, 1890-1955, Registration Year 1897, p. 172, no. 33 Bessie Taylor.

⁶ NS Archives, Nova Scotia Death Records, 1890-1955, Registration Year 1898, p. 196, no. 37 Andrew D. Taylor.

⁷ LAC, RG - 31 Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1901, microfilm T-6451.

⁸ NS Archives Library O/S G 1129 H3 H67 1878. City Atlas of Halifax, Nova Scotia, Ward 5.

⁹ NS Archives, Nova Scotia Vital Records, 1763-1957, Registration Year 1871, Book 1815, p. 186, No. 185.

Unfortunately, Aleck suffered another upheaval early in life. On August 11, 1908 his grandfather and adoptive father died, and the family left their home at 337 Brunswick Street in Halifax.¹⁰ As early as 1901 Aleck's uncle and adoptive brother Edward had been working as a bookkeeper.¹¹ On October 20th, 1908 Edward Macdonald, now living in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia married Amanda Dickson.¹² Following the death of his grandfather, Aleck and his grandmother Lydia relocated to Bridgewater to live with Edward and his wife.¹³ Aleck appears not to have had much contact with his paternal relatives. His father was born in Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island, and had moved to Amherst, Nova Scotia prior to marrying his first wife, Helen Read, who also died young.¹⁴ A survey of names that Aleck specifically mentions writing to, or receiving mail from, in his diary in almost a year of service overseas does not reveal any obvious paternal relatives, but does include maternal relations. Family appears to be a strong, if somewhat impermanent influence in Aleck Taylor's life, and he is constantly surrounded by the Macdonalds of his maternal family. When the time came for Aleck to choose his own career, he first followed his uncle's footsteps and became a clerk at the Bank of Montreal branch in Bridgewater, Nova Scotia. However, in the spring of 1916 shortly after his nineteenth birthday Aleck once more felt the sway of martial influence, and on

¹⁰ NS Archives, Nova Scotia Deaths, 1890-1955, Registration Year 1908, p. 155, no. 34 Alexander B. Macdonald.

¹¹ LAC, RG-31 Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1901, microfilm T-6451.

¹² NS Archives, Nova Scotia Vital Records, 1763-1957, Registration Year 1908, Book: 1807, p. 264, no. 144

¹³ LAC, RG-31 Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1911, microfilm T-20362.

¹⁴ LAC, RG-31 Statistics Canada, Canada Census, 1891, microfilm T-6311; NS Archives, Nova Scotia Vital Records, 1763-1957, Registration Year 1895, Book: 1819, p. 64, no. 339. Record of marriage of Andrew D. Taylor and Bessie M. McDonald (Andrew Taylor is listed as a widower).

March 8th he enlisted for overseas service with the 219th "Highland" Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force.¹⁵

Recruiting and the Expansion of the Corps

The 85th Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force (Nova Scotia Highlanders) was authorized on September 14th, 1915 and was quickly flush with recruits from all parts of Nova Scotia. The officers of the 85th felt that there was great potential to raise more than just one battalion of soldiers, and this confidence led to the authorization of a further three battalions to form the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade. The new battalions, the 185th, 193rd, and 219th were allotted regions of the province, and set to work recruiting in earnest. The 185th was assigned Cape Breton Island. The counties of Cumberland, Colchester, Hants, Pictou, Antigonish and Guysboro were assigned to the 193rd. The 219th was assigned the counties of Halifax, Lunenburg, Queens, Shelburne, Yarmouth, Digby, Annapolis and Kings. In the late winter and spring of 1916 detachments of the newly formed brigade canvassed the province to fill the ranks. The effectiveness of the campaign can be inferred from Hayes' claim that in twenty-two days the entire brigade was recruited up to, and then overstrength.¹⁶ Young Aleck Taylor was swept up by this recruitment fervor and volunteered for the 219th Battalion along with his friend and fellow bank clerk Allison Glenn who enlisted on the same day.¹⁷

¹⁵ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, facing pages and Dec. 30, 1916.

¹⁶ Joseph Hayes, *The 85th in France and Flanders*. (Halifax, NS: Royal Print and Litho Ltd, 1920), 22-27.

¹⁷ LAC. RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3584-8, Digitized Service File of A.C. Glenn. (Glenn also appears on the Bank of Montreal Honour Roll).

Though Taylor's diary does not contain entries that speak to his early experiences in uniform, another young man caught up in the same recruitment fervor can illuminate what Taylor likely encountered. Will R. Bird enlisted in the 193rd Battalion in his hometown of Amherst, Nova Scotia¹⁸ in April 1916 and was a member of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade until he transferred to the 42nd Battalion in December of 1916.¹⁹ During that time Taylor, Bird, and thousands of other young Nova Scotians began their indoctrination into the Canadian Expeditionary Force, and prepared to join their comrades already fighting overseas.

When the First Canadian Contingent was authorized in August, 1914 Minister of Militia Sam Hughes discarded pre-war mobilization plans that called for a controlled and decentralized build-up of the country's military capacity. Spurning existing militia training grounds across the country, he personally directed militia colonels to bring the swelling ranks of their units to a site 25km northwest of Quebec City. The site consisted of sandy fields on the east bank of the Jacques Cartier River, and did not yet possess anything resembling military training facilities. Teams of labourers working around the clock quickly began to transform this landscape into the centralized military training ground Hughes dreamed of, and Valcartier became one of Canada's largest cities almost overnight. The first troops arrived by train on August 18th, two weeks after the outbreak of war, and a further 10,000 troops would arrive by the end of September. Everything in Valcartier was

¹⁸ LAC. RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 748-27, Digitized Service File of William Richard Bird, Attestation Paper.

¹⁹ Will R. Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands* (Ottawa, ON: CEF Books, 2002), 5-6.

improvised in the moment. The tasks of housing, clothing, feeding, and training an ever-growing number of soldiers were carried out by officers who had no guide to follow, and very little time to devise a solution before even more recruits arrived. Compounding these problems was a general lack of field experience in the camp. Hugh's disdain of professional soldiers had ensured that Canada's Permanent Force infantry, the Royal Canadian Regiment, containing many veterans of the previous war in South Africa, were dispatched to Bermuda where they could not interfere with his grand improvisation in Valcartier.²⁰

The soldiers of the First Contingent spent the months from August to October in a state of barely controlled chaos in Valcartier. They lived under canvas until more permanent structures could be constructed, drilled for weeks in civilian clothing until uniforms were available, and spent as much time filling out documents, and being sick from inoculations as learning any soldiering skills. Around them, work was feverishly taking place to turn Valcartier's sandy fields into a town to house up to 30,000 men, complete with utilities and military training facilities. From the swirling mass of thousands of men, a few experienced officers, and a great deal more social-climbers who held a fashionable militia commission, something resembling a military division began to emerge. Uniforms and rifles, but never enough of either, began to replace civilian clothing and broomsticks. By October 3rd, 1914 all the route marches, foot drill, and training had prepared some

²⁰ Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 33-34; G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962), 20-28.

30,617 men to be sent overseas to England. Many of them felt that they were now completely ready to drive the Germans back over the Rhine, and put a quick end to the war, but somewhat frustratingly for them they were only heading for a cold and wet fall and winter of additional training on Salisbury Plains in England.²¹

After the departure of the fledgling First Contingent, cold weather prompted the winter closure of Valcartier Camp. When the camp re-opened in the spring it had lost its primacy as the training ground for Canada's war contribution. The war in the spring of 1915 looked very different than it had in August of 1914. The highly mobile German offensives early in the war had pushed deep into French territory, and eventually ground to a halt through a combination of stiffening Anglo-French resistance and outstripping the capacity of the German supply lines. Where the German thrust eventually lost momentum, both sides began to dig in and fortify their position. Seeking to outmaneuver the enemy, German, and Anglo-French forces then began a series of assaults on each other's open northwestern flank hoping to return mobility to the conflict. These successive flanking attacks provided little military advantage to either combatant but did extend the line of opposing fortified positions to the Belgian coast. At the conclusion of this "race to the sea"²² thousands of men now faced each other in a line of fortified positions across the entirety of France and Belgium. The early disconnected trench outposts were hurriedly expanded and connected to form one almost unbroken frontier. Though British and French military doctrine would continue to cling for years to the goal of breaking

²¹ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 54; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 28-34.

²² Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 244.

through the deadlock of this static trench warfare, and returning to a mobile war, it was becoming clear that this would not be a brief clash.²³

Prompted by the expanding nature of the conflict, a second division of Canadian soldiers was authorized, followed by a third, and eventually a fourth division which included the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade. By the spring of 1916 when Aleck Taylor enlisted in the 219th Battalion the military recruiting and training apparatus in Canada had expanded to encompass almost every community in the country. The sheer number of soldiers and equipment needed to replace losses overseas could not be trained and assembled in a single location such as Valcartier Camp. Starting with the Second Canadian Division, recruits were raised and trained according to the decentralized pre-war plan based on militia districts, and armoury halls across the country rather than one titanic tent city at Valcartier.²⁴ New recruits like Taylor now spent their first days in the army training in small detachments in public spaces in their home communities. Eventually they were gathered into larger groups as their battalion mobilized, often in pre-war militia training grounds that had been hastily built up since the outbreak of hostilities. In the case of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade and Taylor, this was at Aldershot Camp in Nova Scotia.²⁵ Taylor's diary opens in December 1916 after being shipped overseas to Britain but

²³ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 55-67; John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 2000), 136; Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold, eds., *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 51-52.

²⁴ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 49.

²⁵ Hayes, *The 85th In France and Flanders*, 27; Brent Fox, *Camp Aldershot: Serving since 1904* (Kingston, NS: Kings Historical Society, 1983), 6-7.

broad strokes of his experience at Aldershot Camp can be gleaned from the memoir of his contemporary, Will Bird.

After a spring spent training with his battalion in his hometown of Amherst, Nova Scotia, Bird and the rest of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade converged on the old militia training grounds of Aldershot Camp. There, Bird depicts a summer of parades, drills, marching, physical hardening, special courses of instruction, and commonplace injustices of army life. A great deal of discipline and refinement was required to produce a functional fighting force from Canada's new masses of citizen-soldiers. Some, like Will Bird, recently returned from a harvest tour of Western Canada,²⁶ perfectly embodied Sam Hughes' vision of his "boys,"²⁷ but there were also less rugged recruits. On March 8th, 1916 when Aleck Taylor enlisted in the 219th Battalion he stood 5-foot 5^{1/2} inches, weighed 130lbs, and had only celebrated his nineteenth birthday two months prior.²⁸ Taylor's experience as a bank clerk would likely have stood in stark contrast to his first weeks as a soldier. There was a world of regulations, procedures, perceived deficiencies, and offenses to military discipline that had hitherto remained unknown to him, but which he would learn to navigate.²⁹

A Typical Soldier Who Does Not Fit the Mould

Bird described his time at Aldershot, and indeed army life writ large as an endless series of hardships, and injustices borne by the common soldier. The root

²⁶ Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands*, v.

²⁷ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 33.

²⁸ LAC. Digitized Service File of A.I.M. Taylor, Attestation Paper.

²⁹ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 82.

cause of this in Bird's view was bureaucratic incompetence, officers full of bluster, but lacking skill, and sergeants more concerned with dogged adherence to procedure than problem-solving. Bird encountered early all three of these antagonists when his refusal to obey contradictory orders landed him on a punishment detail. His disciplinary hearing was perfunctory, illogical, unjust to the civilian mind, and likely all too common an experience for Canada's citizen soldiers as they became acquainted with their new realities. Bird boldly claimed that this first encounter with army discipline converted him from a proud soldier, to a jaded one, knowing that there would never be any real justice found in the army. It also set a very apparent trend throughout his memoir of the need for common soldiers to band together in inveigling and obfuscating the designs of their superiors to survive in a very callous hierarchy. Bird repeatedly portrayed himself using his resourcefulness and intellect to out-scheme and outwit a number of officers and non-commissioned officers in an effort to ease the brutal life of a soldier. When necessary, he felt no guilt for having purloined food from the officers' supplies, or ensured his own survival in the face of incompetent leadership.³⁰ As Bird noted, many of the names in his published memoir are of his own invention to protect the privacy of the persons contained within. With that protection in place, Bird rarely disguised his true feelings toward an individual. Some of his erstwhile brothers in arms are accorded laurels such as Captain Arthur "one of the finest men I have met anywhere"³¹ while others receive unmitigated vitriol. A soldier's diary might be his

³⁰ Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands*, 3-5, 42-45.

³¹ Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands*, 42.

most trusted confidant during the harsh realities of life in a rapidly industrializing war. Constantly in the presence of his fellow soldiers, and with postal correspondence subject to censorship by officers, privacy was at a premium. A diary kept in a uniform pocket may have been the only medium for a soldier to express private thoughts without fear of recrimination. It isn't surprising that Will Bird and many contemporary soldiers would use wartime diaries to record for posterity unedited assessments of those around them. Breaking from the norm, Private Aleck Taylor refrained from expressing discontent with any one person in his diary. Unlike Bird, Taylor never mentioned being blackguarded by uninspiring NCOs, or having to outwit pompous officers. In fact, throughout nearly a year of dutiful diary entries Taylor never once mentioned any of his superiors in a direct fashion. He did note when his unit had been paraded for inspection by such lofty individuals as the commanding officer or "G.O.C." [General Officer Commanding], or when rumors flew that his unit would parade for the king,³² but the entries are matter of fact without emotional reaction. Aside from one mention of receiving a box of chocolates from "Aunt Teck" the only persons mentioned by name in his diary are Taylor's family, correspondents, and closest friends in uniform. Taylor refrained from committing to his diary personal details and opinions regarding those who share his world.³³ He also largely refrained from introspection, preferring to detail the events of his life in matter-of-fact fashion. Over the course of his diary Taylor never disparaged any individual, never railed against the army establishment, and never appeared

³² NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, July 11, 1917.

³³ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 10, 1917. (Likely a Christmas gift of chocolates to His Majesty's soldiers, received late, from Mary of Teck, Queen consort of the United Kingdom).

dissatisfied with anything more critical than the weather. He rarely complained at all. During his training in Witley Camp Taylor did once appear annoyed at having been “Sent back to my company. Just my rotten luck!!”³⁴ from a course of instruction for battalion runners which he considered to be a “sinch of a job”³⁵ but appeared to accept the change readily enough. This was perhaps a stroke of luck for Taylor who could not have known how frequently runners failed to return from their task on the battlefield.³⁶ Prior to embarking for France Taylor only mentioned one instance of being unduly tired after a day’s work.³⁷ Rebuilding practice trenches into the early hours of the morning may have tired Taylor, but it didn’t dampen his enthusiasm to get to France. Two days after a day building trenches he remarked “Some tired and bed looked good. Its [sic] great to be a soldier.” Taylor was eagerly anticipating his departure from England: “No word of going to France as yet. Worse luck.”³⁸ Prior to his actual departure almost two months later, Taylor made particular mention of going to France five additional times, recorded rumored departure dates and the receipt of kit to be used in France, and genuinely seemed disappointed when he was temporarily delayed in quarantine while the rest of his battalion shipped out.

Camaraderie in Khaki

Sydney Frost, another former bank clerk and Nova Scotian, served in the First World War with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. Like Taylor, his vocation

³⁴ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 4, 1917.

³⁵ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 2, 1917.

³⁶ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 151.

³⁷ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 9, 1917.

³⁸ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 11, 1917.

and training likely played a role in his proclivity for collecting records, documenting his wartime experience in diary and scrapbook form, and meticulously describing his interactions with both friends and superiors. Taylor's diary was given to him by his prewar employer The Bank of Montreal,³⁹ which in addition to his vocation and affinity for reading and writing may have been a driving force in his decision to record his wartime experiences. Frost's memoir is rich in interpersonal details. He described at length conflicts and moments of camaraderie among the actors in his world and devoted entire sections to biographical details of those who share his tent or barrack room. Bird similarly makes special mention of his friends in uniform and is deeply affected when they are injured or killed.⁴⁰ Early entries in Taylor's diary depict two men Taylor took the time to specifically mention. While training in England, Taylor was frequently visited by "Glenn" Allison Clyde Glenn, and "Cush" Alexander Burton Cushing. Taylor, Regimental No. 282278, Glenn, Regimental No. 282291, and Cushing, Regimental No. 282294 all enlisted with the 219th Battalion in Bridgewater, NS on March 8th, 1916. Cushing was born in Bridgewater and had worked as a chauffeur before enlisting.⁴¹ It is not immediately clear if Cushing knew either Glenn or Taylor prior to enlisting. Glenn was born in Meductic, New Brunswick, and had been working as a bank clerk prior to enlistment.⁴² Since Glenn also appears on the Bank of Montreal Honour Roll, it is highly likely that Glenn and Taylor worked at the same branch in Bridgewater and at the very least knew each

³⁹ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 10, 1917.

⁴⁰ Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands*, 168.

⁴¹ LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 2245-1, Digitized Service File of A. B. Cushing, Attestation Paper.

⁴² LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 3584-8, Digitized Service File of A.C. Glenn, Attestation Paper.

other before enlisting. The experiences they shared during the spring and summer of 1916 forged a bond in these three young men that carried across the Atlantic.

Training and Retraining

Early Canadian soldiers arriving in England were often eager to get to France and combat, believing that their training in the militia camps and drill halls of Canada had fully prepared them to be soldiers. It had been a half century since Canadian militia units had begun to take a primary rather than auxiliary role in the defense of Canada from departing British regulars. In that period it was accepted that an untrained recruit could progress from the basics of drill to brigade-level tactical exercises in ten days.⁴³ This confidence was born of a lack of experience in combating a modern, industrialized, professional fighting force. Memory, made more glorious in the intervening years, of Canadian successes in the South African War helped to dim acceptance of the need for additional training.⁴⁴ Amid the harsh lessons of Canadian troops' first combat engagements on the Western Front, Sir John French's generous claim that Canadians had "saved the situation" at the Second Battle of Ypres again propounded the myth: personal *élan* had brought inexperienced but determined Canadian troops success where professionally trained and equipped French troops had failed.⁴⁵ For senior officers and civilians across the ocean, the concept that victory depended less on personal acts of courage

⁴³ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 80; Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth: Masculinity, Class and Militarism in Ontario, 1902-1914," *Labour/Le Travail*, 42 (Fall 1998): 120.

⁴⁴ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 5-6; Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth," 120-125.

⁴⁵ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 54; Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold, eds., *Vimy Ridge*, 39-39.

and bravery than on the methodical application of superior material production was a difficult paradigm to accept.⁴⁶

Canadian recruits spent an average of eight months training in Canada before embarking across the Atlantic. Taylor enlisted on March 8, 1916 and embarked from Halifax for Liverpool on October 12th, 1916 having spent just over seven months in uniform⁴⁷. Taylor's diary does not contain entries from that time, but contemporaries spent their first months in training almost leisurely. There was plenty of time to learn and repeat the basics of drill, and the polishing and maintenance of personal kit and equipment, though both were often in short supply. Recruits woke to the sounds of reveille at 6:00am, experienced physical hardening through various calisthenics and aerobics, washed, had breakfast and spent the rest of the day from 8:00am to 4:30pm engaged in drill, route marches, or classroom learning. From 4:30pm until "lights out" at 10:00pm recruits were generally free unless experiencing punishment for some infraction of army discipline, or if they were unlucky enough to be selected for piquet duty.⁴⁸ Drill and marching were the two most common elements of the regimen of instruction, interspersed with inspections to root out any deficiencies. The men also practiced fighting skills such as bayonet fencing, throwing bombs, and fieldcraft. Unfortunately, until 1917 most instructors in Canada had limited experience actually using these skills in combat in the current war. Drill fostered an obedience to authority, and allowed a soldier to

⁴⁶ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 150; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 11-13.

⁴⁷ LAC, Digitized Service File of A.I.M. Taylor.

⁴⁸ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 80-81.

operate his weapon as if it was part of him, and route marches did harden feet and bodies to prepare them to carry up to 80lbs of kit for a day's journey.⁴⁹ The realities of the conflict in France, however, went well beyond the scope of the drill and marching recruits had spent so much time mastering in Canada. Upon arrival in England, even troops having spent seven months in uniform were often regarded as little better than raw. Having to spend a further few months in cold, muddy camps in England relearning what they had been taught in addition to more practical aspects of fieldcraft often rankled soldiers eager to prove their worth.⁵⁰ If Canada's new soldiers were unhappy to discover their training so far had only been moderately useful in preparing for war, they were even less thrilled to quickly discover that much of the equipment they brought from Canada could not stand up to the rigors of their new training fields. Almost every single piece of Canadian-made equipment failed prior to entering combat and required replacement with hardier British equivalents.⁵¹ For Taylor, a private in an infantry battalion, this meant long winter months learning again how to be a soldier and receiving replacement British equipment while eagerly anticipating embarkation for France.

After a weeklong journey by sea from Halifax, Taylor arrived in Liverpool, England on October 19th, 1916. His diary does not contain entries covering his first two months overseas, but from December 28th, 1916 it is possible to build a sketch of Taylor's experiences. Perhaps due to his familiarity with recordkeeping as a clerk

⁴⁹ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 81-82; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 85-93.

⁵⁰ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 90; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 91.

⁵¹ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 78; Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force*, 26-28; Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold, eds., *Vimy Ridge*, 35.

Taylor was very predictable and methodical in his diary entries during the period he was preparing to go to France. Taylor made regular mention of the weather, what activities or instruction he took part in, equipment he received, any occurrence outside of the routine and what he did in his leisure time. In some cases, his entries from December 28th, 1916 to March 8th, 1917 read like a ledger as much as a personal diary. Taylor's entry from January 25th is broadly representative of the pattern of his diary during this period:

Thursday January 25th 1917

Drilled all morning as usual. In afternoon went to Thursley Commons putting up barb wire entanglements. In evening read and wrote a letter + turned in early.⁵²

January 25th, 1917 was a typical training day in Witley Camp for Taylor. His mornings were generally filled by drill, followed by an afternoon course in some more practical aspect of fieldcraft or a route march. Once his day on parade had finished Taylor liked to spend his free time reading, keeping up a prodigious correspondence, and going to bed early. There are occasional deviations from this norm which Taylor notes, for example when he is paid, when he is sent on special courses of instruction, or when he receives a new piece of equipment. Taylor's apparent preference for spending his free time reading, writing and going to bed early sets him somewhat apart from contemporaries like Will Bird. The archetypal Canadian soldier in England during the First World War is frequently depicted as spending their off hours fighting, drinking, and getting into whatever trouble they

⁵² NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 25, 1917.

could in the English countryside. Certainly Bird's proclivity for hijinks meshes well with that stereotype.⁵³

A soldier's day was strictly controlled by the establishment to which he belonged. While training for combat in England, from reveille at 6:00am until dismissed, usually around 4:30pm Canadian soldiers followed a predictable schedule determined by their officers. Drill and marching were the most common activities, interspersed with training in more practical skills and fieldcraft; inspections were a constant companion to any soldier.⁵⁴ Taylor largely followed this pattern. From his first diary entry on December 28th, 1916 until he departed to join his battalion on March 28th, 1917, Taylor recorded practice drill sessions on twenty-seven days, twenty-six practical training sessions, and fourteen route marches. He also made note of fifteen inspections, two parades, two church parades, and a day standing guard. Taylor's diary indicates that he spent more time in practical training sessions than marching, but only covers his last few months in training. An increase in practical fieldcraft skills over marching and basic drills is understandable in the latter portion of his preparations for combat on the Western Front. From 4:30pm until "lights out" at 10:00pm soldiers were free to entertain themselves. Games, sports, gambling, smoking, and rapidly spending any money they possessed were favoured pastimes in Canadian camps. Trips to nearby towns offered other diversions, where Canadian soldiers lined up to take in dance routines and

⁵³ ⁵³ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 73; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 33, 386-390; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme*, 337.

⁵⁴ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 80-81.

theatrical revues. Returning to camp with empty pockets, soldiers could find coffee, tea, wholesome conversation, and a place to mail letters at the YMCA hut.⁵⁵ Taylor spent much of his downtime as he did on January 12th, reading, writing, and going to bed early. In the ninety entries Taylor made while training, he specifically mentioned turning in early on fifteen days, sometimes as early as 7:00pm. He noted reading on nineteen evenings during that time and received or wrote mail on thirty seven days:

Friday January 12th 1917

Squad drill as usual. In afternoon we went to T. Commons for a lecture on trench digging and laying sand bags. In evening I wrote a letter read a while + turned in early. Good days work.⁵⁶

January 12th, 1917 was another typical day in Witley Camp for Taylor. The day's lesson on trench digging, and laying sandbags forms part of a longer series of lectures and courses designed to prepare recruits for actual conditions in the trenches of the Western Front. Foot and arms drill continued to be the foundation of discipline in armies of the British Dominions. Regular drill periods produced soldiers who could react to orders without thinking and operate their weapons as extensions of their bodies. However, the modern battlefield required more than crisp, exact movements and clockwork precision in timing. Alongside regular drills, inspections and cleaning Taylor also undertook several special courses in the two

⁵⁵ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 394-401; Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 243; Krista Cowman "Touring behind the lines: British soldiers in French towns and cities during the Great War," *Urban History* 41, no. 1 (February 2014): 110-112.

⁵⁶ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 12, 1917.

months prior to departing Witley Camp. In addition to his disrupted course with the runners he received lectures on poison gas and the use of protective equipment, entrenching and sandbagging, use of the Lewis Gun and trench mortar, battalion-sized mock attacks and instruction as a “bomber.” Eventually specializing as a bomber, Taylor would have carried extra hand-thrown explosives in combat to support his platoon’s riflemen. The British, and therefore Canadian army called these explosives Mills bombs, though the concept originated in the eighteenth century as the “grenade.”⁵⁷ Though specializing with bombs, Taylor was trained in the use of many weapons in the Canadian arsenal.

Canadian soldiers in the First World War would not have found Taylor’s schedule to be unusual. By 1917 enough experienced instructors had returned from France to put together a coherent training programme to prepare new recruits for the rigors they might face in the current conflict as opposed to the battlefields dreamed up by militia instructors in Canada who had never seen combat.⁵⁸ As part of the new and more flexible Canadian military doctrine adopted after the unimaginative campaigns of the first three years of war, soldiers had to be able to think and act independently and fill any vacant role. Taylor could fight with many of the weapons in Canadian service, entrench, and act independent of orders. However, as his diary reveals, often the most useful task for Taylor to carry out was digging trenches and carrying supplies up the line under cover of darkness on a working party. As a contemporary soldier, Bird also found himself trying his hand at many

⁵⁷ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 128.

⁵⁸ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 91.

roles, spending some time as a sniper, a bomber, and a clerk before eventually surrendering his sergeant's stripes, having turned them down twice previously on the grounds that he preferred the comradeship of being in the ranks.⁵⁹

Breaking Social Supports

At the beginning of Taylor's diary in December of 1916 he was a young man turned soldier, uprooted from his home and family and denied his previous social supports. In his new uniformed family, camaraderie was central to thriving under increasingly harsh conditions. Contemporary soldiers like Bird and Frost place great emphasis on interactions with the other young men sharing their fate. In the sea of khaki that was the Canadian army in the First World War, the men of a fighting unit formed small, fluid, and unofficial families. The men of a platoon or section became like family to each other. They shared hardships and successes, meals and leisure time was spent together, and they learned to take pride in looking after each other. Men who had been recruited together came from the same communities, wore the same badges on their hats and shoulders, and marched under the same regimental banners forming bonds that transcended friendship into a kind of familial relation. They took great pride in their newfound identities in these units, and were often devastated when forced to move into an unfamiliar group.⁶⁰ In the training camps of southern England, Taylor's closest compatriots were two young men who shared his experiences in becoming a soldier from the beginning: Allison Glenn and Alexander Cushing. Over the course of the first months of his diary from January 6 to

⁵⁹ Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands*, 168.

⁶⁰ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 76-78; Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth," 127-128.

March 8, 1917, Taylor specifically mentions seeing Glenn twelve times, and Cushing four times, though always paired with Glenn. On December 30, 1916 Glenn, Cushing, and the remainder of the 219th Battalion had moved to Bramshott to be distributed as reinforcements to other battalions.⁶¹ Two days prior on December 28th Taylor had transferred to the 85th Battalion at Witley Camp. Army regulations prevented soldiers under the age of nineteen from proceeding to France and active combat, thus Glenn and Cushing continued to wait in reserve until they are nineteen. Taylor, older than his friends, was now part of a battalion destined for the Western Front. It must have been difficult for Taylor to be separated from the friendships he had forged in the past year, and thrust into a new social group, but Taylor wasn't fully isolated from his friends. Cushing, and particularly Glenn, frequently found time to journey the approximately 11km from Bramshott to visit Taylor, and Taylor reciprocated by journeying to visit them. Taylor and Glenn often met to go to one of the towns located near the Canadian camps such as Haslemere or Godalming to go to the movies, or seek food other than that provided by the army.⁶² They also made frequent trips to the Tintowns that sprang up on the margins of the Canadian camps in Surrey. These quickly erected huddles of tin-sided shops were infamous for providing soldiers with food, entertainment, and baubles at inflated rates.⁶³ Taylor and his friends also met to travel to the Y.M.C.A. to send letters home or seek the soldier's entertainment they offered:

⁶¹ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, December 30, 1916.

⁶² NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 5, 1917.

⁶³ Desmond Morton, "Kicking and Complaining": Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-19,' *Canadian Historical Review*, 61. 3 (1980) p. 338.

Wednesday February 14th 1917

Route march in morning. Scrubbing hut boards in afternoon. In evening I went to YMCA + mailed a few letters. Met AleG [Al Glenn] + came back to camp. Turned in.⁶⁴

Mailing letters, and meeting a friend were simple diversions in Taylor's life, and doubtless helped break up the monotony of scrubbing his hut while in quarantine waiting to join the rest of his battalion already departed for France:

Thursday March 8th 1917

Nothing much doing in morning. Inspection in afternoon leaving for France tonight. Issued with ammunition. Glenn + Cush came over in evening to say au revoir.⁶⁵

On his last free evening before departing for France Taylor ensured that his leisure hours were spent in the company of his closest friends. Entraining for France the next day, Taylor was forced to say a hurried goodbye to the men who had been his army family and join his new regimental family overseas. Arriving in France and joining a fighting battalion headed for combat tested Taylor and pushed him to extremes that he had never before encountered. Concurrent with his first experiences fighting for his life, Taylor was also thrust into the anonymity of a new battalion, and new social landscape. The other members of the 85th battalion had bonded during their time in France while Taylor and the two hundred and sixty-nine others that were quarantined during a mumps scare remained in Witley

⁶⁴ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, February 14, 1917.

⁶⁵ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, March 8, 1917.

Camp.⁶⁶ His first experiences in the trenches left Taylor shaken, and prompted some of his most revealing entries while also affording him few social supports to lean on. After leaving Cushing and Glenn behind Taylor did occasionally mention other individuals by name, but none with the frequency and regularity he had enjoyed in England. Camaraderie was an important component in adapting to and surviving army life during the First World War. A battalion could be thought of as a soldier's home in the army, and the dozen or so men who were closest to a soldier were the nearest thing to family that he was likely to find in the trenches.⁶⁷

Conclusion

Of the twelve months Taylor spent training and preparing to go to war, his diary details just over two. Inferences can be drawn about his first ten months in uniform from the experiences of his contemporaries, and from the personality that becomes apparent through his diary. Taylor appears to have been a quiet, reserved and bookish young man not unlike many young Canadians who volunteered for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. In Taylor's experiences of the war there is little that would be considered startlingly atypical, but Taylor himself was somewhat apart from his archetypal contemporaries. Like Sydney Frost, Taylor appeared to carry an implicit belief in authority, the system within which he moved, and the justness of the war. Unlike Will Bird, Taylor never complained about the hardships he underwent, or the frequent injustices of army life. He never mentioned grievances with his officers or NCOs, or with the people who shared his world. Taylor did make

⁶⁶ Hayes, *The 85th in France and Flanders*, 34.

⁶⁷ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 76-78.

a special exception for the weather, about which he complained frequently. More frequently indeed than about the actions of “Fritz” the enemy. Soldier’s diaries rarely contain information that they took for granted, or could not possibly know. Taylor’s diary insinuates that either he took no issue with any of these common soldiers’ grievances, or stoically accepted that they were all part of army life, and not worth commenting upon. This marks Taylor as different from his contemporaries. There was little else that soldiers loved to do more than complain about the army.

Taylor’s diary entries in England depict a young man, genuinely eager to get to France. By the time Taylor reaches England, some of the deadliest battles of the war have been fought, and there was no indication that the fighting would end soon. Taylor cannot have been under the heady illusions of glory that captured so many recruits early in the war. The protracted Battle of the Somme ended just after Taylor’s arrival in England, and that months-long offensive had cost the allied armies dearly in lives.⁶⁸ As an ardent reader and soldier Taylor cannot have been insensitive to the dangers he was about to embark on, yet he betrayed no sense of worry at the prospect of heading to France. During his training in England he enjoyed a predictable schedule of drills, inspections and lectures, and was afforded ample leisure time to read, write, sleep well, and entertain his friends. His departure for France abruptly upended his neat and orderly schedule with the messy and unpredictable nature of armed combat, though Taylor did manage to find time for

⁶⁸ William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme*, 415-434.

his constant activities: reading and writing letters. The move to France also abruptly ended his ability to lean on his friends Cushing and Glenn for support in his tumultuous new environment. Taylor offered precious few details in his diary of the people he interacted with. It is clear that he was writing the diary for his own eyes and would ostensibly have details of all his world's actors within his memory. There are enough clues to shed light on some of his friends and correspondents, especially Glenn and Cushing, but some are little more than names on paper, and many remain entirely unmentioned. Taylor underwent several separations in his young life, and after leaving his family to enlist, his next most damaging separation was likely his transfer away from Cushing and Glenn. On the eve of entering into the horrors and tragedies of armed combat in the First World War Taylor was stripped of his closest emotional supports and tossed into a very unfamiliar new social group. As evidenced by Taylor's contemporaries Bird and Frost, camaraderie played a defining role in soldiers' lives and could literally mean the difference between life and death. Though Taylor did mention other soldiers by name after departing England, none appear with the frequency or apparent warmth of his two best friends left behind. At a time when he needed them most, Taylor been taken from his closest friends and confidants and embarked upon a physically and spiritually taxing journey through combat on the Western Front in the summer and autumn of 1917.

Chapter Three: “In the Trenches:” Taylor’s Experiences in Combat Rotation and Under Fire, April to November 1917.

March 31, 1917 marked a dramatic change in Taylor’s experience of the war. He had spent the past year anticipating and preparing for combat. Finally, he found himself going up the line with a fighting battalion and catching his first glimpses of combat. The previous day Taylor was excited to hear his “first gun of the war”¹ and likely viewed this as portent of a new and more exciting chapter of army life. He soon discovered that he had only traded the monotonous days of drill, inspections, and marching in England for the formulaic rotation of battalions on frontline service in France. The glamour and gut-wrenching terror of going “over the top” on a massive offensive was a comparatively small part of life in the trenches. Extended service in frontline areas entailed a great deal of stress for the soldiers tasked with anticipating an enemy attack or preparing one of their own. Even in quiet sectors soldiers always faced the possibility of being wounded or killed by accident, disease, or stray enemy fire. Troops could not be expected to remain effective and endure the front line indefinitely, and so a system of rotation was devised by British high command to mitigate the effects of frontline service. British, and Canadian troops following suit, rotated between front line trenches, support trenches, reserve, and rest areas. As noted by Tim Cook, the 16th Battalion’s rotation was typical of Canadian infantry units during the war. Over 1240 days in France, the battalion

¹ Nova Scotia Archives, 85th Battalion Memory Club, M.G. 23, v. 1 No. 5, *Diary of A.I.M. Taylor*, March 30, 1917

spent thirty-four percent of their time in front line or support trenches, and sixty-six percent of their days in reserve or further to the rear.²

At the end of March 1917 Pte. Aleck Taylor entered this rotation with the 85th Battalion C.E.F. He experienced the harrowing major Canadian offensive operations at Vimy Ridge and the Second Battle of Passchendaele, as well as the short, terrifying moments of coming under enemy fire, and meeting an opposing patrol in the nocturnal depths of no man's land. Taylor also recorded the long periods of drudgery, and unglamorous aspects that formed the bulk of the daily experience on the Western Front during the First World War. Taylor's methodical daily diary entries provide an opportunity to make a quantitative assessment of just under ten months in the typical life of a Canadian infantry soldier. A "typical" Canadian soldier of the First World War emerges from the current body of literature as a collage of over 400,000 individuals. In many ways Taylor resembled this soldier, but Taylor differed in several key respects. This chapter examines Taylor's diary entries from March 31 to November 6, 1917 and discusses how he relates to the traditional paradigm of typical Canadian soldiers as ill-disciplined, unruly brawlers, prone to mischief, drinking, and womanizing, yet highly effective fighters.³ Taylor is both typical and highly atypical, offering a variation on what is considered usual. The period from March 31 to November 6 represents Taylor's time spent in the Western

² Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 381-383.

³ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 73; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 33, 386-390; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 337; Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 11.

theatre of the First World War. Specific attention will be paid to the non-combat activities, and humdrum of daily life in the war. Camaraderie under fire, examples of it with regard to Sydney Frost and Will Bird, and Taylor's apparent lack of personal interaction during this time will be discussed. Several of Taylor's experiences under fire will be detailed with reference to contemporary accounts of the same engagements. The distinct lack of recorded casualties in Taylor's diary will facilitate a discussion of the presence of death as a constant companion in the trenches of the Western Front, and how soldiers dealt with it.

Drudgery and Working Parties

For soldiers of the First World War, life in a combat theatre did not mean being constantly under fire, pressing the attack, or huddled in a hole in the ground awaiting enemy shells. The trenches that spanned Europe on the Western Front offered areas of relative safety from the offensive power that ruled a 700km long swathe of shell-cratered and mined ground. British, and Canadian troops held some of these zigzagging lines of muddy fortifications in Northern France and Belgium, and vigorously defended them against enemy action. Yet, while the trenches at the front offered relative safety compared to the surface, just a few kilometers behind the lines were green fields and villages unmarked by shell fire, also inhabited by soldiers. Between the front line and this comparative paradise beyond enemy artillery range were multiple staggered lines of defense.⁴

⁴ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 216; John Keegan, *The First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 2000), 176-179.

The use of multiple lines of defense evolved for British and Canadian troops by 1915. The war's early battles had shown that a single line of entrenched defenders could be breached by the combined efforts of artillery and infantry. Multiple lines of trenches staggered in depth offered a more flexible defense, and bought precious time to organize a counterstrike to throw back attacking forces before they had time to dig in. By 1916 almost 50 kilometers of trenches existed in the rear for every kilometer of trench at the front. These trenches were arranged in secondary or tertiary lines parallel to and supporting the front, or at right angles running through and connecting, or offering communication between, one line of trenches and another.⁵

Multiple lines of defense allowed for the front line to be more thinly held, with troops in supporting trenches able to filter quickly to the front if needed. Behind the support lines were further reinforcements in reserve, also able to quickly reposition to thwart enemy incursion further up the line. Even moving a few hundred yards back from the front had a dramatic positive effect on the morale of the troops in combat. A system of rotation permitted front line service to be evenly distributed among the units holding a particular frontage and associated rear areas. A battalion holding a section of frontage for a "tour" would generally be arranged with two companies in the front line, and the remaining two close in support trenches. After a four to six day turn at the front, they would be relieved by another battalion and move rearward a few hundred meters to positions in support

⁵ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 224-229; John Keegan, *The First World War*, 179.

trenches. Further relief would bring the battalion nearly one kilometer behind the front to a reserve area, and eventually several kilometers behind the line for a period of rest.⁶

A front-line section of trench and associated rear areas became a complex fortified city underground, into which thousands of soldiers, and all the necessities for their survival and endurance in the face of the foe would be placed. The walls of these cities were frequently subjected to enemy fire, and erosion by weather. Though they were constructed of nothing more permanent than dirt, wooden planking, and metal sheets, they safeguarded their inhabitants from death and were the subject of obsessive repairs and improvements. The depth and complexity of these defensive arrangements meant that while only a small portion of the soldiers holding an area could be at the front, many would be consistently active by day or night behind the lines to fulfill the needs of their subterranean community. Rank and file soldiers like Taylor experienced almost daily periods of labour-intensive work, as well as long stretches of inactivity.⁷

By day, soldiers engaged in work to repair damaged sections of their trench homes, expanding or improving existing trenches, or bringing supplies forward from the rear. By night soldiers were tasked off to work parties above ground both forward of the line, or in the rear. A dark night offered the only opportunity to

⁶ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 381-382.

⁷ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 244-245; Barton C. Hacker, "White Man's War, Coloured Man's Labour: Working for the British Army on the Western Front," *Itinerario*, 38, no. 3, (2014): 27-28; Peter Chen-main Wang, "Caring beyond National Borders: The YMCA and Chinese Laborers in World War I Europe," *Church History* 78, no. 2 (June 2009): 327-330.

perform chores above the parapet, or to conceal movements of large amounts of troops or materiel. Parties of often forty to fifty soldiers crawled over the top in darkness to hurriedly prepare new defensive positions ahead of the line, and repair damaged barbed wire.⁸ By 1917 special labour battalions began to free Canadian fighting infantry battalions from vast amounts of the digging, road building, and supply carrying that had been a mainstay of a battalion's rest days. Hard lessons from 1916 had informed the theory that additional time for training and rest would allow the infantry to be more effective in combat.⁹ A constant complaint of the infantry was that their "rest" days were filled not with languor and ease, but with digging, roadmaking, and stacking artillery ammunition in addition to regular training courses, and route marches to prepare them for the much-predicted breakout when the stalemate on the Western Front lifted. This burden was keenly felt prior to the arrival of labour battalions, but was never fully lifted.¹⁰

Entering the trenches in the spring of 1917, Taylor was lucky to benefit from the proliferation of labour battalions. On September 20, 1917 he made specific mention of seeing a Chinese Labour Corps unit at work. Though he likely spent less time engaged in manual labour than his predecessors in uniform, Taylor was never fully spared the necessity of working parties. A strength of Taylor's diary as a source material is his methodical recording of the drudgery of his day-to-day as well as the

⁸ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 272-274.

⁹ Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 21.

¹⁰ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 233; John Keegan, *The First World War*, 178-182; Barton C. Hacker, "White Man's War, Coloured Man's Labour," 27-29.

more glamorous aspects of army life. Taylor was careful to record the minutia of life, getting paid, being ordered to the baths, training courses, drill, and periods of inactivity awaiting further instruction. Official battalion War Diaries offer some of these details in large-scale, but do not provide a scope that allows for a temporal breakdown of one soldier's war. Published memoirs such as that of Will R. Bird often do not fully capture the drudgery of day-to-day life in such readily quantifiable terms as Taylor. From March 31st to November 6th, 1917 Taylor's experiences broadly resemble those of contemporary Canadian soldiers on the Western Front. From the 224 daily entries Taylor made during this time it is possible to quantify aspects of his wartime experience.¹¹ Taylor spent thirty-four days in front line trenches, forty-seven days in support trenches, 129 days in reserve or rest areas and fourteen days removed from the line for medical care. During that time, he specifically mentioned being under fire on twenty-seven days. Thus, Taylor spent roughly thirty-six percent of his days on the Western Front in front line or support trenches, and the remaining sixty-four percent relatively removed from, but not immune to enemy action. He spent just over twelve percent of his days under fire. Of the twenty-seven days he mentioned being under fire, twenty of them are in April and June. Analysis of his diary indicates that Taylor's time spent in the trenches versus in rear areas broadly follows the pattern held as typical by Cook. Taylor's experience of war in the trenches was one of brief moments of action embedded within long stretches of digging, training, and regular duties.¹²

¹¹ See Figure 3.1. Appendix A.

¹² NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, March 31 to November 6, 1917.

Of the daily duties and non-combat drudgery that made up the bulk of Taylor's activities from March 31st to November 6th 1917, several are mentioned so frequently as to be readily quantifiable. Taylor specifically mentioned being assigned to working parties on fifty-one days digging new trenches, repairing existing ones, or carrying materials, usually at night, but in the case of April 9th at Vimy Ridge all day and all night. On fifty-six days Taylor made mention of having an abundance of idle time, or in his words: "loafing." On at least twenty-four days Taylor was engaged in drill, and spent time on at least nineteen days in training courses for his specialization as a bomber, or going over plans for an upcoming advance. He specifically mentioned sixteen inspections, eleven parades, almost two church parades per month, nine days standing guard, and three route marches in July which Taylor found particularly disagreeable. For Taylor, a typical day in the trenches consisted of sleeping until the afternoon, and then spending the night out working. September 13th, 1917 exemplifies this. On that day Taylor was engaged in the "same programme as usual. Sleeping in day and out on a working party at night."¹³ In contrast to the nearly nocturnal existence dictated in the trenches by night work, Taylor's time in reserve and rest areas was typified by mornings of light duties, drill or instruction, idle afternoons, and evenings spent leisurely in town or at a concert at the local YMCA hut. On September 22nd, 1917 Taylor "had a box respirator inspection in morning. Loafed the rest of the day. In evening we paraded to the YM to a concert which was a good one."¹⁴ Taylor visited his local YMCA hut no

¹³ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, Sept 13th, 1917.

¹⁴ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, September 22nd, 1917.

less than twenty-four times over the course of his diary. Huts operated by the Young Men's Christian Association offered services to soldiers. They served as gathering points, offering tea, coffee, goods from home, and activities like concerts and games.¹⁵ Taylor frequented the YMCA for the concerts, movies, and the ability to mail his prolific correspondence. Taylor dutifully documented each of these trips. Taylor's methodical recording of the mundane allows for a detailed quantitative analysis of the less glamorous parts of his war experience.

Taylor's steadfast commitment to record the less glamorous day-to-day events as well as the more momentous periods of his war provides a useful tool for illuminating his full experience. His methodical style offers the opportunity to perform quantitative analyses which reveal that significant portions of his wartime experience were spent engaged in drudgery. The essential though unremarkable tasks that Taylor carried out would have been familiar to his peers, though are generally underrepresented in contemporary accounts. Taylor's account of his non-combat war experiences offers new information, and an alternative to the prevailing view of the average Canadian soldier's experience in the First World War.

Camaraderie Under Fire

Published war memoirs like those of Will Bird and Sydney Frost tend not to offer the same opportunities for quantitative analysis. Frost shared Taylor's clerical obsession with minute details, but did not offer as rigorous and dependable day-to-

¹⁵ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 393; Krista Cowman, "Touring behind the lines: British soldiers in French towns and cities during the Great War," *Urban History* 41, no. 1 (February 2014): 110-115.

day accounting of his activities and movements. Bird offered a fast-paced narrative of his personal highlights from the war and tended to eschew the mundane. However, both Frost and Bird dwelt on the relationships they formed with the soldiers around them, and the camaraderie that ensued. In this, Taylor stands out as abnormal. Taylor recorded regular encounters with two fellow soldiers while training in England, Allison Clyde Glenn, and Alexander Burton Cushing. Neither Glenn nor Cushing transferred to the 85th Battalion, and after he left England individuals are named far less frequently in Taylor's diary. From the time he joined the 85th in France until the end of his diary 224 days later Taylor only noted eight examples of personal interaction between himself and one or more others. The first example is two weeks after Taylor rejoined the battalion, and just after taking Vimy Ridge. Taylor recorded that "the boys" got his dinner, dressed his feet, and made up his bed because he was too exhausted to accomplish those things himself.¹⁶ However, he opted not to name any of the individuals who showed him such kindness. The person who appears most frequently in Taylor's diary after leaving England is likely James Lewis Hall, Regimental No. 282290. Referred to as "Jim", "JLH", and "Jim H" he merited three mentions, once sharing a meal, and on another occasion traveling to town with Taylor. Hall, though mentioned most frequently, only appears three times, and Taylor did not include any particulars of their comradeship beyond his mere presence. One other appearance of note is the first and only mention of "Pike" on August 18th, 1917. Taylor and an individual he named

¹⁶ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, April 15, 1917. [The event took place on April 14th, but Taylor ran out of room on that day's entry and continued onto the pre-dated section for the next day.]

only as Pike travel together ahead of the battalion as an advance party to a rest area¹⁷. Pike could be Frank Leonard Pike, Regimental No. 282758 of the 85th Battalion. If Taylor was writing about Frank Pike, then it is odd that he would consider him close enough to mention in his diary, given how few people he named, but fail to record that he was seriously injured on September 13, 1917 and later died of his wounds.¹⁸ The social support provided by the camaraderie of the soldiers in a unit was essential to adapting and surviving amidst the constant stressors of life in the First World War. These men spent their down time together idling the long hours away in the trenches, but also depended upon each other for their lives in combat. Frost devoted considerable space in his memoir to short biographical sketches of the men who shared his environment, even going so far as to include post-war information and updates current at the time of writing.¹⁹ Camaraderie is also a central theme in Will Bird's reminiscence of the war. His recorded memories heavily feature his friends in uniform and their shared experiences. He was deeply moved when they are injured or killed, even going so far as to insist upon a reduction in rank to be closer to them when one dies.²⁰

Though Taylor's professional experiences greatly resemble those of many of his contemporaries, he was somewhat abnormal in his personal experiences. An examination of Taylor's diary entries does not bear out the popular image of a rough

¹⁷ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, August 18, 1917.

¹⁸ Library and Archives Canada, RG 150, 1992-93/166, Box 7831 – 34, No. 575888, Digitized Service File of Frank Leonard Pike.

¹⁹ Edward Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War: The Memoir of Captain Sydney Frost*, MC (St. John's, NL: Flanker Press 2015), 50-64.

²⁰ Will R. Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands* (Ottawa, ON: CEF Books, 2002), 168.

and rowdy Canadian soldier overseas. Far from the drinking, brawling colonial who was instantly at home in the bars and *estaminets* of Europe, and ever ready for the next scheme or opportunity to flout authority, Taylor seemed rather quiet and mild-mannered.²¹ Unlike the men of Frost's regiment who spontaneously decided to band together to break out of their barracks and enjoy one last night of hijinks before departing Edinburgh, Taylor never mentioned being part of any scheme or plot, or any form of misbehaviour.²² Taylor never mentioned being in a group with more than three other individuals, though he must constantly have been surrounded by peers. Rather than engage in the comradeship and bonhomie that would be considered typical according to the current view of the average Canadian soldier, Taylor preferred to read, keep up a prodigious correspondence with home, and go to bed early.²³ Taylor's apparent isolation is odd, but perhaps it was intentional. He may have viewed his diary as a chronicle of events, and not an appropriate place to record personal interactions or feelings. He dutifully recorded his experiences both in and outside of combat with the same matter-of-fact tone, and rarely allowed speculation or introspection to bleed through.

Taylor in Combat

A smaller proportion of Taylor's wartime experience, though one undoubtedly seared in his memory, were his experiences in combat. Of his 224 days on the Western Front, Taylor specifically mentioned coming under fire on twenty-

²¹ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 72-73; Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 73; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme*, 337.

²² Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, 81.

²³ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 73; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 33, 386-390.

seven of them. Eleven of those days occurred in April 1917, the highest number of days under fire recorded in any month of Taylor's diary. Finally rejoining his battalion on March 31st, 1917 after a delay in quarantine, Taylor found them amid preparations for an upcoming major offensive. In the nine days leading up to the offensive, Taylor's time was filled with training and physical labour, and if he suspected anything of the potential import of the battle to come, he refrained from committing it to his diary. Taylor rejoined the 85th Battalion just in time to fight with the rest of the Canadian Corps to contest the possession of Vimy Ridge.

Vimy, a seven-kilometer ridge running northwest to southeast at the western end of the Douai plain in northeastern France, offered a commanding view of all defensive works in the area. The ridge had been lost to German forces in October 1914, and by the spring of 1917 still stood as a seemingly impregnable barrier to any allied advance in this sector. The ridge had been contested several times by French and British forces during the course of the war, resulting in limited, temporary gains, and many thousands dead on both sides.²⁴ After the grinding attritional nightmare in 1916 of nine months at Verdun, the French had held their ground, but over the bodies of some 700,000 French and German casualties. Desperate to break the deadlock and cycle of attritional warfare on the Western Front, the French appointed a new commander, Robert Nivelle, to carry out his audacious plan. Nivelle's plan called for a coalition effort to close a pincer movement

²⁴ Tim Cook, *Vimy: The Battle and The Legend* (USA: Penguin, 2017), 8-10; Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold, eds., *Vimy Ridge: A Canadian Reassessment* (Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007), 4-8.

on a grand scale against a salient of German-held ground near the Aisne river, overrunning and bypassing their main lines, restoring mobility to the war, and providing the breakthrough to mobile warfare that allied generals had been seeking since late 1914. Key to this plan was a diversionary offensive to the north to draw away German reserves that would be carried out by British forces. Vimy Ridge was a site of immense strategic value on the Western Front, offering the ability to observe and disrupt any operation being carried out at its base. To assault beyond the ridge without taking the ridge itself would have exposed the British line to fierce flank attacks, and so the ridge would have to be taken in order to support Nivelles's offensive. The thus-far impossible task was given to the Canadian Corps.²⁵

Planning the assault against Vimy began in January 1917, months before the battle. New tactics, training, and equipment were put to use, and the various branches of the assaulting force coordinated to such a degree as to ensure there would be no repeat of the Somme battles the previous summer. Beginning in February, and gaining in intensity, a counter-battery artillery fire program identified and suppressed German artillery positions, and a new fuse enabled the destruction of barbed wire obstacles in ways that had not been possible during the Somme preparations. The artillery program was hugely successful in eliminating the defenders' ability to hinder Canadian operations but required up to 2,500 tonnes of ammunition daily to sustain. In addition to lugging shells, logistical preparations for the coming battle called for the building and rebuilding of roads, and light rail lines

²⁵ Cook, *Vimy*, 27-31; Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold, eds., *Vimy Ridge*, 9-11.

to haul supplies to the thousands of soldiers labouring under fire. At the end of the supply lines, new trenches and jumping-off points were dug for the assault, and a pre-existing network of underground caverns were expanded and refurbished to house the attacking force near the front in cramped but relative safety.²⁶

Few hints of the elaborate logistical preparations prior to the assault up Vimy appear in Taylor's diary. Many were complete or nearing completion by the time he joined his battalion on March 31st. In the days leading up to April 9th, Taylor took part in a flurry of last minute training and work to finish preparations for the attack. He took a course in bombing on April 3rd, and on April 4th and 6th he was engaged in working parties at the front. On the evening of April 8th Taylor and the rest of the 85th Battalion picked up their tools and moved into position at the Music Hall line of support trenches. The 85th Battalion was ordered to support the assault by providing labour. They would maintain the path through communication trenches to the front, haul ammunition, and follow behind the assaulting force to mop up any resistance. Taylor, as part of B Company's number seven platoon under Lt. Hallett, was specifically assigned to carry wire, and support the brigade wire party in construction.²⁷

The 85th Battalion was not expected to take part in the frontal assault on April 9th, but rather to support the attacking battalions. The 85th was newly arrived in France, full of men like Taylor who had never seen combat. Moreover, they had

²⁶ Cook, *Vimy*, 52-57; Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold, eds., *Vimy Ridge*, 1.

²⁷ Library and Archives Canada. *War Diary of the 85th Battalion*. Appendix "A" covering operations 8-4-17 to 14-4-17. Online MIKAN no. 1883276

spent the preceding weeks out on working parties every night, unlike the well-rested assaulting battalions. As the attack up Hill 145 stalled, the 85th were ordered forward against this most formidable section of the ridge. Advancing at 6pm over hundreds of meters above ground with no artillery barrage as cover, the battalion cleared German positions with rifle and bayonet. The 85th took the crest of Hill 145, held it against counterattack, and stayed in the line for four more days while the remainder of the ridge was consolidated in Canadian hands.²⁸

Taylor began April 9th by standing ready at 4am with the rest of his work party and continued in that role until 6pm when he was ordered forward to carry ammunition to the companies attacking up Hill 145. He worked until dawn and did not have a chance to rest until 6am, April 10th. The rest was brief, and he was ordered out again at 10am. At 3pm he was ordered to advance through a heavy snowstorm and occupy a new support line in captured territory. That night he advanced again to the front line, and hurriedly tried to repair the damage his own artillery had done to the trench in the past few days, while under fire from German “whiz bangs and coal boxes.” Taylor worked all night into April 11, broke for breakfast in the morning, and then continued to work throughout the day. That night he moved to another flank under fire “got hell getting there” and worked until 3am April 12th when he dropped from exhaustion. He had lost his own company, become covered in mud, and was absolutely soaked. After finding his own company in the morning, they consolidated their position and stood guard. Taylor advanced

²⁸ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 134-136; Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold, eds., *Vimy Ridge*, 220.

twice more on April 13th before being relieved by another battalion and heading back to Vimy Ridge, chased by shellfire the whole way. Crawling on his stomach, he reached the tunnels built to shelter the attacking forces and was able to rest for two hours before heading overland behind the ridge to rest billets.²⁹ By the end of this ordeal, Taylor was exhausted and had worked for several days under fire with very little rest. Taylor was not alone in this. Thousands of young Canadian soldiers shared much the same experience to take the ridge.

The battle of Vimy Ridge was a victory achieved by all four Canadian Divisions, representing communities throughout the young dominion. It was a success achieved where British and French forces had failed and could be viewed as a uniquely Canadian achievement in innovation and execution. It became a symbol and identifier for Canada's young military, the first major military success for allied forces on the Western Front, and eventually took on mythological status at home in Canada.³⁰ As Tim Cook noted, even on the eve of the battle, some soldiers speculated on the importance of the endeavour on which they were embarking. On April 9th Lieutenant Sawell of the 20th Battalion wrote in his diary that "Canadian soldiers this day, did more to give Canada a real standing among nations of the world than any previous single act in Canadian history."³¹ In a letter after the battle, Sergeant Percy Wilmot wrote that "so far it was the most decisive, the most spectacular, and

²⁹ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, April 9-15, 1917.

³⁰ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 148; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme*, 455; Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold, eds., *Vimy Ridge*, xii.

³¹ Steven E. Sawell, ed., *Into the Cauldron: Experiences of a CEF Infantry Officer during the Great War: Memoirs of Edward Stanley Sawell, M.C., V.D.* (Burlington, ON: self-published, 2009), 58. Cited by Cook, *Vimy*, 2.

the most important victory on this front since the Marne and Canada may well be proud of the achievement.”³² Doubtless there were more than a few Canadian soldiers who could begin to grasp the import of the victory they had achieved. Taylor had a narrower scope. The memories of that day, and the days to follow that he chose to record in his diary were the lack of sleep, prevalence of mud, and the heavy weight of the enemy counter-bombardment falling throughout his first trip in the trenches. The experience also prompted two rare introspective entries in his diary. On April 9th Taylor wrote: “The sights I saw on the ground I shall never forget it was hell.”³³ A few days after the battle, and given time to reflect Taylor recorded on April 15th: “As I look back on my time in the trenches it is more like a nightmare than a reality.”³⁴ However, Taylor steadfastly avoided recording precisely what horrors and nightmares he may have seen.

The four days of battle at Vimy claimed over 10,500 Canadian casualties, 7,707 of them on the first day. The long weeks of training, preparation, and the highly effective artillery barrage had softened the German defences to the point where it was possible to break them, but the advancing Canadian infantry still found pockets of resistance in what remained of the defences. The battle was a Canadian victory, achieved within a larger British strategic success, offset by the grinding

³² Brian D. Tenyson, “A Cape Bretoner at War: Letters from the Front, 1914-1919.” *Canadian Military History* 11.1 (Winter 2002): 44.

Cited by Cook, *Shock Troops*, 147.

³³ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, April 10, 1917. (Taylor was writing about the events of April 9th)

³⁴ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, April 16, 1917 (The event took place on April 15th but Taylor ran out of room on that day and continued writing in the pre-dated section for April 16th.)

failure of the major French offensive the battle was envisioned to support.³⁵ The 85th Battalion alone suffered one hundred and seventy-two killed, missing and wounded during the attack on Vimy. Having spent very little time in the line prior to Vimy, their casualties to this point in the war had been relatively limited.³⁶ With thousands of dead and wounded strewn across the battlefield Taylor almost certainly witnessed scenes of incredible carnage. The bodies of comrades and enemies, and possibly friends mangled by artillery or rifle fire would have been inescapable. Taylor refrained from recording specifically what horrors he saw, or who from his small khaki world was brutally removed. Will Bird gave short consideration to the attack on Vimy in his memoir, but in its aftermath he learned that no less than eleven of his companions died during the assault. Bird had already seen combat, and lost friends but he took the time to gather the remaining members of his battlefield family and silently reminisce about how losing their friends in combat had changed them spiritually and physically.³⁷ Perhaps overwhelmed by his first major battle, Taylor found himself unable or unwilling to record precisely what had occurred, preferring instead to internalize those memories and feelings. Like fellow soldier Samuel Honey, he may have felt that “at some future time, I maybe able to tell of some of the things I saw and how I felt, but not now.”³⁸ He certainly made no grand claims about what victory at Vimy would mean for the course of the

³⁵ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 142; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme*, 435; Geoffrey Hayes, Andrew Iarocci, and Mike Bechthold, eds., *Vimy Ridge*, 11.

³⁶ LAC. *War Diary of the 85th Battalion*. Appendix “A” covering operations 8-4-17 to 14-4-17.

³⁷ Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands*, 26.

³⁸ Canadian War Museum, 19950008-014, Samuel Honey papers, letters to parents, 18 April, 1917. Cited by Cook, *Shock Troops*, 147-148.

war, nor any speculation as to how that accomplishment would improve the standing of his young dominion in the eyes of the world. Many of his contemporaries likely shared his more immediate and personal concerns of cloying mud, and aching feet.

Casualties and Death

Death was a constant companion in the trenches. Soldiers who spent extended periods on the Western Front saw many of their friends wounded or killed in addition to being surrounded by the detritus of previous conflict. Years of static warfare left the ground into which the trenches were dug littered with discarded equipment, unexploded ordnance, and poorly buried victims of past conflicts.³⁹ Death in the trenches was a daily occurrence. Even outside of a prepared assault, or defending against one, death by accident, sickness, a stray bullet or a fragment of exploding shell was a very real possibility, and something soldiers learned to deal with. Each rotation through the trenches cost a battalion a few men to death and wounds. The risk was greatest at the front, but even in rear areas was never wholly removed.⁴⁰ Curiously, Taylor remained unwilling to commit to his diary many of the unpleasant parts of the war he must have encountered, save for mud and rain. He consistently refrained from directly addressing any casualties which he may have witnessed, even when they occurred to soldiers within arm's reach. Only four times in his diary did Taylor specifically mention a wound or casualty. Taylor's first

³⁹ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 273; Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 137-143.

⁴⁰ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 256-266; Peter Simkins, *From the Somme to Victory: The British Army's Experience on the Western Front 1916-1918* (Barnsley, UK: Praetorian Press, 2014), 80.

recorded mention of seeing his comrades wounded occurred on his second night after rejoining his battalion in France. His diary entry regarding the event states that it was “rather rookey last night after we turned in. A shell of Fritz’s came through the roof and exploded in room. Disarranged things generally wounding five and tore wall down. Had to change billets. Monday afternoon moved to the hill. Fritz is catching hell today.”⁴¹ Taylor’s treatment of this event seems matter-of-fact, and elicits no more reaction on his part than a day of drill, followed by an inspection. He quickly pivoted from the events of the previous night to the events of the afternoon, and the current bombardment of the enemy. The 85th Battalion war diary reveals the names of those affected by the burst shell, and the extent of their injuries. Six men of B Company sleeping in Billet 56, Bouvigny Huts were wounded in the head and limbs when a shell burst as they slept.⁴² One of those men, James Lewis Hall would go on to appear three times in Taylor’s diary entries as his most frequently mentioned companion after leaving his friends Glenn and Cushing in England. Given this additional information, it appears that the men wounded on April 1st were likely all in Taylor’s platoon, billeted together, and could be considered the closest thing to a family he would have on the Western Front. His cursory treatment of seeing some of his most constant companions so dramatically injured is odd when compared with the literature surrounding the importance and prevalence of soldierly comradeship, and khaki families.⁴³

⁴¹ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, April 2, 1917.

⁴² LAC. *War Diary of the 85th Battalion*. Sun, Apr 1, 1917.

⁴³ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 77; Nosheen Khan, *Women’s Poetry of the First World War* (Kentucky, USA: The University Press of Kentucky, 1988), 115.

It would be over two months before Taylor recorded another casualty in his diary. During that time, he noted being under fire at least eleven times, and his battalion took part in the assault on Vimy Ridge. The second instance in Taylor's diary of a casualty is a passing reference on June 13th to "a few casualties in No. 6 this morning"⁴⁴ without any further elaboration. Whether Taylor saw, or merely heard of the casualties in another platoon within his company is unclear. In either case they appear not to have affected him enough to merit more than a brief mention. Almost two months later, Taylor once again mentioned casualties among the members of his soldier family. This time, the event takes place within the context of a night patrol into no man's land, and Taylor was an eyewitness. By August 1917 the Canadian Corps had developed a well-deserved reputation as first-rate trench raiders. Canadian units had spent the better part of the previous two years developing a finely honed approach to control no man's land, gather intelligence about the enemy, and harden troops to combat. Nighttime patrols into the shadowy areas beyond the front line, and raids into enemy-held trenches were common in Canadian sectors. Raiding became almost a competitive sport among Canadian battalions, later spilling outward into other allied units, and the soldiers took pride in a raid well executed. Poorly executed raids could lead to disastrous casualties, but Canadian soldiers were remarkably successful in averting failure. In either case, soldiers would have to work hard to shrug off the short, brutal hand-to-hand engagements in the small dark places of the night. Raiders were often volunteers, lightly equipped with improvised weapons, but occasionally larger

⁴⁴ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, June 13th, 1917.

groups employed a diverse array of fire support. Bombers like Taylor were occasionally employed along with riflemen and Lewis gunners to support raids. By 1917 raids and patrols were hallmarks of the Canadian combat doctrine and were a part of almost every front line tour.⁴⁵

In the course of his diary, Taylor spent 215 days in a combat theatre, eighty-one of those in front line or support trenches, but only mentioned two patrols. On August 10th, 1917 after a day standing guard Taylor took part in a night time patrol through no man's land:

Went to [sic] close for comfort to Fritzies lines and had to get back P.D.Q. When we were nearly to our wire we met an enemy patrol who opened up at us with M.G. at close range. Pretty warm spot for a few minutes. Our casualties were quite slight."⁴⁶

Taylor described a hasty withdrawal from the enemy front, and an ambush by an opposing patrol as they approached their own barbed wire. After a brief exchange while pinned down by machine gun fire, he and a number of patrollers returned having taken some casualties, but not to a degree that seemed to concern Taylor. Taylor's description of the event is characteristically brief and devoid of emotional embellishment. Another, more detailed account of the patrol's events is recorded in Hayes' history of the battalion:

The night of August 10th-11th was particularly active- Sergeant Gladstone McDonald had charge of a portion of a patrol which was surprised by a burst of machine gun fire from an enemy party concealed and only five yards away. The sergeant and six others of his party were wounded, yet he organized the men near him and opened fire with a Lewis gun and bombs. So vigorous and well directed was the attack of this little band that they dispersed the enemy, killing one and wounding several others, one of whom was shortly afterwards taken prisoner by another patrol. Although suffering from his wound McDonald remained with the patrol until the situation was cleared up and then assisted another badly wounded comrade back into the trenches. Lance-Corporal Wesley T. R. Zinck was number one

⁴⁵ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 291-302; Colin Garnett, "The Art of Minor Operations: Canadian Trench Raiding, 1915-1918," *Canadian Military History*, 24, no. 1 (2015): 258-283.

⁴⁶ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, August 10th, 1917.

Lewis gunner on this patrol and although wounded in four places, two of which were severe bullet wounds in the thigh, got his gun into action and kept up a steady fire on the enemy post until they were dispersed, and then insisted in keeping charge of the gun during the remainder of the time the patrol was out, and only gave up to be taken out and have his wounds attended to when relieved by another gunner.⁴⁷

Hayes recorded a much more dramatic version of the patrol with seven wounded, some rather seriously, and a scene of heroism with both Sgt. Gladstone and L/Cpl. Zink refusing to abandon their position even while wounded. Zink would eventually be awarded the Military Medal for his part.⁴⁸ Taylor may have been one of the few members of that patrol to escape a wound in the action, yet he seemed to downplay the event in his diary. It is unclear if Taylor's matter-of-fact recording, and the absence of the names of the wounded men denotes a lack of familiarity on Taylor's part, or a conscious effort to omit some of the more gruesome details of the war from his diary. Given Taylor's steadfast avoidance of recording any of the unpleasantness he must have seen other than mud and rain, the evidence is weighted toward the latter. Two days later Taylor recorded another patrol going out but noted that he was not on it. The War Diary of the 85th Battalion recorded at least twelve patrols occurring during the time that Taylor is with the battalion in combat.⁴⁹ Raiding and patrolling was a key component of the Canadian battle doctrine during the First World War, but for an individual soldier like Taylor it formed a relatively small part of his war experience. Many Canadian soldiers of the

⁴⁷ Joseph Hayes, *The 85th in France and Flanders* (Halifax, NS: Royal Print and Litho Ltd, 1920), 82.

⁴⁸ LAC. *War Diary of the 85th Battalion*, Fri, Aug 10, 1917.

⁴⁹ LAC. *War Diary of the 85th Battalion*, Fri, Apr 27th – Thu, Sept 13th, 1917.

First World War dealt with the death of their friends by developing a fatalistic attitude, half-jokingly referring to the dead as having “gone west,” or clinging to talismans in a supernatural belief in their protective powers.⁵⁰ Taylor seemed to cling to his diary as a talisman, his entries appear to take on an almost religious regularity. Perhaps the absence of wounded, dead, and dying friends from his record was an unconscious attempt to deny their existence within the world he constructed in his diary.

Within the pages of his diary, Taylor complained of mud sixteen times, and rain thirty-three times. He appeared to deliberately avoid recording anything in his diary more unpleasant than inclement weather. His brief introspective statements regarding the hellish things he saw during his first tour in the trenches were quickly followed by the daily events and humdrum he usually recorded in his diary. On occasions when Taylor can be demonstrated to have seen fellow soldiers wounded his diary entries avoid direct reference to the wounded men, downplay the gravity of the event, or are devoid of any reference to his khaki family being torn apart. The only casualty who Taylor referred to by name, and only the fourth instance of a casualty appearing in his diary, was himself. On October 30th, 1917 Taylor recorded in his diary that he “got wounded this morning. Rather badly in leg and foot. Carried out through heavy shell fire.⁵¹ October 30th, 1917 marked the beginning of a major Canadian offensive in the second phase of the Battle of Passchendaele, and was part of a larger British campaign. The 85th Battalion was at the far right of the assault

⁵⁰ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 255-266.

⁵¹ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, October 30th, 1917.

near the recently captured Decline Copse and facing a tough German position. Immediately after beginning the advance, nine officers and an untold number of other ranks became casualties to a wall of enemy machine gun fire, but the attack pressed forward, and the position was taken. That day 394 of the 85th Battalion's 688 men were wounded or killed.⁵² Taylor was wounded sometime that morning and evacuated to hospital in Étaples where he died of his wounds on November 9th, 1917, three days after his final diary entry.⁵³

Conclusion

Taylor, as a private in an infantry battalion during the First World War, might easily represent the model of an average Canadian soldier during this time. Without knowledge of his diary, he fits broadly within the mould established by the current literature to describe this average Canadian soldier. His professional experiences mirror those of his contemporaries, and official records of his service offer nothing to discourage this view. Taylor's diary offers a wealth of qualitative and quantitative information that depict him as being somewhat different from the established conception of Canadian soldiers as rowdy, mischievous brawlers, prone to vice.⁵⁴ Taylor's methodical and consistent diary entries offer a fantastic opportunity to perform a quantitative analysis of much of his time in uniform. His steadfast recording of the daily humdrum of his time as a soldier sheds light on the less glamorous periods that make up the bulk of soldiering and are often neglected in

⁵² Cook, *Shock Troops*, 343-345.

⁵³ LAC, RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9513-2, Digitized Service File of A.I.M. Taylor.

⁵⁴ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 73; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 33, 386-390; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme*, 337.

published memoirs. Taylor's reflections in combat can be compared with contemporary accounts of the same engagements, and in doing so Taylor differs somewhat from established expectations. Taylor's view in combat was limited to personal issues and concerns. He did not speculate about the future ramifications his actions might hold for his country, nor did he make the grandiose statements of valour which were so adored by his peers. He confined his thoughts to immediate concerns. Taylor's diary indicates that he did not seek out or engage in the rampant camaraderie which is commonly considered to be such an integral part of soldierly life in the trenches of the Western Front. Far from being a rough and rowdy colonial set loose upon Europe, Taylor emerges as a quiet, bookish individual who finds solace in the written word. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Taylor did not engage in the half-hearted joking about comrades having "gone west" when they died. Instead, Taylor generally avoided mentioning any death or injury that occurred to the members of his small overseas family. He seemed to find comfort in the written word, generally ending each day by keeping up a prolific correspondence with home, and with an almost ritualistic attention to his diary. Taylor bears many of the hallmarks of a typical Canadian soldier during the First World War, but his diary depicts him in a fuller light, and offers a view of him that serves as a variation on the current view of what a typical Canadian soldier was. Taylor's reality, as recorded by his diary informs the broad view of what he and his contemporaries were and experienced. Taylor is a variation on the typical soldier, certainly part of a greater and more varied body than the current literature presents.

Chapter Four: Loafing, Leisure Activities, and Contemporary Comparisons

This thesis is rooted in a thorough analysis of the diary of Aleck Taylor, a Canadian soldier of the First World War. The diary provides a wealth of information regarding his leisure activities, and how accurately his experience represents that of the “typical”¹ Canadian soldier of this time. It offers a glimpse into Taylor as a person, as a dynamic, thinking human being. Traces of Taylor can be found in official records such as census forms and his service file, but they reveal little of his character. Taylor’s official paper trail documented when he was orphaned, where he lived, when he enlisted, and where he served. Without his diary, little can be gleaned about his personality and how he chose to spend his time. As Keegan classically noted, in the study of military history the longstanding general illiteracy of soldiers makes it difficult to include their voices in analyses. When possible, “allowing the combatants to speak for themselves is not merely permissible”² it is an essential component of military history.

This chapter discusses leisure time activities for Canadian soldiers of the First World War, and specifically Taylor, both in the trenches, and during rest periods away from the line. Leisure activities were important in maintaining the physical and mental wellbeing of soldiers. Prescribed leisure activities such as

¹ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number’s Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 73; Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 33, 386-390; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 337.

² John Keegan, *The Face of Battle* (New York: Viking Press, 1976), 32.

games, and sports were built into a soldier's working day, but off-duty leisure activities are often more revealing of a subject's character and desires. Changes in the availability and time devoted to certain leisure activities with regard to Taylor's proximity to the front line will be quantified. Taylor's diary entries present a representation of Taylor's personality with likes, dislikes, beliefs, and values. An analysis of Taylor's personality will compare him to his contemporaries Will Bird and Sydney Frost in an effort to place him on a spectrum of his peers. This analysis will inform a discussion of the ways Taylor exemplifies the stereotypical Canadian soldier of this time, and the ways in which he appears to break the mould.

Leisure Time for the Corps

Games, sports, gambling, drinking and rapidly spending any money they possessed were favoured pastimes for Canadian soldiers of the First World War. The young men of this overseas expeditionary force found themselves away from home and regular social norms, with money in their pockets. They had relatively few necessities to cover since their food, lodging, and clothing was provided by the army which demanded so much of their time. In their few free hours they contemplated the uncertainty of being alive tomorrow, let alone until next pay day, and attempted to assuage their fears with any distraction their relatively high proportion of disposable income could buy. Lining up in camp after a return trip from the front, soldiers quickly descended on nearby towns and villages to seek food, drink, entertainment and companionship. The first two could be found in abundance in most villages. Residents partially converted any spare space in their homes into

makeshift bars and eateries, selling diluted drinks and homecooked meals at exorbitant prices.³ Also located conveniently at the margins of many Canadian camps were the “Tintowns” that appeared almost overnight to cater to the whims of soldiers. These huddles of crudely erected tin shacks offered trinkets and services to soldiers willing to pay for the convenience.⁴ Other forms of entertainment could be found further from camp, and soldiers were often free to make their way to the nearby towns when off duty. The notion of exploring their surroundings was often made more attractive by the allure of meeting the local women. For a battalion of young men turned loose after weeks under threat of death in the decidedly male forward trenches, the urge to seek female companionship, whether to court or in a brothel setting, was often very strong. Other diversions were brought to the soldiers as part of a concerted effort to maintain their emotional wellbeing. Concerts performed by battalion bands were popular, as were amateur theatrical reviews put on by the soldiers themselves. Often the script was provided by the rankers, darkly humorous and full of satire regarding their own circumstances. Discipline was slightly relaxed to accommodate a few good-natured jests at the expense of the army hierarchy. Motion pictures were a relatively new form of entertainment, but by the latter years of the war makeshift theatres had been set up in many camps. Often operated by the YMCA these picture houses charged a small fee and were highly popular with the troops. The opportunity to relax and socialize outside of the

³ Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 386-387; Krista Cowman, “Touring behind the lines: British soldiers in French towns and cities during the Great War,” *Urban History* 41, no. 1 (February 2014): 110-112.

⁴ Desmond Morton, “‘Kicking and Complaining’: Demobilization Riots in the Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1918-19,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 61. 3 (1980) p. 338.

strict world of rank and protocol in which they normally existed was recognized as being important to keeping up morale and ensuring the welfare of the soldiers' spirits.⁵

Further than soldiers' physical desires, the army establishment attempted to ensure the upkeep of soldiers' physical health by scheduling regular sports and competitions. Games like cricket, baseball, and football were exceedingly popular, and readily found in most Canadian and British camps. Sports days were almost universally popular with the troops, helping to increase morale, and relieve stress through a physical outlet. Both were excellent outcomes, but sports were also doubly effective at building fitness without the trudging of a route march, and soldiers engaged in sports were far less likely to become idle and have time for mischief.⁶ Though sports were nearly universally popular in both the Canadian and British Expeditionary Forces, Taylor doesn't appear to take a particular joy in them. Competitive sports and interunit rivalries came honestly to the Canadian army of the First World War. Constructed on the lines of their British counterparts, Canadian battalions easily adopted their proclivity for acquiring complicated, and highly individual identities, traditions, rituals, and rivalries with any level of out-group. Competition fostered between soldiers, between platoons, battalions, and any organized grouping of soldiers was born of the Victorian public schooling system. For the officers that made up the backbone of the peacetime British army, sports

⁵ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 395-402; Cowman, "Touring behind the lines," 114.

⁶ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 398; Eliza Riedi and Tony Mason, "'Leather' and the Fighting Spirit: Sport in the British Army in World War I" *Canadian Journal of History* 41, no. 3 (Winter 2006): 486-487.

and competitions were a perfectly natural extension in their role as guide to their juniors. In school, sports served to meld groups of boys together into a cohesive unit, to inure them to their new surroundings, and to occupy their time that might otherwise be spent on ill-conceived hijinks. For British officers, sports and physical competitions were a necessary part of army life, and for ensuring the physical and mental wellbeing of their charges. In the same way, regular attendance at divine service was necessary for spiritual wellbeing.⁷

In an effort to tend to their spiritual needs, Canadian soldiers were ordered to periodically attend Sunday church parades according to their denomination. Soldiers declared their religious affiliation on their attestation form upon enlistment, and Canadian soldiers appear to have been a majority, at least on paper, Christian. Of the whole corps 13.6 percent reported that they, like Taylor, were Methodist. Some soldiers were deeply religious, but most found ways to overlook the necessary sins and vices associated with the war.⁸ If not overtly religious in the same sense that their churchgoing families at home would recognize, most Canadian soldiers clung to a belief system of some kind. The randomness of death on the Western Front coupled with the near omnipresence of drink, gambling and other vices in soldierly culture was difficult to reconcile with orthodox Christianity. Soldiers often turned to a personal blend of mysticism, talismans, superstitions, and willful ignorance of church doctrine to rationalize their suffering as atonement in a

⁷ Keegan, *The Face of Battle*, 274.

⁸ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 395-396.

modern Crusade.⁹ Many soldiers called upon a higher power to preserve them from death and injury amid the seemingly senseless selection of their comrades by death in the trenches. At the same time, they carried out a near pagan devotion to rituals and talismans thought to augment fate or charm them in some manner against the destruction around them. Superstitions and a belief in the miraculous, perpetuated by a healthy culture of mysticism helped some soldiers cope. Others credited a gradually increasing sense of fatalism, paralleling the time a soldier spent in combat. Some soldiers believed that death could be provoked through the use of unlucky numbers, or the act of wearing issued identification discs so that a corpse could be recognized. To contemplate death was tantamount to inviting it. Each soldier carried his own ward against death. A bible, a trinket, or a token of home served the purpose. The talisman was individual to each soldier, selected and imbued with a meaning known only to the possessor.¹⁰

The Young Men's Christian Association also assumed an active role in providing for the moral guidance and spiritual wellbeing of soldiers. A YMCA hut was a fixture of many Canadian camps offering coffee, tea, mementos of home, and a gathering place for soldiers. The support offered was of a far more practical nature than a sermon. Some soldiers did indeed seek out religious guidance in addition to church parades, but many found redemption at the tables of the YMCA. Movies, concerts, meals, and gatherings were hosted by the YMCA for soldiers returned from

⁹ Jonathan F. Vance, *Death so Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 35-37.

¹⁰ Tim Cook, *Shock Troops: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1917-1918* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 219-227.

the line. Here, staff often helped illiterate soldiers write letters home, allowing a connection to a world left behind.¹¹ The support of loved ones at home was crucial to the mental wellbeing of soldiers at the front. Most who had someone to write to kept up a steady correspondence, keeping a stack of letters to peruse when they needed assurance or comfort. Soldiers in the trenches eagerly anticipated receiving mail, and looked forward to rotating to the rear to post replies. Over eighty-five million letters crossed the Atlantic during the war, along with innumerable care packages of food, clothing, and mementos of those on the homefront. Letters passing home via the military post were subject to censorship by battalion officers. Knowing that their letters would be reviewed deterred some soldiers from fully expressing themselves via post, but others felt uninhibited.¹² Taylor recorded a prolific amount of correspondence in his diary, though he rarely indicated who he wrote to, or who wrote to him, and none of these letters were archived with his diary.

Options for leisure pursuits were far more numerous when soldiers were stationed in reserve or rest areas, or out of combat altogether. In the trenches, the variety of entertainments available were narrowed by cramped conditions, operational requirements, and the actions of the enemy. Sports, concerts, theatre, movies, and divine service were not possible in the trenches. Soldiers' diets were restricted to army rations, hauled to the front, and did not extend to eggs and chips, which were so popular in the *estaminets*. Water, whatever tea could be furtively brewed in the dugouts, and the occasional tot of S.R.D. rum were a far cry from

¹¹ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 393-401.

¹² Cook, *Shock Troops*, 180-182; Cowman, "Touring behind the lines," 108-109.

boozy nights in a tavern behind the lines. The unpredictable schedule of a frontline soldier left little time for planned activities, but when not tasked to a working party at night, or some fatigue duty by day, soldiers could enjoy a few moments of down time. Lack of sleep often prompted much of this time to be spent napping. If sleep wasn't possible, soldiers could gossip, day dream, smoke, play cards, read, or grouse about the small injustices of army life. There was little that soldiers wouldn't complain about, and they were usually assured of a like-minded audience. Written material was widely available to those who could read. Books, bibles, and newspapers were commonly carried into the trenches, and the mail eventually made its way up the line. Much of the written material was shared. Newspapers and books passed along to a new owner once read. Privacy was nearly non-existent in the trenches, so finding a dark corner to read a particularly salacious letter, or admire a photograph was a luxury.¹³

Leisure Time for Taylor

Taylor's daily entries in his diary provide a robust record to perform an analysis of his leisure time and activities.¹⁴ Taylor disembarked in England on October 19th, 1916 and from that time until he entrained to join his battalion at the front on March 28th, 1917 he enjoyed a fairly regular schedule while in training. Generally being released from his duties by 4:30pm, Taylor had many evenings free to indulge himself in the delights of England near the Canadian camps until "lights

¹³ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 184-189; K. Craig Gibson, "Sex and Soldiering in France and Flanders: The British Expeditionary Force along the Western Front, 1914-1919," *The International History Review* 23, no. 3 (September 2001): 536.

¹⁴ See Table 4.1 Appendix A.

out” at 10:00pm.¹⁵ Taylor’s diary does not include entries for dates prior to December 30th 1916, but from that time forward it is possible to analyse his time spent in leisure activities. As a private, Taylor garnered one dollar per day, plus 10 cents “field allowance” for his service.¹⁶ Compared to British counterparts the pay was generous, even after orders were issued in 1916 to hold back half the pay of men in the ranks.¹⁷ Even so, Taylor found ways to spend his earnings. Three times in this period Taylor recorded receiving money from home, and once borrowed money from his friend Allison Glenn. Following in the vein of his fellow soldiers he found ways to empty his pockets, and on July 6th, 1917 he recorded being “broke again” two days after receiving his pay.¹⁸ While training, Taylor was able to make regular trips to nearby towns, four times in both January and February, and twice in March. He appeared to often have free time on weekend afternoons as well as in the evening after dismissal, and this permitted him to make frequent trips in search of food. Three times in this period he specifically recorded going to town for a “feed” but also frequented the YMCA hut and camp canteen for the same purpose. Four times in this period Taylor recorded visiting the Tintown near camp to get a haircut, go shopping, or go to the movies. On his trips to Godalming or Tintown, Taylor was sometimes accompanied by his friends Allison Glenn and Alexander Cushing. In his

¹⁵ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 80-81.

¹⁶ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 12.

¹⁷ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 87-88.

¹⁸ Nova Scotia Archives, 85th Battalion Memory Club, M.G. 23, v. 1 No. 5, *Diary of A.I.M. Taylor*, July 6th, 1917.

search for food, camaraderie and places to spend money, Taylor is not at all unlike the majority of his soldierly comrades.¹⁹

Unlike many of his comrades in uniform, Taylor does not appear to share a strong drive to associate with the local women. Nowhere in his diary did Taylor record meeting, or attempting to court a woman while overseas. It is possible that he may have done so in the months prior to beginning to keep his diary, or did so, but did not record it. Given that Taylor studiously avoided recording personal details about the people he met, he may not have felt a courtship was appropriate material for his diary. It is also possible that Taylor had no interest in meeting or courting a woman while overseas. Taylor did note some women in his diary entries as correspondents, but did not state their connection, and none emerge as an obvious sweetheart. He twice received care packages from Mrs. Glenn, presumably Allison Glenn's mother.²⁰ On February 5th, 1917 Taylor wrote four letters to "the girls, Laurel and Dorothy, Muriel, + Winifred"²¹ at Acadia Ladies' Seminary in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. Presumably these were women approximately Taylor's age, but he didn't seem to accord special consideration to one over another, and immediately proceeded to mention a route march the next day. He may have kept up a regular correspondence with one or more of them, but none of the four were mentioned again in his diary. On March 4th, 1917 Taylor recorded receiving a "letter from H.I. and also her snap"²² indicating that he received a letter and a photograph

¹⁹ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 393-396; Cowman, "Touring behind the lines," 112-113.

²⁰ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, August 7th, and 14th, 1917.

²¹ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, February 5th, 1917.

²² NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, March 4th, 1917.

from a woman. Taylor recorded the names and addresses of several of his correspondents in the memoranda section at the back of his diary. Within these names is a “Miss Hattie Innes” of Dahlia St. Dartmouth, Nova Scotia.²³ The 1911 Census of Canada indicated an eleven year old Hattie Innes residing at Dahlia St. in Dartmouth, making her approximately seventeen years old when she wrote to Taylor, and three years younger than him.²⁴ Taylor may also have kept up a regular correspondence with Miss Innes, but never mentioned her by name again. He recorded her name and address in the back of his diary, but he did the same with “the girls” Laurel, Dorothy, Muriel, and Winifred, as well as Al Glenn, Gunner Ralph Cook, Signaller L.V. Mackenzie, and B.T. Conrad. The single most frequently mentioned person in Taylor’s diary is Al Glenn.

During his time training in England, Taylor’s most frequent companion was Al Glenn. Though their ways parted when Taylor transferred to the 85th Battalion, Taylor and Glenn continued to make efforts to spend time with each other. In addition to traveling to town together, Glenn and Taylor went to the movies together at least twice, which he recorded on January 6th and March 7th, 1917. Motion picture shows were a relatively new and popular pastime for soldiers, often viewed within makeshift theatres set up by the YMCA. Taylor recorded going to the movies thirteen times before joining his battalion in combat, nine of those in March, 1917. He only managed to go five times in the following seven months. Aside from reading, going to the movies seemed to have been one of Taylor’s most favourite

²³ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, Memoranda.

²⁴ Library and Archives Canada, RG 31 – Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1911, item no. 2148178.

pastimes, though after he joined his battalion in combat he had less time for them. An inverse relation existed for concerts. While in training, Taylor only attended one concert. Later in France, Taylor attended at least seven more concerts, which he genuinely seemed to enjoy. All but one of the concerts was organized by or held at the YMCA.²⁵ Taylor specifically mentioned going to perhaps one theatrical performance. On October 8th Taylor recorded having gone to a “show” in the evening.²⁶ Given that Taylor routinely used the words “movies” or “cinemas” to note motion picture shows, it can be inferred that it was not a motion picture show. Taylor appears to not have taken in any theatrical performances during the time covered by his diary prior to joining the 85th Battalion in combat. Concerts and theatrical reviews were popular among Canadian soldiers, and bolstered morale with patriotic scenes and songs. They helped soldiers find humor in their situation and aided in creating a unique culture of soldier’s humor in both song, and phrase. However, they never managed to inspire the kind of fanatical following that sports did for soldiers of the First World War.²⁷

Canadian troops clamoured for sports, whether to participate, or to cheer on their team against that of another company or battalion. Games like baseball, cricket or football required very little in the way of equipment and could easily be held on a flat stretch of ground behind the lines. The troops loved the physical outlet, and the sense of competition and accomplishment. The army loved sports days because they

²⁵ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 4th, May 30th, July 1st, 9th, September 10th, 22nd, October 2nd, 3rd, 1917.

²⁶ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, October 8th, 1917.

²⁷ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 399-401.

kept the men fit, and prevented them from developing idle hands that could turn to mischief.²⁸ Taylor, breaking from the norm, did not seem to share the same rabid devotion to sports that could be expected of his contemporaries. Taylor only recorded sports on four days in his diary. On the one day of those four that he did attend he left early and “stayed in camp for the rest of the day.”²⁹ Taylor was able to avoid “the sports” as he called them in each of the other three instances. On June 4th he recorded that “in the afternoon they had the sports, which I didn’t attend,”³⁰ on July 18th “as it was very showery the sports were cancelled,”³¹ and on September 29th there were “Corps sports in afternoon at Villers au Bois[sic] but [he] was on a salvaging party.”³² Each of the four days on which Taylor recorded a sporting event occur after he has rejoined his battalion in France in the combat rotation of the trenches. Prior to this while training, Taylor exercised more agency over his leisure time. He enjoyed a regular schedule and had more options available to him. Upon entering the trench rotation with his battalion some of his previous avenues for entertainment were restricted. His movements were more tightly controlled, his time was more fully taken up by operational requirements, and the need to perform labour tasks for his entrenched community. Sports days were scheduled by the officers when operational requirements allowed, and as part of the trench rotation to help soldiers vent frustrations. The lack of sports days during the period when Taylor exercised agency over his choice of leisure activities, the dismissive wording

²⁸ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 398-399; Eliza Riedi and Tony Mason, “‘Leather’ and the Fighting Spirit,” 488.

²⁹ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, July 20th, 1917.

³⁰ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, June 4th, 1917.

³¹ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, July 18th, 1917.

³² NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, Sept 29th, 1917.

he used to describe “the sports,” and his ability to avoid attending give the impression that Taylor did not enjoy participating in sports in the same way that many of his peers did. He mentioned scheduled sports days, and his reasons for not attending, because he felt a small pride in having avoided them.

Taylor also did not appear to seek spiritual guidance outside of scheduled church parades. Taylor recorded attending at least fifteen church parades in the entirety of his diary. At no point did he indicate that he sought out additional help from a pastor, or padre, or attended a service other than those prescribed by orders. Many of Taylor’s fellow soldiers were highly devout, and perhaps Taylor was too, but not overtly. Many soldiers developed a personal mysticism or belief system. They worshipped signs and took auguries in the mundane in an attempt to make sense of the incomprehensible. They developed rituals and religiously carried them out as a devotion to fate to keep them from harm.³³ Taylor’s daily devotions took the form of writing, whether in his diary or in letters. Other soldiers kept talismans to keep them safe. Perhaps for Taylor, writing in his diary was a form of religiosity. Taylor kept detailed and methodical diary entries over ten months without fail. He recorded the mundane as well as the exciting, and his diary was never far from hand. Even in the tumult surrounding offensives like Vimy Ridge and Passchendaele Taylor took the time to record the events in his diary.

Reading was another of Taylor’s constant companions. He recorded reading as a pastime on forty days over the course of his diary, nineteen times before

³³ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 219-227.

entering combat, and twenty-one times after. During the period of his training Taylor generally read before turning in for the night. At that time, he had a larger variety of leisure activities available to him, but he consistently made time for his favourites: reading and keeping up a correspondence with home. Taylor mentioned three books by title. On February 10th he read *The First Hundred Thousand* by Ian Hay, and *Sergeant Michael Cassidy, RE* by Sapper.³⁴ On June 6th he read *Around the World for a Rifle*, and he described all three books as “dandy.”³⁵ The titles of these three books offer insight into Taylor’s interests, and the kind of reading material that was available to Canadian soldiers. All three are very relatable to Taylor’s current circumstances and reflect the mind of a young man enmeshed in soldiers’ culture.

Taylor got at least one of his books from the YMCA, adding library to the long list of things which the YMCA meant to him.³⁶ For some soldiers, the small salvations found at the YMCA huts were equal to, and more gratefully accepted than any chaplain’s works. Soldiers visited the YMCA for coffee, snacks and food, reading rooms, writing paper, the cinema, concerts and organized sports. The local YMCA was a gathering place and formed a central supporting pillar in soldier’s lives.³⁷ Taylor made use of the YMCA in all of these capacities, except perhaps sports. He recorded visiting the YMCA on twenty-four occasions over the course of his diary. His most frequent visits are for writing letters, which he noted on six occasions, and

³⁴ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, February 10th, 1917.

³⁵ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, June 6th, 1917.

³⁶ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, June 22nd, 1917.

³⁷ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 243-244.

seeking food on five occasions. He went there for church parades, for concerts, to see movies, to get a book or just for a walk as well. The local YMCA hut was Taylor's most frequently visited location throughout the course of his diary including all of his trips to various towns combined. Given that the YMCA indulged his two most constant habits, reading and writing letters, it isn't surprising that it held such a central role in his diary. Taylor could find solace there, and a place to indulge in his devotions. In an impermanent environment continually changed by orders and shellfire, the YMCA must have seemed like one of the few constants in his life.

Aside from his diary and the YMCA, another of the constants in Taylor's life was the steady correspondence he kept up. On one hundred occasions in his diary Taylor recorded writing at least one letter or receiving at least one piece of mail. He often wrote multiple letters in one sitting and generally did not note how many pieces of mail he received at a time. He received at least twelve boxes and care packages from home and from charitable drives to provide soldiers with comforts. For example, in one mail delivery Taylor received "a box of eats from home and a sweater etc. from Aunt Teck."³⁸ Writing letters was a focal point for Taylor's war experience. On sixty-nine occasions in his diary Taylor mentioned writing at least one letter. In the same time, he recorded only twenty-two interactions with people physically present. Furthermore, upon leaving his friends Cushing and Glenn behind in England, the entries that indicate interaction with other humans took on a much more perfunctory tone. For example, on July 24th Taylor recorded that "in evening

³⁸ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, Oct 27th, 1917. (Likely part of a goodwill campaign associated with Mary of Teck, Queen consort of the United Kingdom)

JLH and I went to town”³⁹ but the entry lacks any further details regarding the time he spent with James Lewis Hall, and does not mirror the warmth associated with Taylor’s earlier entries regarding his friends Al Glenn and Alexander Cushing. Mentioned only twice more, James Hall accounts for three of Taylor’s eight entries indicating personal interaction after entering combat, and was the most frequently mentioned individual. Prolific amounts of mail crossed the Atlantic during the First World War. Soldiers at the front were hungry for news of home, and of events in Canada in general. Taylor was not alone in seeking a written connection to those that he left behind.⁴⁰ Taylor was, however, somewhat atypical in seeming to have a more fulsome friendship with his pen pals than with his comrades in uniform.

Training versus Trench Rotation

Before entering the trench relief rotation soldiers had a broader catalogue of leisure activities available to them. The freedom of movement they often enjoyed in camp was sacrificed upon entering the trenches. While in camp, there was a predictable end to the working day, and with few exceptions the soldiers were free to pursue leisure activities in camp as well as travel the surrounding area seeking additional diversions.⁴¹ Typically, Canadian soldiers enjoyed traveling to nearby towns to seek food, drink, and female companionship, but also enjoyed games, sports, gambling, smoking, and any other mischief they could get up to in camp.⁴² Once in the trenches their free time could be, and often was, interrupted by the

³⁹ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, July 24th, 1917.

⁴⁰ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 238; Cowman, “Touring behind the lines,” 108.

⁴¹ Morton, *When Your Number’s Up*, 80-81.

⁴² Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 393-399; Cowman, “Touring behind the lines,” 121-123.

needs of the army, and the actions of the enemy. In addition to the loss of regularity in their schedule, soldiers also lost a great degree of freedom of movement being now confined to a particular sector with their company. Consequently they lost much of their agency in selecting leisure activities. Between the working parties by night, and general duties by day, soldiers were still able to enjoy a few idle moments. Often exhaustion dictated that much of this time be devoted to snatching a few moments of sleep if they could. If not sleeping, soldiers could smoke, read, gossip, day dream, gamble or complain about the litany of soldiers' discomforts. Small injustices were a daily occurrence, so material for complaints rarely ebbed. Books and newspapers made the rounds, shared among the literate crowd.⁴³ Gambling was a favoured pastime to alleviate boredom in the trenches. A pack of cards was easily carried in a uniform pocket, and the ever-popular, though illegal, Crown and Anchor boards were an army tradition. Unsure if they would live to spend it, many soldiers were tempted to risk their remaining pay to enliven a slow day at the front.⁴⁴

Taylor fell into broadly the same pattern as his comrades in uniform with regard to leisure time. His activities were more diverse when he was in training, and more a master of his own schedule. During the three months of training covered by his diary from January to the end of March 1917 he made ten trips to town, and four trips to the Tintown near camp seeking food, friendship, or diversions to spend money on. In the over seven months in combat rotation following that he only made thirteen additional trips to town, seven of those being in October 1917 while his

⁴³ Cook, *Shock Troops*, 184-189; Cowman, "Touring behind the lines," 108.

⁴⁴ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 239; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 394-395.

battalion was given a lengthy rest period prior to their Passchendaele offensive. Another of Taylor's favourite locations to spend his leisure time was the YMCA. He recorded five visits during his time training, and nineteen in the latter seven months of his diary. When his movements became restricted by the requirements of his battalion, Taylor turned to the YMCA to provide him with the things he could no longer travel to acquire for himself. Lacking the freedom to travel to towns at will, Taylor sought food, movies, and other diversions at the YMCA. While in the trench rotation on the Western front, the YMCA also provided Taylor with reading material, and a place to keep up with his correspondence. He wrote at least one letter on twenty-eight occasions while training, and on forty-one occasions in the seven months to follow. He maintained his daily diary entries throughout, even when he was too tired to write home.⁴⁵ Of all the leisure activities available to him, reading was consistently one of Taylor's first choices. Taylor was an avid reader and recorded forty instances of engaging in it in his diary. In the trenches he appeared to have ample time for reading at length. In the last seven months of his diary Taylor recorded nine instances of having read for an entire morning, afternoon, or evening. He also alternated between periods of intense physical activity, and long stretches of inactivity or waiting. On fifty-one occasions during his time in forward areas Taylor was tasked to a working party, generally working late into the night and sleeping through the morning. Nocturnal labour was a fixture of the schedule of activity in

⁴⁵ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, March 11th, 1917.

the trenches.⁴⁶ On forty-five days in the trenches Taylor recorded having an abundance of downtime, and no specific activity to fill it, or in his words “loafing.”

As Taylor transitioned from his training period to an active rotation through the trenches his leisure schedule underwent a significant change as well. His regular daily schedule of drill and training with evenings free was replaced by a more chaotic schedule defined by the need to inhabit and maintain the defensive trench line. The move also restricted his access to certain leisure activities. Taylor placed emphasis on continuing the activities that he drew the most enjoyment from, and continued to write letters, read, and make diary entries regardless of the difficulty of his circumstances. Even after he was wounded at Passchendaele and in hospital he managed to write at least a line in his diary every day. His last diary entry is a simple “read a little bit and wrote a card,”⁴⁷ placing him carrying out his two favourite activities before dying of his wounds. Taylor shared many of the same pastimes as other Canadian soldiers, but he tended to spend a greater proportion of his time in quieter pursuits. Taylor mentioned sports only four times in his diary, attended only once, and on the whole seemed unenthusiastic about the concept. Taylor recorded two instances of playing cards in his diary, but did not mention if he played for stakes, and never made a mention of winning, losing, other games, or betting of any kind.⁴⁸ At no point in his diary did Taylor mention drinking anything other than tea and water. He made no references to alcohol of any kind, including the issued rum

⁴⁶ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 272-273.

⁴⁷ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, November 6th, 1917.

⁴⁸ NS Archives, *Taylor Diary*, January 26th, August 16th, 1917.

that was perennially popular with his peers.⁴⁹ None of Taylor's leisure pursuits were beyond the norm to be found in his contemporaries. His high proportion of time spent reading and writing mark him as having been more bookish than some, but his apparent avoidance of sports, and lack of any mention resembling gambling or liquor stand out as going against the grain of typical behaviour for a Canadian soldier in the First World War. Success in gambling could be a point of pride for soldiers, and frequently appeared in their accounts of the war.⁵⁰ Rum was a constant and institutionalized companion in the trenches, and many soldiers, abstainers included, remarked upon its necessity for courage in battle, and to see the men through difficult times.⁵¹

Typicality, Taylor, and his Cohort

This thesis seeks to situate Aleck Taylor with regard to Canadian soldiers of the First World War, specifically with two contemporaries Sydney Frost and Will Bird. Frost and Bird share a number of commonalities with Taylor and are useful in discussion of what experiences and behaviours would be considered typical for young men in their situation. This section will sketch brief biographies of Frost and Bird and discuss how they relate to Taylor. Sydney Frost was a Nova Scotian and had been a clerk with the Bank of Nova Scotia prior to a promotion which led him to a branch in St. John's, Newfoundland. An analytical and calculating individual, he had swiftly climbed the ranks within the bank in a few years prior to the war. Upon

⁴⁹ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 239.

⁵⁰ Imperial War Museum, W.S. Lighthall Papers, 9-10. Cited by Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 73; William Breckenridge, *From Vimy to Mons* (Self Published, 1919), 17. Cited by Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 394.

⁵¹ Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme*, 168; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 242-243.

arrival in St. John's he began actively integrating into the social scene, and the opening pages of his memoir contain a "who's who" of Newfoundland social elites, and future leaders of the Bank of Nova Scotia. Frost was fervently patriotic, and had the "utmost respect for the monarchy, law and order, and our own form of government institutions."⁵² When war broke out, Frost had long made up his mind to serve and enlisted as a private with the Royal Newfoundland Regiment. Frost served with this regiment throughout the war, eventually reaching the rank of captain. As an avid collector of written records, Frost's diaries, scrapbooks and over 400 field messages informed his post-war memoir.⁵³ Frost's memoir depicts him as an ambitious man, with an air of refinement and a firm belief in the justness of the system he belonged to, and its institutions. Frost believed in order and adherence to hierarchy but was willing to circumvent it on rare occasions when he felt it was necessary. For example, just prior to his enlistment Frost had sustained a knee injury which would likely have prevented his passing an army medical exam. Upon learning that Frost intended to leave the bank to enlist against his wishes, his manager swore to ensure that Frost's medical results would disqualify him. In defiance of his manager, Frost connived with the examining doctor to persuade him to overlook the knee injury.⁵⁴ Later, in Scotland with his regiment, Frost applied for and was denied leave to have dental work done. He took it upon himself to correct the matter, and having taken "French leave" went to have the work done anyway,

⁵² Edward Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War: The Memoir of Captain Sydney Frost*, MC (St. John's, NL: Flanker Press 2015). 24.

⁵³ Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, xi-26.

⁵⁴ Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, 27.

prepared to accept whatever consequences resulted.⁵⁵ In both cases Frost was prepared to side-step authority in order to achieve practical and in his opinion necessary ends. Conversely, when the men of his regiment staged a mass exodus in defiance of their orders in order to enjoy one last night in Edinburgh before departing, Frost does not join them. He had been assigned to stay behind with a small party to clean up and knew he would have an opportunity to say his farewells in Edinburgh once the rest of the regiment had left. He was not inclined to flout rightful authority without cause. Frost was willing to side-step rules for practical purposes, not for fun.⁵⁶

Will Bird was exactly the kind of soldier to side-step, or break, any rule for fun. Recently returned from a harvest tour of Western Canada, Bird was rugged, capable and perfectly embodied Sam Hughes vision of his “boys.”⁵⁷ Bird was caught up by the same recruitment drive as Taylor in the spring of 1916. In April he enlisted with the 193rd Battalion of the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade.⁵⁸ His early days in uniform very closely mirrored those of Aleck Taylor as the Brigade gathered at Aldershot Camp to train, and embarked in Halifax to head overseas where Bird transferred to the 42nd Battalion. Bird’s early experiences at Aldershot set the tone for the remainder of his memoir. Army life as Bird saw it was a series of hardships and injustices to be borne by the common soldier. Bureaucratic incompetence, blustering but unskilled officers, and sergeants unable to see past their dogged

⁵⁵ Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, 75.

⁵⁶ Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, 81-82.

⁵⁷ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 33.

⁵⁸ LAC. RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 748-27, Digitized Service File of William Richard Bird, Attestation Paper.

adherence to procedure were the cause of a soldier's woes. Early in his time in the army Bird came into contact with all three of these antagonists and earned a punishment detail he felt was undeserved. It was however, likely all-too representative of the growing pains Canada's citizen soldiers encountered as they entered army life. Bird declared this moment as that of his transition from proud soldier to jaded old hand, and that going forward he knew there was no real justice to be found in the army. This encounter sets a trend in Bird's memoir of the need for common soldiers to scheme together to win any foothold they can to ease their existence against the designs of authority. Bird's memoir contains frequent examples of his use of resourcefulness and inveigling to outwit authorities and thwart a callous hierarchy. He felt no compunction in thieving food from the officers' supplies or ensuring his survival against the incompetent designs of poor leadership.⁵⁹ Aleck Taylor in contrast never mentioned being part of any scheme or plot, defiance of procedure, or having gotten into trouble of any kind.

Aleck Taylor was also born in Nova Scotia, and like Sydney Frost was nurturing a career in banking prior to enlisting. Their shared career paths seem to have inculcated in Frost and Taylor a passion for noting times, dates, and recording the details and minutiae of life. Taylor's highly methodical diary entries read, in some cases, more as a schedule of events, devoid of emotion, than as a personal diary. Frost and Taylor also appeared to share an implicit belief in authority. Within his diary, Taylor does not question his place in, or the correctness of, the army

⁵⁹ Will R. Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands* (Ottawa, ON: CEF Books, 2002), v-5, 42-45.

hierarchy, or the necessity of the war. Though they spent many months training within the same sphere with the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade at Aldershot Camp and in England, Taylor and Bird appear to share little else. Bird's memoir is riddled with situations in which he bears, or cleverly overcomes grievances with the army and small injustices associated with being a soldier. Taylor steadfastly declined to complain about anything more controversial than the weather and enemy action. His most frequent complaint is about mud and rain. Where Bird's memoir is a fast-paced, and exciting retelling of his personal highlights, tending to omit the mundane, Taylor's diary offers a rigorous accounting of the day-to-day. Taylor's clerical obsession with detail offers a much more robust opportunity for quantitative analysis than Bird's highlight reel or Frost's more balanced and lengthy account. Taylor's diary was written in daily entries, with little opportunity or evidence for revision after the fact. Taylor's is a record of his actions and thoughts in the moment where the memoirs of both Frost and Bird were written after the war based on records they kept, as well as the years of reflection and distortion of memory that separate a diary and a memoir.⁶⁰

Central to the memoirs of both Frost and Bird are a sense of camaraderie with their fellow soldiers, and a plethora of actions and events that detail their relationships with the other actors in their world. In the khaki sea that was the Canadian Expeditionary Force in the First World War, the men of a fighting unit formed small, fluid and unofficial families.⁶¹ Frost devoted a significant portion of

⁶⁰ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, v. and Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, xi-xvi.

⁶¹ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 76-78; Mike O'Brien, "Manhood and the Militia Myth," 127-128.

his memoir to detailing the particulars of the soldiers who surrounded him. He offers brief and unflinching biographical sketches of the men who shared his world including the particulars of their service with Frost, and salient features of their post-war lives.⁶² Bird's memoir is similarly replete with stories of the antics and hijinks he and his cohorts became involved in overseas. Examples like that of a rat "accidentally" ending up in the mouth of a squadmate notorious for snoring as he slept, impart a sense of the rough and rowdy fun that meshes with accounts of a typical Canadian war experience. Bird also recounted the sense of kinship that drove his mates to dig him out of a collapsed trench even after their sergeant declared he must be dead,⁶³ and how deeply affected he felt at losing some of his closest friends in uniform.⁶⁴ In the course of ten months of his diary Taylor only recorded twenty-two personal interactions, and never in a group larger than three other people. In the first three months of his diary Taylor recorded spending time with his friend and fellow bank clerk Al Glen on twelve occasions, and Glenn is by far the most mentioned person in his diary. The relationship between Taylor and Glenn may have been an example of a "pal-ship" or "buddy-system" which was nearly universal in the experience of First World War veterans. These strong bonds tended to form early, often in training, and persist throughout the war until broken by death or separation. The bonded soldiers relied on each other heavily for mutual support, and once that was lost, they often found it difficult to establish this kind of bond

⁶² Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, 72-73, 83-84.

⁶³ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 62-63.

⁶⁴ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 168.

with another.⁶⁵ Having left Glenn for France, Taylor may have struggled to establish this kind of bond with his new company mates.

Bonds of a less permanent nature often formed between Canadian soldiers and their pay. Soldiers returned from the front were often eager to enjoy whatever pleasures they could before heading to an uncertain future in the trenches. Vices like drinking were very popular ways for soldiers to empty their pockets. Drinking to excess was a rampant problem in Canadian camps, and in rear areas, causing more courts martial than all other offences combined. Liquor brought small comfort to the difficult lives of soldiers, and indiscipline related to it was a longstanding and somewhat tolerated crime.⁶⁶ Canadian camps were initially dry by order of Sam Hughes, but that highly unpopular order was quickly repealed and wet canteens were established.⁶⁷ The policy had initially been influenced by a widespread temperance and prohibition movement in Canada, but the general consensus overseas was that rum was essential to the army in providing battle courage, and ameliorating harsh winters. In any case, beer and wine were readily available at every *estaminet* and stopping the flow into camp would have been impossible.⁶⁸ Will Bird indicated that he was one of a dozen or so men in his draft that never drank or smoked. His memoir includes several instances where men around him are killed or wounded by carelessness on their part, brought on by an excess of liquor. Bird at

⁶⁵ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 240; Gibson, "Sex and Soldiering in France and Flanders," 536.

⁶⁶ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 386-389; Cowman, "Touring behind the lines," 111; Gibson, "Sex and Soldiering in France and Flanders," 546.

⁶⁷ Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 75-76; G.W.L. Nicholson, *Canadian Expeditionary Force, 1914-1919* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1962), 38.

⁶⁸ Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 239; Cowman, "Touring behind the lines," 110.

first refused any rum ration offered to him, having seen the needless death of an officer for want of caution, and another man go mad with rum and injure other men around him before having his eyes shot out after impetuously thrusting his head above the trench parapet. On another occasion Bird encountered six drunk men and insinuated that their carelessness and inattention later cost their battalion dearly when, unprepared, they received a salvo of German artillery fire. Principles aside, Bird did eventually accept rum on a freezing night to stave off the cold.⁶⁹ Frost had pledged at age eight to abstain from liquor, but by age twenty-two he had begun to take the morning rum ration at stand-to, and saw nothing wrong in enjoying wine at the rear area *estaminets*, or accepting drinks from his commanding officer at dinner.⁷⁰ Both Frost and Bird entered the war abstaining from alcohol, but both eventually acceded to its near omnipresence in the soldierly culture in which they existed. Curiously Taylor never made any mention of rum or any other form of liquor in his diary. He may, like Frost and Bird, have been an abstainer, or perhaps it was so much a regular part of his routine by the time he began keeping his diary that it didn't merit a specific mention. Taylor offered no evidence to indicate either; however, Frost may inform the discussion. When he detailed an acquaintance who was required to relinquish his position, Frost noted a contemporaneous rule for employees of the Bank of Nova Scotia. Namely, that bank employees were to "abstain from taking beer, wine, or intoxicating liquor in any form."⁷¹ Taylor's

⁶⁹ Bird, *Ghosts have Warm Hands*, 11-15.

⁷⁰ Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, 220.

⁷¹ Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, 410.

former employment with the Bank of Montreal may have introduced him to a similar restraint.

Frost and Bird also had the advantage of Taylor in that they were both afforded the opportunity to edit their war memories for publication. Both may have forsaken vows of abstinence from alcohol while serving overseas, but both also had the opportunity to publish their memoirs after the war in a time when prohibition sentiments had died down, and to edit their publications if they so chose. The opportunity to choose what to include in their memoirs versus what to omit is one that Taylor was not afforded. Bird made the conscious decision to alter some of the names of men in his memoir to preserve the privacy of those about whom he wrote.⁷² Having done so he often offered scathing assessments as well as rare praise.⁷³ Bird also trimmed much of the humdrum of daily soldiering from his account, offering a much more fast-paced and exciting narrative than did Taylor. A salient feature of Bird's memoir is a delve into the mystic wherein the ghost of his brother interceded to preserve Bird's life. It was a spiritually transformative experience for Bird, but very quickly his officers ascribed the event to an excess of rum on his part, regardless of Bird's abstention from the rum ration.⁷⁴ Bird consciously included this tale in his memoir, aware of the incredulity it would foster. Frost's descriptions of the other actors in his memoir were often of the warts-and-all variety, and he chose not to alter names. The miracles that saved Frost's life time

⁷² Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, v.

⁷³ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 42.

⁷⁴ Bird, *Ghosts Have Warm Hands*, 27-29.

and again are miracles of administration such as when he is held in reserve during his regiment's disaster at Beaumont-Hammel, rather than supernatural intervention.⁷⁵ Frost's lengthy war memoir included more of the drudgery of soldiering than did Bird's, and he frequently quoted directly from letters, and diaries he wrote during the time under discussion. For example, when discussing a rotation through the trenches at Passchendaele in March, 1918 he quoted a sparse diary entry that he made at the time, and then proceeded to set the quote in a more fully realized setting within the context of his personal recollections. Given the benefit of time, Frost provided a more expansive record of the war than his daily diary provided. Doubtless the same was true of Taylor. His diary is reflective of the events and feelings he chose to record, rather than the complete experience.

Sydney Frost and Will Bird offer comparative data points for Taylor on a spectrum of Canadian soldiers of the First World War. All three men were born in Nova Scotia and served as privates in the First World War. On the one extreme is the rugged and ever-scheming Will Bird who flouted authority with regularity. On the other is the refined and socially ambitious Sydney Frost who wholly supported established authority. Both men left written memoirs of their war experience in which they espouse the importance of their friendships and relations with other members of their khaki family, and their distress at seeing them wounded or killed. Both Frost and Bird entered the war abstaining from alcohol, but acknowledged its near omnipresence in the soldiers' culture, and eventually allowed it to become part

⁷⁵ Roberts, ed., *A Blue Puttee at War*, 154.

of their war experience. Of the two, Bird seemed to align most closely with the conception of the rough and rowdy Canadian soldier typical of the First World War. Frost's disinclination to engage in some of the more notorious soldier's hijinks, his support of the establishment, and his eventual officer's commission mark him as being slightly atypical. Taylor's bookish nature and history as a bank clerk, in addition to his apparent acceptance and support of the established hierarchy align him more closely with Frost than with Bird, though even Frost was willing to bend the rules when it suited him, which Taylor left no record of ever having done.

Conclusion

This chapter conducted an in-depth analysis into the leisure time and personality of Aleck Taylor. A discussion of common leisure time activities for soldiers of the Canadian Expeditionary Force established that games, sports, drinking, and rapidly spending their pay on comforts were the most favoured pastimes for Canadian soldiers. Soldiers enjoyed traveling to nearby towns to seek food, alcoholic drinks, and the companionship of women. Residents of these towns established industries to cater to the whims of these soldiers, and to bring conveniences to them, and soldiers were only too happy to pay for them. Diversions intended to prevent soldiers from seeking more base entertainment were also popular, but to a lesser extent. Concerts and theatrical reviews put on by the soldiers themselves played upon the stressors of their working lives, and eased tensions by allowing for a relaxation in discipline, if only temporarily. Motion picture shows were a new and popular form of entertainment, and in the latter

years of the war the YMCA operated makeshift movie houses near the front to bring this entertainment to more soldiers. Sports were both popular among the men and encouraged among the army hierarchy as a way to improve physical fitness, provide an outlet for frustration, and to keep mischievous hands from becoming idle. Sports were nearly universally popular in Canadian and British camps, but Taylor seemed to prove the exception to the rule. Religious devotion for soldiers of the Western Front was rooted in the same Protestant and Catholic traditions that were recognizable in communities across Canada, but also took on elements of mysticism and the miraculous. For soldiers, a nearly pagan devotion to ritual and a lucky talisman often formed parts of a personal brand of religious devotion. Soldiers espoused a deep belief in superstition and an individual soldier's belief system was often something of his own making.

The YMCA huts established in British and Canadian army camps took on a titanic importance in the support and wellbeing of the soldiers they served. Acting as a gathering place, source of spiritual redemption, purveyor of food, drink, entertainment and other small comforts endeared them to Canadian soldiers. The YMCA also served as a hub for the endless correspondence that traveled across the Atlantic, and in which Taylor played an active part. Leisure pursuits were available in greater variety when soldiers were stationed in rest or reserve areas behind the line, than at the front. Cramped conditions and operational requirements precluded sports, concerts, theatres, movies, and many popular pursuits as well as restricting soldiers' diets to issued rations and tea brewed in whatever was available. Between working parties at night and regular duties soldiers found time to nap, gossip,

daydream, gamble, read, smoke, and complain about a litany of issues their comrades all shared. Written material took on a collective ownership, and once read, passed to the next owner.

Taylor's methodical daily entries provide a robust record for quantitative analysis of his leisure time and activities. During his time in training he enjoyed a more regular schedule, without interference of working parties and enemy action. With his evenings free Taylor was able to achieve the Canadian norm of quickly emptying his pockets, and then some, before his next pay. Taylor frequented the nearby towns and YMCA huts for food, as well as the Tintowns on the edges of camp for shopping and entertainment. In his trips to town he was occasionally accompanied by his friend Al Glenn. Taylor's search for food, entertainment and camaraderie was not at all unlike the majority of Canadian soldiers at this time. Unlike many typical soldiers of this time, Taylor did not seem driven to seek out the association of local women. He did not record any encounters with women while overseas in his diary. He kept up a prodigious correspondence with home, and among his named correspondents were several women and girls, though none stood out as an obvious sweetheart. Taylor appeared to have enjoyed motion picture shows, making a great deal of time for them both while training, and later in the combat rotation. Taylor mentioned sports days in his diary, but seemed to lack enthusiasm for them, and may have recorded them only to note when he had avoided participating in them. Given more agency over his free time during training, Taylor did not record participating in any sports during those months. Taylor also did not appear to seek spiritual guidance outside of the church parades he was

ordered to attend with his battalion. Taylor's religiosity seemed to find expression more in his diary entries and his devotion to the written word. Reading was also an important leisure activity for Taylor. Whether in training or in the trenches, Taylor always made time for reading, and along with writing, they formed two of the constants within his diary. Taylor's record of continued correspondence with people not physically present far outweighed his record of interaction with the persons around him. After he left Al Glenn in England, Taylor appeared to struggle to fill the gap in his social circle.

Taylor's leisure activities fell broadly in line with those of his contemporaries. His activities were more diverse when he was able to exercise more agency over this schedule. After entering the trench rotation with his battalion in April, his activities were more limited in variety. Even under the weight of combat and operational requirements Taylor managed to find time for the activities that meant the most to him. He maintained strong attendance at the various movies and activities hosted by the YMCA, though his ability to travel to towns was limited. Taylor continued to read and write prolifically while in the trenches, and may have actually found more time for reading given the dearth of other leisure options in the trenches. Taylor recorded having a great deal of idle time with no specific task to complete once he entered the trench rotation. After being wounded at Passchendaele and evacuated to a hospital, Taylor still managed to find time to read and write. Taylor's variety of leisure activities is not uncommon compared to his contemporaries. Taylor's choice to spend more time in quieter pursuits rather than

drinking, gambling, and causing trouble mark him as being slightly more introverted than the typical Canadian soldier.

Two of Taylor's contemporaries that form informative data points on a spectrum of what is considered to be typical for a Canadian soldier of the First World War are Sydney Frost and Will Bird. All three men were born in Nova Scotia and served in the First World War as privates at one time. Taylor more closely resembled Frost in his implicit belief in authority, his bookishness, and his devotion to collecting details and records about the world around him. Both men seemed to distance themselves from the mischief and antics their brothers in uniform found so entertaining. Will Bird thoroughly enjoyed mischief and serves as a useful foil for discussions of Taylor. Bird more closely resembled the archetypical Canadian soldier described in literature surrounding the Canadian army at this time.⁷⁶ All three men were privates at one point, and their experiences were broadly representative of those of their peers. Taylor's atypicality stems from his behaviours in reaction to those experiences.

⁷⁶ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 73; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 33, 386-390; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 337.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

Nineteen years old in March 1916, Aleck Taylor answered the same call to arms as many young Canadians, and volunteered for overseas service with the Nova Scotia Highland Brigade. He was one of 430, 000 Canadians who served in the First World War, and one of 61, 000 who did not return.¹ As a private in an infantry battalion, Taylor was representative of thousands of his peers. This thesis compares Taylor to the current paradigm of a typical Canadian soldier of the First World War: an ill-disciplined, unruly brawler, given to misbehaving, drinking, and womanizing, and by war's end a member of an elite fighting formation.² The diary that he kept religiously throughout ten months overseas is methodical, and contains a wealth of detail concerning the minutiae of daily life in the Canadian Expeditionary Force both in training, and in combat. Taylor's diary offers a rich source for quantitative analysis of his daily life. Taylor recorded the exciting and the mundane with equal attention. From the entries he made in almost a year of writing, elements of Taylor's personality emerge in what he chose to record, and how he reacted to his circumstances. Taylor appears to have been a quiet, reserved and bookish young man not unlike many young Canadians who volunteered for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. In Taylor's experiences of the war there is little that would be considered startlingly atypical, but Taylor himself was somewhat apart from his

¹ Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End: Canadians Fighting the Great War 1914-1916* (Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009), 3.

² Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993), 73; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 33, 386-390; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme: The First Battle of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Knopf, 2010), 337; Tim Cook, *Clio's Warriors: Canadian Historians and the Writing of the World Wars* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2006), 11.

archetypical contemporaries. Like Sydney Frost, Taylor appeared to carry an implicit belief in authority, the army hierarchy, and the justness of the war. Unlike Will Bird, Taylor never complained about the hardships he underwent, or the frequent injustices of army life. He never mentioned grievances with his officers or NCOs, or the people with whom he shared his world. Taylor did make a special exception for the weather, about which he complained frequently. Taylor's diary suggests that either he took no issue with any of these common soldiers' grievances, or stoically accepted that they were all part of army life, and not worth commenting upon. This marks Taylor as different from his contemporaries. There was little that soldiers loved to do more than complain about the army. Taylor's diary entries in England depict a young man genuinely eager to get to France. While in training, Taylor recorded each instance of drill, marching, and the practical training and fieldcraft he received. His training in a diverse array of weapons and skills was reflective of a Canadian military doctrine adopted after the unimaginative campaigns of the first three years of war. On the eve of entering into the horrors and tragedies of armed combat Taylor was stripped of his closest social supports and tossed into a very unfamiliar new social group.

In combat, Taylor's professional experiences mirror those of his contemporaries, and official records of his service offer nothing to discourage this view. Taylor's methodical and consistent diary entries offer a fantastic opportunity to perform a quantitative analysis of seven months in the trench rotation. Taylor spent roughly thirty-six percent of his days on the Western Front in front line or support trenches, and the remaining sixty-four percent relatively removed from, but

not immune to enemy action. Of these, he spent twenty-seven days under fire. Analysis of his diary indicates that Taylor's time spent in the trenches versus in rear areas broadly follows the pattern held as typical by Cook.³ A strength of Taylor's diary as a source material is his methodical recording of the drudgery of his day-to-day life as well as the more glamorous aspects of army life. Battalion War Diaries and personal memoirs offer some of these details, but often do not provide a scope that allows for strong quantification. Taylor specifically mentioned being assigned to working parties on fifty-one days, digging new trenches, repairing existing ones, or carrying materials, usually at night. On fifty-six days Taylor made mention of having an abundance of idle time. Curiously, Taylor's diary is nearly devoid of interactions between himself and others after he leaves England. The humdrum and drudgery comprised a significant portion of Taylor's days spent in the combat rotation of the trenches. A smaller, though vivid proportion of Taylor's wartime recollections were his experiences in combat. In his twenty-seven days under fire Taylor saw combat in two of the most defining battles for the Canadian Expeditionary Force. Taylor took part in the battles of Vimy Ridge and the Second Battle of Passchendaele, as well as a night patrol through no man's land. The most salient feature of Taylor's diary entries for his time in combat was his steadfast refusal to record the death or injury of his comrades, even when he can be demonstrated to have seen them by independent accounts. From the time he joined the 85th in France until the end of his diary 224 days later, Taylor only noted eight examples of personal interaction between himself and one or more others.

³ Tim Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 381-383.

Camaraderie was an essential and nearly ubiquitous feature of soldierly life in the First World War, yet Taylor appeared to struggle to form bonds with his khaki family.

Games, sports, drinking, and rapidly spending their pay on comforts were typically the most favoured pastimes for Canadian soldiers. Soldiers enjoyed traveling to nearby towns to seek food, alcoholic drinks, and the companionship of women. Diversions intended to prevent soldiers from seeking more base entertainment were also popular, but to a lesser extent. Movies, concerts, sports and theatrical reviews were hosted by the YMCA to keep up morale, and the YMCA became an important gathering place for soldiers in camp. The YMCA huts established in British and Canadian army camps took on a central importance in the support and wellbeing of the soldiers they served. Acting as a gathering place, source of spiritual redemption, purveyor of food, drink, entertainment and other small comforts endeared them to Canadian soldiers. The YMCA also served as a hub for the endless correspondence that traveled across the Atlantic.

Leisure pursuits were available in greater variety when soldiers were stationed in rest or reserve areas behind the line, than at the front. At the front, cramped conditions and operational requirements necessitated the reduction of many popular pastimes, and restricted soldiers' diets to army rations. Between working parties at night and regular duties soldiers found time to nap, gossip, daydream, gamble, read, smoke, and complain about the injustices of army life to a captive audience. During Taylor's time in training he enjoyed a more regular

schedule, without the interference of working parties and enemy action. With his evenings free, Taylor was able to achieve the Canadian norm of quickly emptying his pockets before his next pay. Taylor's leisure activities fell broadly in line with those of his contemporaries. His activities were more diverse when he was able to exercise more agency over this schedule. After entering the trench rotation with his battalion in April, his activities were more limited in variety. However, even under the weight of combat and operational requirements Taylor managed to find time for the activities that meant the most to him. Taylor's choice to spend more time in quieter pursuits like reading and writing rather than drinking, gambling, and causing trouble identify him as being slightly more introverted than the norm among his peers.

Two of Taylor's contemporaries, Sydney Frost and Will Bird, provide informative points of comparison on a spectrum of what is considered normal for a Canadian soldier of the First World War. All three men were born in Nova Scotia and served in the First World War as privates at one time. Taylor more closely resembled Frost in his implicit belief in authority, his bookishness, and his devotion to collecting details and records about the world around him. Both men appeared to distance themselves from the mischief and antics their brothers in uniform were notorious for enjoying. Will Bird thoroughly enjoyed mischief and serves as a useful foil for discussions of Taylor. Bird more closely resembled the rough and tumble colonial soldier described in literature surrounding the Canadian army at this time.⁴

⁴ Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, 73; Cook, *At the Sharp End*, 33, 386-390; William Philpott, *Three Armies on the Somme*, 337.

All three seemed to have consciously abstained from the vice of alcohol for at least part of their wartime experience. All three men were privates at one time, and their experiences were broadly representative of those of their peers. Taylor's atypicality stems from his reaction to those experiences.

Taylor is atypical in his typicality. Unlike many of his contemporaries he seemed to be a quiet, reserved individual who liked nothing more than reading, writing and going to bed early. The personality that emerges from the early portion of his diary is one of a sarcastic young man who unreservedly accepts his new surroundings, and is eager to get to the real soldiering in France. Later, having seen combat, Taylor maintained his equanimity by wordlessly accepting the horrible conditions of life in the trenches. He consistently refrained from complaining about the war, his superiors, or his lot in life, and rarely made introspective statements. He made no mention of the most common soldierly vices, and seemed to derive sufficient enjoyment from reading and keeping in touch by mail. Taylor's diary is a fascinating and highly informative primary source. The window it opens into almost a year of his life offers tantalizing snippets that, paired with additional research into his surroundings and correspondents, could form the highly compelling basis of a more in-depth microhistory.

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Appendix A: Tables and Figures

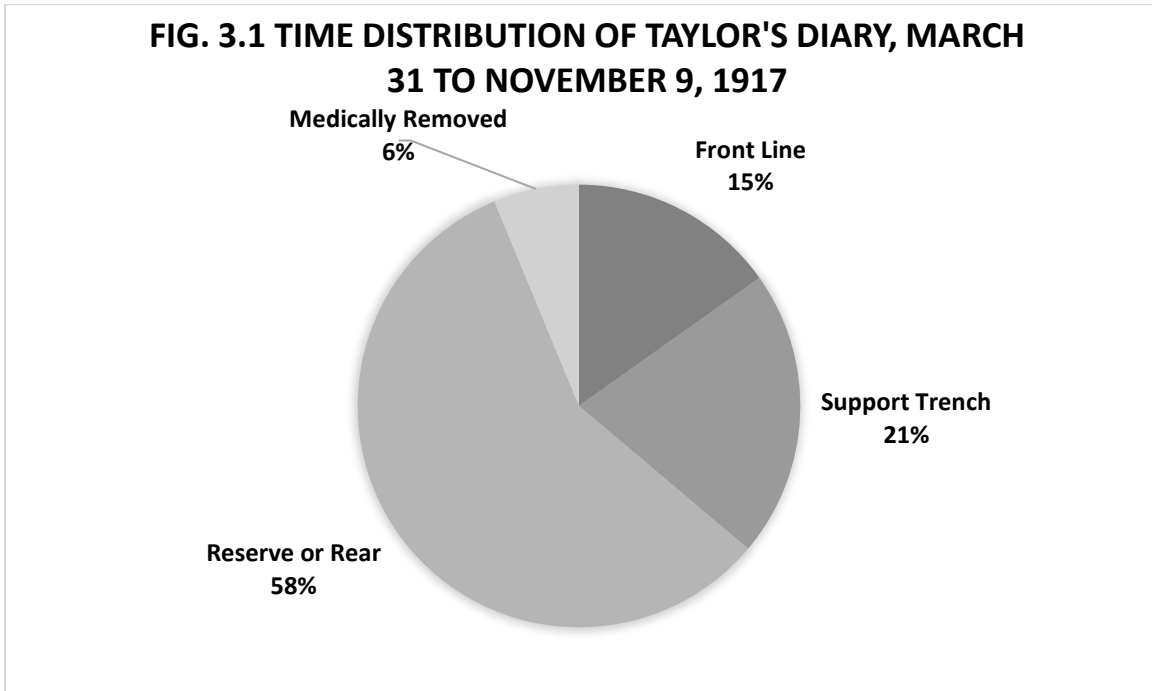


Table 4.1 Taylor's Leisure Pursuits December 30, 1916 to November 9, 1917.

<i>Leisure Activity</i>	In Training	Trench Rotation	Total
<i>Movies</i>	13	5	18
<i>Concert</i>	1	7	8
<i>Theatre</i>	0	1	1
<i>Sports</i>	0	4	4
<i>Reading</i>	19	21	40
<i>Personal Interaction</i>	14	8	22
<i>YMCA</i>	5	19	24
<i>Writing</i>	28	41	69
<i>Received Mail</i>	9	22	31
<i>Loafed</i>	3	45	48

Appendix B: Select Diary Entries

Friday, January 5th, 1917

Got a m. O from home for £2. Some lucky. Am now a millionaire. Still drilling hard. In evening I went to town and had a real feed. Came home early and turned in. Issued with gas helmets and goggles today.

Saturday, January 6th, 1917

Went out to Thrusley Common for battalion drill. Some fun.

In afternoon Glenn came down from Bramshot and we went in town together. went to movies, had a feed then walked to camp.

In the trenches

Monday, April 9th 1917

Music Hall trench
standing by since 4 are
ready to go and do our
work. A very heavy
bombardment and barrage
going on from our side.

Called out about 6 PM for
working party carrying ammuni-
tions to CW Coy. Worked
till dawn, and nearly dead from
fatigue. For on our new ground

Tuesday, April 10th, 1917

captured from Fritz this
afternoon the mud was knee deep
The sights I saw on the ground I
shall never forget. It was hell.
As we were going back Fritz shelled
us like sin. Returned to CW Coy
at 6 AM. Called out about 10 AM
and went back to Music Hall.
about 3 we went over the top and
advanced. Thanks to a heavy
snow storm we got safe to the
new supports. That night

Monday, November 5th, 1917

Feeling pretty good
still. Not got
much appetite tho

Tuesday, November 6th, 1917

Read a little but
and wrote a
~~one~~ card.

Appendix C: Image of Taylor



This image may be Aleck Taylor, though misidentified as Arthur. Aleck Taylor's Regimental No. was 282278.

Acadia Vaughn Memorial Library, *A Short History and Photographic Record of the 219th Overseas Highland Battalion, C.E.F.*, Lt. Col. W.H. Muirhead, Commanding Officer, Microfiche collection FC5.C5 no. 78064, (Dominion of Canada, 1916), 31.

2 282278, Lance Corporal ARTHUR TAYLOR,
Bridgewater.