

CHAPTER XVI

OUTSIDE THE CORPS

(See Sketches 54 and 55)

THE RECORD of Canada's participation in the First World War, while largely the story of the Canadian Corps on the Western Front, would not be complete without some account of the part played by other components of the nation's armed forces. Of some 150,000 Canadian troops in France and Belgium at the time of the Armistice, nearly 40,000 were outside General Currie's command. Other Canadians were serving or had served elsewhere in various roles - military, naval and air. We have noted, for instance, that the future Canadian province of Newfoundland had been represented at Gallipoli and subsequently in the main theatre on the Western Front.

Some of these Canadian contributions have been described already. Earlier chapters have dealt with such matters as the dispatch of Canadian garrisons to the West Indies, and the operations of Canadian cavalry serving with British formations. Allusions made from time to time to the part played by the Air Services in specific operations will provide a background to a section of the present chapter dealing with Canadians who fought in the air. Other sections will cover the activities of groups of Canadians who were given special employment in various parts of the world. All made worth-while contributions,

Railway Troops on the Western Front

It was natural that Canada, where in the years immediately preceding the war more new railways had been built than anywhere else in the British Empire, should be called on to play a leading role in providing troops for the construction and operation of railways on the fighting fronts. The force of Canadian railway troops which served in France and Belgium was the largest body of Canadians on the Western Front not under the command of the Canadian Corps. Composed for the most part of men beyond the normal military age, the Canadian Railway Battalions were perhaps the most colourful of all units.

In the pre-war discussions that took place between the British and the French military staffs, the French undertook to man and control the entire railway service. They would be responsible for "the work of construction, repair, maintenance, traffic management and protection, not only in French territory but

beyond the frontier”.¹ When war broke out it first seemed that this arrangement might work out satisfactorily, since France appeared to have an ample supply of railway troops and a well-planned system for employing them. A British railway company which landed at Le Havre in mid-August 1914 was faced with lack of employment, and there was soon a proposal to transfer from it men of other than railway trades to replace casualties in field units.²

Then came the Battle of the Marne, and the subsequent advance to the Aisne. French and British forces found themselves as much as eighty miles beyond their railheads - a gap which French railway units vainly tried to close while, not by their own choice, British repair troops remained idle. Finally on 17 September 1914 the French Government accepted British assistance, though with certain reservations. The French staff still had a number of railway units of their own available, and hoped to use as unskilled labour prisoners of war and Belgians or Italians. At this stage of the war they seemed concerned about keeping their own railway repair arrangements neat and tidy by avoiding the complications that might arise from accepting British assistance.³

Early in October 1914 the War Office issued a call for additional railway troops.* When interested Canadians learned of this from the press and offered their services to their own government, Ottawa asked the British authorities to substantiate the newspaper reports, asserting that “Canada can supply the want probably better than any other country.” While the Army Council expressed its appreciation of the offer, it was not prepared to take advantage of it at that time. “When accepted”, the British reply concluded, “a railway corps should be organized on military basis [as opposed to civilian ‘gangs’] through principal Canadian railways.”⁵ Finally on 21 January 1915 the Army Council sent word that it would be glad to have a corps of Canadian railwaymen. “Skilled construction men are wanted . . . please telegraph what numbers can be provided and on what conditions.”⁶

On 2 February the Canadian Government replied that it could provide at its own expense a corps of 500 or more railwaymen for construction work; officials of the Canadian Pacific Railway were cooperating in the organization of the unit.⁷ Mobilization of the Canadian Overseas Railway Construction Corps - two companies and a regimental headquarters - began at Saint John, N.B., recruiting being completed by 15 May. The men were all experienced construction workers employed by the C.P.R., and each had to pass a test as to his technical ability. By 15 May recruiting was completed, except to make up for discharges - approximately 100 out of some 670 attested - and to form a ten

* In October Lord Kitchener sent Brig.-Gen. Sir Percy Girouard to France to report on the railway situation. Sir Percy, a distinguished Canadian-born Royal Engineer Officer, had made an outstanding contribution in the construction of railways for military purposes in the Sudan and South African campaigns. Out of his recommendations came the appointment of a permanent International Railway Commission on which the French, British and Belgian General Headquarters were represented. One of its main concerns was the provision and maintenance of rail transportation in Belgian territory.⁴

percent reserve. The unit sailed for England on 14 June and arrived on the 25th. Exactly two months later it landed in France.⁸

Between the last week of August and the beginning of October 1915 the Corps served with the Belgian forces, laying light track for 60-centimetre tramways. It also worked on siege-gun and machine-gun emplacements for the Royal Marines.⁹ There was a sudden break in this employment when on 5 October the Canadian unit was withdrawn to England for transfer to Salonika. That move, however, did not materialize. Returning to France on 2 November, the Canadians were assigned to the British Second Army Lines of Communication for work in the Reninghelst area south of Poperinghe. Here they constructed sidings and maintained standard-gauge railway track that had been laid by British railway troops.¹⁰

In most sectors of the virtually static front the existing railheads were a dozen miles or more behind the front lines. Ammunition and supplies and engineer stores were commonly transported over this gap by lorry to a refilling point and thence by horse transport. The volume of traffic on the roads was tremendous, it has been calculated that at the Battle of the Somme an average of 1934 tons had to be removed from the railheads daily for each mile of the Fourth Army's front. The roads suffered heavily from this tonnage, particularly in wet weather, and damage from shelling increased the problems of keeping them in repair. One solution was to reduce the use of mechanical transport by providing railheads within reach of horse transport.¹¹ Such a programme was launched on an experimental basis in January 1916, the railheads being advanced to within some three miles of the front.¹²

But a further problem remained. When because of bad roads and shellfire the horse transport could not reach troops in the trenches, the last stage of moving supplies from the railhead had to be performed by manual labour or by pack animals. To remedy this situation, early in 1916 authority was given in cases of extreme necessity to construct 60-centimetre tramlines linking up the standard gauge railheads with the trenches. The advantages of tramways, used with trolleys which were mostly pushed by hand, sometimes drawn by mules and only occasionally pulled by small locomotives, had been recognized more generally by the Canadian than the British forces. In the Canadian Corps two Tramway Companies composed of Canadian engineer personnel, under the C.R.E. Corps Troops, constructed, maintained, and operated tramways until the end of the War. There had been no wide-scale adoption of tramways, however, for while such a system was obviously well suited to supplying a stable front, it received little consideration from G.H.Q., which took the view that the war would soon revert to one of movement. By 1917 there was conviction that all railway resources should be concentrated on the standard-gauge lines that would be needed when the expected general advance started.¹³

In order to extend and maintain rail communications farther forward, more and more railway troops were required. There was no lack of response in Canada, as private individuals willing to raise railway units submitted their offers to the Governor General, the Minister of Militia, the Prime Minister, the Premier

of British Columbia, as well as direct to the British authorities. Expansion overseas was rapid. In May 1916, the War Office asked Canada to furnish another railway construction unit approximately 1000 strong. Recruits drawn from skilled railway workers across the country were organized into the 239th Overseas Railway Construction Battalion, commanded by Lt.-Col. J. W. Stewart. From the Chief of the imperial Staff came congratulations to the Militia Department on the "promptitude you have shown in raising Jack Stewart's Railway Construction Battalion", a message whose apparent informality was doubtless prompted by General Sam Hughes' practice of referring to proposed units by the names of the individuals* offering or organizing them.¹⁵ Before the unit could sail, however, Stewart was called to the United Kingdom at the request of the War Office, to be sent to France as Deputy Director of Light Railways.

By April 1917 there were five new Canadian railway units in France. The 1st Canadian Construction Battalion (which had crossed the Channel in October 1916) and the 127th Infantry Battalion (from Bramshott to France in January 1917) were reorganized as the 1st and 2nd Battalions Canadian Railway Troops. The 239th was renamed the 3rd Battalion Canadian Railway Troops, and proceeded from England to France in March. The 4th and 5th Battalions were formed at the C.R.T. Depot at Purfleet, in Essex, and reached France in February.

It was then decided to increase the number of battalions to ten. As more units arrived from Canada they were sent to Purfleet. By the end of June the 6th, 7th, 8th and 10th Battalions had been formed at the Depot. The 9th Battalion came from reorganization of the 1st Pioneer Battalion, in France since March 1916. In November the 11th and 12th Battalions were raised from Canadian labour battalions in France, and the 13th came into being at Purfleet in March 1918. April 1917 saw the arrival in France of the first of three specialist Canadian railway operating companies. A railroad shop company formed at the C.R.T. Depot in March 1918 arrived in France in April.^{†16}

When they reached France the Canadian Railway Troops Battalions came under the command of Brig.-Gen. Stewart, who at the beginning of 1917 had been appointed Deputy Director General Transportation (Construction) at G.H.Q. In March 1917 he established the administrative headquarters of the Canadian Railway Troops at G.H.Q. British Armies in France, where it remained completely apart from the Canadian Corps. The following May saw a reorganization in which the original Overseas Railway Construction Corps and the four independent companies joined the thirteen battalions under the Headquarters, Canadian Railway Troops, the whole being redesignated the Corps of Canadian Railway Troops, under the command of Brig.-Gen. Stewart.¹⁷

* As when the Acting High Commissioner for Canada in official correspondence with the Prime Minister writes of a "regiment" offered by "Big Jim McDonald"!¹⁴

† These four units were the 13th Light Railway Operating Company, the 58th Broad Gauge Railway Operating Company, the 69th Wagon Erecting Company and the 85th Engine Crew Company.

Towards the end of August, as we shall see, a C.R.T. bridging company was formed for service in the Middle East. By the time of the Armistice the strength of the Corps, including 3364 railway troops in the United Kingdom, had risen to 19,328.¹⁸

From the moment of their arrival in France the Canadian railway units found plenty to do. The German withdrawal to the Hindenburg Line meant that new track - of both standard and narrow gauge - had to be pushed forward. The work was carried out with remarkable speed, despite the hindrance of appalling weather and enemy demolitions. In preparation for the Arras-Vimy offensive in the spring of 1917 Canadian railway units laid steel up to the forward trenches; and as the infantry of the Canadian Corps advanced over Vimy Ridge, close on their heels tramways were pushed forward over the newly consolidated ground. Later that year Canadian construction units laboured under the dreadful conditions in the Ypres Salient before Passchendaele, when on the Second and Fifth Army fronts alone the number of breaks in the light railway lines caused by enemy shellfire averaged one hundred a day.¹⁹

From 1917 to the end of the war all light railway construction and maintenance on the British front was carried out by Canadian troops, assisted by attached labour. During the German offensives of 1918 railway units were diverted to the necessary reorganization of the L. of C. and to the construction of a rear defence system. The 2nd Battalion C.R.T., it may be recalled, assumed an infantry holding role (above, p. 371). The ready ability of the railway troops to undertake this commitment was a vindication of the policy laid down by the Canadian military authorities-that every Canadian engaged at the front on work of a technical nature must first be trained as a fighting soldier. All British railway, labour and other troops assigned to the defences came under the orders of General Stewart. At one point seven Canadian railway battalions and sixty British units-a total of 22,400 all ranks-were so employed.²⁰ The 2nd Canadian Battalion, working day and night under heavy shelling, maintained lines linking the British and French systems, making it possible to remove much valuable roiling stock which otherwise would have been destroyed or abandoned. To salvage valuable stocks of timber from the advancing Germans, the Canadians dumped the logs into the canals, forming them into rafts on which they carried to safety large quantities of steel rails, telephone poles and railway ties.²¹ By the late summer of 1918 Canadian railwaymen were heavily involved in preparing for the great Amiens offensive which opened on 8 August. They continued to play an important role in the subsequent operations which eventually brought victory to the Allies.

Between April 1917 and the end of 1918 Canadian units laid 1169 miles of broad-gauge line and 1404 miles of light track. In the final year of the war the number of men employed on railway construction averaged nearly eight thousand daily. At the same time an average of more than four thousand were busy every day on maintaining lines already built. We have noted that in certain sectors the Canadian railway troops were under fire for protracted periods. The 10th Railway

Battalion, for example, which was in the Ypres Salient, was never out of range of shellfire from the time of the Messines action in June 1917 until the end of the Passchendaele fighting. From 1 April 1917 to the end of the war the Corps of Canadian Railway Troops suffered 1977 casualties.²²

Repairing Bridges in Palestine

One of the important contributions made by Canadian Railway units in France was to raise a bridging unit for service in the Middle East. The 1st Bridging Company C.R.T. was formed in August 1918 in response to a request by General Sir Edmund Allenby, who, it will be recalled, had relinquished the command of the Third Army in France to command the Egyptian Expeditionary Force in Palestine.²³

We have already noted the successful offensive against the Turks at the end of 1917. By the late summer of 1918 the E.E.F. held a front stretching from the Mediterranean coast to the Jordan River on a line ten miles north of Jaffa and the Dead Sea. General Allenby was soon to resume the offensive, and it seemed certain that the enemy would attempt by means of railway demolitions to hinder a pursuit into Syria. The rate of Allenby's future progress would depend largely upon his ability to use two existing railway systems. One of these lines ran south-east from Haifa, on the Mediterranean coast, to the Jordan valley, thence northward to the Sea of Galilee (Lake of Tiberias). To the east of Palestine the Hejaz line from Medina passed generally northward through Der'a to Damascus and Aleppo. The two systems were linked by a Turkish line which ran eastward from a tributary of the Jordan, the Yarmuk, to Der'a. Particularly vulnerable were the bridges in the Yarmuk Valley, where the Turkish railway crossed and recrossed the deep gorge on spans which were so long and difficult of approach that the British staffs had previously estimated that their destruction of one of these - when the line was a supply route to the Turkish forces in Palestine - would isolate the enemy from his base for a fortnight.²⁴ It was in anticipation of the need for bridging operations here that the request was made for the Canadian unit. Personnel for the 1st Bridging Company (256 all ranks) were drawn mainly from Canadian railway battalions in France. Under the command of Major A. P. Linton, the company sailed from Marseilles on 20 September 1918.²⁵

The great offensive for which Allenby had been preparing throughout the summer of 1918 opened on 19 September. Within a week he had inflicted a sweeping defeat on the enemy at Megiddo, and demoralized remnants of the Turkish armies were streaming northward into Syria. On the 27th the E.E.F. began to advance on Damascus, the Syrian capital. Brilliant destructive work on the Hejaz railway by Lt.-Col. T.E. Lawrence ("Lawrence of Arabia") and his Arab auxiliaries so delayed the retreat of the bulk of the Turkish army that it had no time in which to organize a defence of Damascus. The city fell on 1 October.²⁶ Allenby now had to restore railway communications between Jerusalem and Damascus, to which end the 1st Bridging Company, arriving in Palestine on 2 October, was promptly ordered to the Yarmuk valley. The second and third

bridges above the junction with the Jordan were found to have been partly destroyed by the retreating Turks. Work on both spans began on the 7th.²⁷

Operating conditions could scarcely have been more unpleasant. The valleys of the Jordan and the Yarmuk were among the most unhealthy places in Palestine. Temperatures of 1000 in the shade continued week after week, rising at times to over 1200. Because of the great depth of these valleys and the enormous amount of evaporation from the Dead Sea, the air was heavy with moisture. Screened from any breeze by the high valley walls, the atmosphere was hot and stagnant, producing in the troops who worked there an extraordinary lassitude and sense of helplessness. The movement of transport stirred up dust from the powdered soil, and dun-coloured clouds would hang for long periods in the overcharged air. Hostile insects added to the pestiferous nature of the surroundings. In the dry parts were scorpions, six-inch centipedes and stinging spiders, and where the ground was swampy - mosquitoes.²⁸ The Canadian bridging company was soon crippled by malaria and other environmental ailments. Some men were hit by the influenza epidemic which was sweeping every theatre of operations. In many cases this was followed by pneumonia. For one week in October not more than six men were able to work at any one time. Nevertheless, with the aid of 560 men of the Egyptian Labour Corps, the unit pushed its task to completion; by 26 October supplies could be sent all the way to Damascus by rail.²⁹

On that date British forces entered Aleppo and advanced eight miles beyond towards Alexandretta. The campaign was all but over; four days later Turkey signed an armistice. Now, with the problems of moving refugees and liberated prisoners of War, and supplying foodstuffs to whole populations on the verge of starvation, there was much work to be done on bridging and restoring and improving the railways. The 1st Bridging Company was transferred to Hama, south of Aleppo, where it carried on its work from the beginning of November 1918 to February 1919. In March the unit sailed for England, to join the C.R.T. Depot. Although the 1st Bridging Company had not come under fire during its tour of duty in the Middle East, it had suffered seven fatal casualties - five by disease, two accidental.³⁰

With the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force

During the First World war approximately 4000 Canadians and British subjects residing in Canada and the United States were enrolled in the Royal Engineers, or seconded to that Corps, for work on inland waterways and docks. Early in September 1916 some thirty members of the Canadian Pioneer Training Depot in England with experience of water transportation in British Columbia were discharged from the C.E.F. and sent to the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force for such duties. Some served at the inland port of Basra at the head of the

Persian Gulf; others operated barges on the Tigris and the Euphrates. Their assignment lasted for the duration of the war and for some months afterwards.³¹

Another group of Canadians were destined to play much more of a combatant role in Mesopotamia. The manner of their becoming involved was directly related to British policies in the Middle East at that time. Ever since Turkey had entered the war on the side of the Central Powers, Britain had recognized the need to prevent German exploitation of Caspian oil. The British were furthermore acutely interested in the Persian, Caucasian and Caspian regions for other strategic reasons, for an advance there by the Central Powers would not only affect the campaign in Mesopotamia, but would seriously threaten the security of India's hinterland. Berlin-Batum-Baku was a more dangerous enemy route to the Indian frontier than Berlin-Baghdad. Following an Allied Conference in Paris in December 1917 at which it was decided to establish unofficial relations with the Bolsheviks, Britain took as her sphere of responsibility the Cossack territories, Armenia, the Caucasus and the territory east of the Caspian Sea. (Later North Russia was tacitly added.)³²

After the Bolshevik Revolution Russia's political control over the Trans-Caucasus disappeared and anarchy among the Russian troops brought the collapse of military control. Under the influence of the Georgians, politically the most mature of the peoples in the region, an independent Trans-Caucasian republic was formed in November 1917, to include Georgians, Armenians and Tartars, despite religious differences and traditional animosities. In March 1918 came the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, which ceded the districts of Batum, Kars and Ardahan to Turkey. Outside influences then made themselves felt. The Turks advanced and, ignoring the terms of the treaty, began to seize the whole Caucasus region. They were opposed by Germany, who was determined to control Baku and its oilfields. Beset by the rival influences of Turkey and Germany, the newly formed Trans-Caucasian republic collapsed and was split up. At the western base of the Caucasus isthmus an independent Armenian republic of Erivan was proclaimed in May under Turkish protection; to the east a Tartar republic under the Turks, to include Baku, was established in the same month. To the north Georgia welcomed a German expeditionary force as protection from Turkish invasion and on 12 June German troops occupied Tiflis. Baku was the only Bolshevik stronghold, and on this the Turks were advancing in defiance of the Germans.³³

The nearest British troops were small parties in Persia and the army in Mesopotamia, and their problems were already sufficiently complex. First, the 630-mile road which ran from Baghdad north-eastward through Hamadan to Enzeli on the Caspian Sea must be kept open against Turkish incursions from the west. This would be no easy task, for the route lay through a devastated, famine-stricken area and over a succession of mountain ranges; and the attitude of the local tribes, especially the Jangalis on the south-western shores of the Caspian, was uncertain and threatening. Furthermore, the advance of Bolsheviks (and Austrian prisoners of war freed by them) into the area east of the Caspian had to be checked lest they join with hostile elements there to present a serious threat to

Afghanistan and India. Finally, if the Eastern Front was to be restored, the Caspian and its shipping must be under Allied control, and this meant that Baku had to be taken and defended against the Turks.³⁴

It was clear at the beginning of 1918 that sufficient British forces were not available from any theatre for dispatch to this area. The only solution seemed to be to organize a local defensive force from Georgians, Armenians, Assyrians, and Russian volunteers. To this end, in mid-January 1918 the War Office authorized a British Mission to be sent to the Caucasus. At its head was Major-General L.C. Dunsterville, an English officer who had served with distinction in campaigns in the Far East and who added to his linguistic accomplishments a keen friendship with the Russians. (Rudyard Kipling had already immortalized him as the "Stalky" of his tales of English public school life.) Dunsterville arrived in Baghdad from India on 18 January with orders to proceed to Tiflis as British representative to the Trans-Caucasian Government, it was foreseen that he would need 150 officers and 300 N.C.Os., who would be used to organize the required local defence forces.³⁵

To "Dunsterforce", as the new force was named, Canada contributed fifteen officers up to the rank of lieutenant colonel and 26 N.C.O.s.,* of "strong character, adventurous spirit, especially good stamina, capable of organizing, training, and eventually leading, irregular troops".³⁶ All came from the Canadian Corps (although three who were medically unfit were replaced in England), leaving the Western Front for England on 13 January. Officers below the rank of captain were made acting captains, while junior N.C.Os. and men became acting sergeants. In London the Canadian contingent joined others from the British, Australian, New Zealand, and South African forces, and to this cross-section of the British Empire were added a party of a dozen Russian officers and one Persian. The aim, they were told, apart from training and leading, was to protect the Baku oilfields, to operate against the Turks from the east, and "to hold the Batum-Tiflis-Baku Krasnovodsk† line to Afghanistan"—all in all, an ambitious programme.³⁷

It was not until 2 March that the contingent from the Western Front, including the Canadians, reached Basra. Here the long voyage up the River Tigris to Baghdad began, all parties assembling in camps south of that city by the end of March. The journey passed pleasantly enough for the Canadians, for many of the officers and members of the crews of the River craft were British Columbians (above, p. 492). Reunions were numerous and heartwarming.³⁸

Meanwhile Dunsterville had left Baghdad with a small staff at the end of January, hoping to be in Baku - then under the control of the Trans-Caucasian government - a fortnight later. At Hamadan, some 250 miles north-east of Baghdad, he was delayed by bad weather and the necessity of undertaking local famine relief the swift onrush of events which followed Brest-Litovsk found him

* A list of the Canadian Officers and N.C.Os. who served with Dunsterforce appears as an appendix to the first instalment of "Canadians in Dunsterforce", an article by Capt. W.W. Murray in the *Canadian Defence Quarterly* (January 1931).

† Krasnovodsk, an important port on the east side of the Caspian Sea opposite Baku, was the western terminus of the Central Asiatic Railway.

still at Hamadan; chaotic conditions prevailing in the Caucasus precluded his onward journey to Baku en route to Tiflis. He was ordered to remain in Persia, where he began to organize and train local levies, at the same time putting tribesmen unfit for military service to work on improving the roads.³⁹ The situation was far from reassuring. Local brigands mobbed and murdered without hindrance along the lonely passes. Demoralized Russians wandered at will throughout the area. Famine stalked the land. Jangali tribesmen, Austrian-trained and German-led, were astride the road to Enzeli, while a hundred miles to the west, in the mountains of Kurdistan, the operations of a Turkish army threatened the line of communication.⁴⁰

Into this maelstrom the Canadians marched, joining Dunsterville at Hamadan during the early part of July. Little time was lost in dispensing them with the rest of Dunsterforce to placate distant tribes, train local levies, supervise road construction, and police the road between Baghdad and Hamadan.⁴¹ Together with local forces, a brigade was being formed at Hamadan from Christian Assyrians who had fled thither following a massacre by Turks and Kurds in Kurdistan which took more than 40,000 lives. The protective rearguard which was hastily improvised from Dunsterforce to assist the Assyrians to reach Hamadan included seven Canadians.⁴²

On 20 July a Jangali force of some 2500 attacked a 300-man British detachment near Enzeli. The attackers were beaten off, and thereafter communications to Enzeli remained undisturbed. Five days later General Bicharakoff, the pro-Allied commander of the Red Army in the Caucasus, assisted by a few officers and four armoured cars from Dunsterforce, staged a successful coup d'état in Baku. A new government, terming itself Centro-Caspian, handed over supreme military command to Bicharakoff, who at once asked for British aid, and sent transports to Enzeli to pick up the first instalment of troops. In front of Baku approximately 6000 local troops, mostly Armenians, were holding a line twelve miles long. They were poorly organized, had few officers and were utterly lacking in discipline, while their positions were badly placed. Nevertheless, heartened by the presence of a British detachment which reached Baku by sea from Enzeli on 4 August, local forces repulsed a Turkish attack on the 5th. Other reinforcements intended for Baku had to be diverted to meet a Turkish advance from Kurdistan which threatened to cut the lines of communication to Enzeli; though it was possible in mid-August to increase the British force at Baku to two battalions. General Dunsterville himself arrived from Enzeli on 18 August.⁴³ Among those associated with the defence of Baku were five Canadian officers* of Dunsterforce.⁴⁴

In their determination to capture Baku the Turks struck again on the 26th. Four separate attacks were repulsed by a British battalion, but support by

* Of these, one acted as paymaster, field cashier and "chancellor of the Baku exchequer", another was placed in charge of all machine-gun troops in the area, a third became Inspector of Infantry, a fourth assisted in arranging for supplies and a fifth commanded an Armenian battalion. A sixth Canadian was dispatched by sea on a mission to a British force operating on the eastern shores of the Caspian.

local troops faded and a fifth assault brought heavy British casualties and the loss of some ground. In the main, further attacks in the last two days of August were resisted only by British troops, who were forced to give up more ground.⁴⁵ The Canadian captain commanding one of the Armenian battalions suddenly found himself without any men—all had bolted at the first sight of the enemy!⁴⁶ General Dunsterville now had some 900 British troops, including a field battery, and about a thousand Russians on whom he could rely. The enemy was employing 6000 regulars and 8000 irregulars, while the city itself swarmed with sympathizers and agents.⁴⁷

During the early part of September the question of evacuating Baku was under continuous examination. The War Office concurred in a recommendation by the C.-in-C. Mesopotamia that British troops be withdrawn, but some improvement in the local situation induced Dunsterville to promise the Baku government that he would remain with them as long as possible. By 12 September the British forces in Baku had been reinforced to three battalions, and 500 more Russians had arrived with ten machine-guns. Forewarned of a coming Turkish attack, Dunsterville hastened his defensive preparations. He was satisfied that the Turks could be held, if the irregulars showed the will to fight. But his reservations were amply justified. Attacking in force on 14 September the Turks broke right through an Armenian battalion at the most defensible part of the line. Dunsterville's position soon became hopeless. Only by the efforts of its own rearguards was the British force able to extricate itself. On the night of 14-15 September it withdrew in two armed ships, being forced to sail under the guns of the Red fleet. One transport was fired on, but the force got through to Enzeli without loss of life. Three days later, General Dunsterville was recalled and his mission ordered disbanded.⁴⁸

Dunsterforce had failed to reach Tiflis or to create the Caucasian force required to hold the line between Batum, Tiflis and Baku. But the Baku oil did not fall into German hands, The Turks, foreseeing the loss of their Arabian provinces and looking to the occupation of the Caucasus as compensation, took control of the oil fields in September, though only for a matter of weeks. On 30 October the armistice with Turkey provided for the reoccupation of Baku by the Allies, and on 17 November a British force from North Persia took over the city. In the meantime, wildly exaggerated rumours about the strength of Dunsterforce had been sufficient to hold a Turkish army immobile in Kurdistan, thereby protecting the British flank in Mesopotamia and discouraging hostile penetration eastward. Though Dunsterville's enterprise had not achieved all that had been hoped for it, it had attained a measure of success in the important delay which it had imposed on the enemy.⁴⁹

Canadian casualties in the Dunsterforce operations had been remarkably light—only one man had been wounded. On the disbandment of the force Canadian personnel were offered similar employment in Mesopotamia, North Persia and Siberia. About one-third accepted; the remainder chose to return to their original units.⁵⁰

The Eastern Mediterranean

While no Canadian troops fought in the Eastern Mediterranean (Newfound- land was then not part of Canada), five Canadian hospitals operated in that theatre during the Gallipoli campaign and for some time afterwards. A total of some 450 officers (including nursing sisters) and about 1000 men served during the period 1915-1917.⁵¹ The hospitals were dispatched by Major-General G.C. Jones, the Canadian Director of Medical Services, in response to an urgent request from the Director General of the [British] Army Medical Services.

The first units to go were Nos. 1 and 3 Canadian Stationary* Hospitals, which opened on the island of Lemnos during August 1915 for the treatment of patients from Gallipoli. After the evacuation of the Gallipoli peninsula four months later, both hospitals left Lemnos. No. 1 moved to Salonika in March 1916, where it remained until returning to England in August and September of the following year. No. 3 was transferred to France in April 1916. In the mean time two general hospitals had gone directly to Salonika: No. 4 (University of Toronto) General Hospital opened there in November 1915, while No. 5 opened a month later. Both returned to England late in the summer of 1917. A fifth Canadian hospital, No. 7 (Queen's University) General (which was sent out as No. 5 Stationary), opened in Cairo during August 1915, with 400 beds. The following January it became a General Hospital with 1040 beds. Three months later it left Egypt, to reopen in France in April 1916.⁵³

It was at Mudros, on the island of Lemnos, that the greatest hardships were experienced. The site assigned to the two hospitals had been previously occupied by a camp of Egyptian labourers. It had primitive sanitary provisions and only a most precarious water supply. Dust and flies abounded; food was scarce and "unsuitable for the personnel, impossible for patients".⁵⁴ By September, ninety five percent of the hospital staff had developed acute enteritis, while the wards were crowded with cases of amoebic diseases from Gallipoli. With autumn came heavy rains and floods which caused extreme discomfort until tents were replaced by huts in October. The lack of fresh vegetables brought an outbreak of scurvy in November, while the intense cold at the end of that month led to frostbite - four hundred cases were admitted in one week.⁵⁵ Nor was respite obtained after the move to Salonika, for there malaria hit sixty per cent of the unit.⁵⁶

In these circumstances the Officer Commanding No. 1 Stationary Hospital requested in September 1916 that his unit be returned to the United Kingdom. His letter reached England at a time when the Canadian Medical Services were under fire from the Minister of Militia. A special inspector General (Colonel H.A. Bruce), who had been appointed (in July 1916) by the

* Early in the war an infantry division was normally served by two general and two stationary hospitals. The latter were designated as "resting places on the lines for sick and wounded casualties on the way to the base". Later, as lines of communication shortened, stationary hospitals became small general hospitals. Bed capacities varied, general hospitals having about twice the capacity of stationary hospitals. Paradoxically the latter, being smaller, were more mobile.⁵²

Minister to make a tour of inspection of “all the Canadian Hospitals and Medical Institutions to which the Canadian Government in any way contributes”, produced a report on 20 September which violently attacked the administration under Major-General Jones. It proposed that the Medical Services be completely reorganized.⁵⁷

One of the principal recommendations of the Bruce report was the segregation of Canadian sick and wounded in Canadian hospitals,⁵⁸ and particular mention was made “of the mistake in judgement” in sending No. 4 General Hospital to the Mediterranean instead of acquiring buildings at Shorncliffe and staffing them with the personnel of the Canadian hospital. Bruce seems to have been unaware that at the time of the British request for the hospital, Shorncliffe Military Hospital was in fact largely Canadian in personnel, both patients and staff.⁵⁹

The whole question of sending medical units into areas where no Canadian troops were engaged led to considerable controversy. At the time when the units were dispatched to the Mediterranean by Major-General Jones, General Carson had been informed of the move and in turn, the Minister of Militia and Defence. Nevertheless, in December 1915, Colonel Hughes asked Carson, “Why has Jones sent so many Canadian doctors to Servia?”^{60*} And in a speech delivered in Toronto on 9 November 1916, only two days before his resignation (above, p. 211), the Minister made the unfounded allegation that “thousands of Canadians had lost months, and sometimes a year, in hospitals not under Canadian control, when they should have been back in the trenches”.⁶¹

A letter written in September 1916 by the British Director General, Army Medical Service to General Jones amply vindicated the latter’s actions:

I had not any hospitals at that moment ready, and I called upon you for assistance. You gave me ... Hospitals. As events proved, these saved the situation. They were good hospitals, containing good officers.... I shall always be indebted to you for the help you gave me at a time when I was very pressed.... The only alternative was to send home wounded in transports, which might have been sent to the bottom of the sea ... if you had refused the help I asked.... You were quite entitled to refuse to send Canadian Hospitals where there were not Canadian Troops.... I am very glad you did not.⁶²

In January 1917, the War Office acted on a recommendation by Colonel Bruce (who briefly replaced Major-General Jones as D.M.S.) that the hospitals should be withdrawn.⁶³ All three units were brought back to England during August and September 1917, their equipment being taken over by the British units which replaced them.⁶⁴ For the equipment of No. 4 Canadian General Hospital, which had been provided by the University of Toronto, the British Government reimbursed the University.⁶⁵

Altogether eight Canadian General Hospitals and ten Stationary Hospitals (as well as three small Forestry Corps Hospitals) served overseas outside of the United Kingdom during the First World War. By November 1918

* At the beginning of the war the form “Servia” was used more commonly than “Serbia”. The Canadian hospitals to which Hughes alluded were, of course, at Salonika, in Greece.

their total bed capacity had reached more than 13,500.⁶⁶ Not the least significant of this contribution to the common cause was that made by the five units whose destiny took them to the Eastern Mediterranean.

The Canadian Forestry Corps

Canadian forestry units are said to have “helped to defeat the submarine ... more surely than a fleet of ships”.⁶⁷ So enthusiastic a claim might be hard to substantiate, but the statement contains a considerable amount of truth.

British pre-war timber imported chiefly from Russia, Scandinavia and North America was valued at some forty million pounds sterling each year. The war brought an increased demand for lumber, but, because of U-boat sinkings, there was a steadily diminishing merchant fleet to carry it. The prior demands of munitions, food, forage and other essentials upon the depleted shipping made it impossible for Britain to continue to import Canadian timber on a sufficiently large scale to meet her war requirements. It was necessary therefore to begin felling English forests and converting them into lumber. A British inquiry, in January 1916, whether Canada could supply expert timbermen to produce lumber in the United Kingdom⁶⁸ was followed a month later by an urgent request from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to the Governor General for 1500 skilled lumbermen. The War Office suggested that Canada might enlist in the C.E.F. a battalion of lumbermen, to be dispatched to the United Kingdom in small companies.⁶⁹

In response to this appeal the Minister of Militia authorized the formation of the 224th Forestry Battalion, C.E.F. By the end of May close to 1600 all ranks had been sent across the Atlantic and timber operations had begun in Great Britain's historic forests. France too had made certain of her forests available for the production of timber. But the situation remained serious. The shortage of shipping was still acute, and there was not enough skilled labour to produce all the timber required. Again in May, the British Government turned to Canada, this time for an additional “2000 lumbermen with plant”⁷⁰ in November 1916 the Army Council asked for 5000 more,⁷¹ and before the end of the year a small Canadian forestry detachment was operating in France. The transfer of skilled Canadian woodsmen across the Atlantic continued throughout the War, and the Armistice found 12,127 Canadian foresters in France and 9967 in England.⁷²

Canada bore the cost of initial equipment, pay, allowances and pensions, and transportation for the foresters to England, while Great Britain paid for accommodation, rations, maintenance and additional machinery and tools purchased in the United Kingdom.⁷³ As timber operations expanded, organization kept pace. To provide flexibility in administration Canadian forestry battalions were reorganized into companies of six officers and 164 other ranks. Formation of the Canadian Forestry Corps had been authorized on 7 November 1916, and a forestry directorate was set up at G.H.Q. in France and became effective on 2 April 1917.⁷⁴ Brig.-Gen. Alexander McDougall (the original commander of the 224th Forestry Battalion) was appointed G.O.C. Canadian Forestry Corps and

Director General of Timber Operations, Great Britain and France. Before the war ended forestry operations in France were spread from the English Channel to the Jura mountains bordering on Switzerland, and from the Belgian to the Spanish frontiers.

By September 1917 Sir Douglas Haig was able to report that his armies had become “practically self-supporting” where timber was concerned; between May and October of that year forestry units provided more than three-quarters of a million tons of lumber.⁷⁵ It was during this period that a Canadian mill at La Joux set a record which, in the words of the officer commanding the Jura Group C.F.C., “cannot be obtained by any of the older firms in the Ottawa Valley, under the best civilian organization” - 160,494 feet board measure in nineteen hours’ running time.⁷⁶ Units in Britain managed to fill a sudden and particularly important demand for lumber on 20 March 1918, eleven days ahead of schedule; of a required 40,000 tons, 34,000 had been produced by Canadian foresters.⁷⁷

Another task undertaken by Canadian forestry units from the autumn of 1916 onward was the construction of airfields for the Royal Flying Corps. Nine Canadian companies, especially organized for this employment, prepared more than a hundred sites in France and England. In France the work included erecting Nissen huts and hangars and the construction of emplacements for anti-aircraft guns.⁷⁸

As was the case with other arms and services, the work of the Canadian forestry units in France was disrupted by the German offensive of March 1918. All forestry personnel were issued arms, both for their own protection and for the training of some 800 of their number as potential infantry reinforcements. Of these 800 men, 500 were reallocated to the Canadian Corps early in October.⁸⁰ Earlier in the year 314 Russo-Canadians, deemed unsuitable for combat duty in view of the Russian collapse, were transferred to the Forestry Corps.⁸¹ In all the Canadian forestry operations attached labour played an important part. Companies on either side of the Channel employed British and prisoner-of-war labour. Those in France-56 companies when the war ended-used Chinese labour as well. Units in England and Scotland were liberally augmented by Finnish and Portuguese personnel.⁸²

At the time of the Armistice 101 Canadian Forestry Companies, with a total strength (including attached personnel) of 31,447, were at work in France and Britain. Forestry operations were continued in France until mid- February 1919 and in Britain until early July. There was cause for pride that 70 per cent of the timber used by the Allied armies on the Western Front had been produced by the Canadian Forestry Corps. The statistics were impressive. Although Britain’s consumption of timber had increased with the demands of War, her timber imports had fallen from 11,600,000 tons in 1913 to little more than half that amount in 1916; for 1918 the figure was only two million tons. It was calculated that the shipping space thereby released was sufficient to carry food for 15,000,000 people.⁸³

To this extent had the Canadian Forestry Corps contributed to the failure of the submarine campaign.

Canadian Tunnelling Companies

A group of Canadian engineers who saw relatively little of their fellow Canadians during the war were the officers and men of the Canadian Tunnelling Companies. The demand that led to their being organized was slow in coming. In the early months of the War, as the Western Front became static, both sides revived various features of siege warfare, including underground mining as an offensive expedient. There was a growing appreciation of the need for some means of blowing up the enemy's trenches before launching an attack on them, or of cratering no man's land so as to provide advanced positions from which machine-guns and bombers could add surprise in such operations. The Germans early took the lead; and after they had exploded two mines under the British trenches late in 1914 British commanders requested special units for mining and counter-mining.⁸⁴

In the beginning mining sections were attached to engineer field companies, drawing the men from former coal miners and other underground workers. The first Canadian tunnellers in France were organized in brigade mining sections, each consisting of one officer and thirty men. It was intended that these sections would reduce the load being borne by two Royal Engineer Tunnelling Companies which operated on the Canadian front during the summer of 1915. In the winter of 1915-16 these sections were formed into a single unit, the 3rd Tunnelling Company, Canadian Engineers, which in mid-January 1916 assumed responsibility for all mining in the Canadian Corps area south of Ypres. Later in the year it moved to the Lens district, coming under the 4th British Division to work on the tunnels at Hill 70. Meanwhile in response to a request from the British government, two other tunnelling companies had been raised at home. The 1st Tunnelling Company, recruited from miners in Central and Eastern Canada, reached France in February 1916; the 2nd (from Alberta and British Columbia) arrived in March.⁸⁵

By the autumn of 1916, a total of 33 British and Dominion tunnelling companies were operating on the Western Front. A fourth Canadian tunnelling company had been disbanded in England and its personnel divided among the existing three. From the beginning of 1916 all mining activities were placed under the coordination of a Controller of Mines at G.H.Q. This meant that tunnelling companies, both from the United Kingdom and overseas alike, were separated from their corps and employed as army troops.⁸⁶ For this reason it is not at all easy to distinguish between the achievements of Canadian tunnellers and those of their British and Australian counterparts. Furthermore, the proportion of infantry and other labour, both military and civilian, attached to the tunnelling companies varied widely at different times, and this ruled out the possibility of assessing the Canadian contribution on the basis of the relative strengths employed. So far did individuals become removed from their own units that it is related that on more than one occasion a Canadian tunneller, emerging after a relief had taken place on the surface, was suspected by the relieving troops of being a deserter, if not indeed an enemy agent!

The tunnellers' life was hard, lonely and full of uncertainty. They faced all the risks of civil mining, many of the normal dangers of warfare, and certain hazards peculiar to military mining - such as breaking into an enemy gallery or being intruded upon by German tunnellers (with a resultant exchange of grenades, pistol shots and knife thrusts), or being blown up by an enemy charge exploded beneath their own workings. Frequently they were in danger of being trapped in their tunnels. Such an incident occurred at Mount Sorrel on June 1916 (above, p. 149), when parties of the 2nd Tunnelling Company were cut off by a German attack. Many were killed or captured; indeed the Company's total reported losses on that and the following day were 96 all ranks, not counting 20 attached infantry.⁸⁷ Reference has already been made (above, p. 154) to a happier instance of close and successful cooperation between the 1st Tunnelling Company and Canadian infantry that took place in July that same year at The Bluff, when the 7th Battalion was saved from a probably heavy toll of casualties, and the tables were turned on the attacking Germans.

Towards the end of 1916 there was a distinct falling-off in mining activity on both sides. This was due largely to the recall of 125,000 German miners to industry - 50,000 more followed in May and June 1917 - and the concern of the British General Staff about the numbers of men employed underground. From then on the British policy was that, except for certain major offensive schemes still in progress, the work of the sappers should be confined to "absolutely necessary defensive measures".⁸⁸ The change in German defensive tactics (above, p. 239) which placed the new main lines of resistance usually outside the range of mining activity further limited the role of our tunnelling companies. The emphasis accordingly shifted to what might be termed "administrative" rather than "operational" tunnelling - the construction of dug-outs and subways leading to the front trenches. There was also a tendency, from the summer of 1917 onward, to use tunnellers more and more above ground as field engineers.

The great year for mining was 1916, when the British on the Western Front blew 750 mines and their opponents 696. The corresponding figures for 1917 were 117 and 106. Less than two months after Messines, "the greatest mining enterprise of the war",* British tunnelling companies were reduced in number and strength. By the time the Germans launched their first offensive in 1918, some 27 tunnelling companies were being employed on the construction of dug outs on the British front.⁸⁹

The two special brigades organized by Lieut.-General Currie in the spring of 1918 to bolster the Canadian defences of Vimy Ridge against the expected German attack included the 1st Canadian Tunnelling Company, along with British engineer units (above, p. 382). All were given a refresher course in musketry and drill and were assigned to the defence of specified localities.⁹⁰ As we have seen, the enemy attack passed the Canadians by, and the tunnelling units carried on with their tasks of preparing demolitions and constructing new defence

* As we have seen (above, p. 302), the 1st and 3rd Canadian Tunnelling Companies fired some of the Messines mines.

lines. At times there was a call to man trenches alongside the infantry, in June, when the Germans again threatened, the larger part of the 3rd Tunnelling Company, engaged in working on dug-outs in the Hazebrouck area, was ordered into the trenches to meet an expected attack, which once again failed to materialize.⁹¹

When General Currie reorganized the Canadian Engineers in the summer of 1918 (above, p. 384), the 1st and 2nd Tunnelling Companies were disbanded, and their members - approximately 1100 all told - distributed evenly among the new engineer battalions.⁹² But the 3rd Tunnelling Company, which at the time was in the Ypres area supporting the 16th French Corps of the Second Army, could not then be released to the Canadian Corps. For the rest of the war and later, this Canadian unit remained virtually an orphan, performing a variety of tasks in Flanders and Northern France. October 1918 found it near the Belgian border building railway bridges with a battalion of Canadian Railway Troops. It was not until 6 February 1919 that the long-lost 3rd Tunnelling Company finally returned to Canadian command, to take its place in the repatriation queue.

Canadians in the Air Services

In two World Wars Canadian airmen made an outstanding contribution to victory. In the 1914-1919 conflict those achievements were all the more significant because of their lowly beginnings. Although by August 1914 five and a half years had elapsed from the February day when J.A.D. McCurdy lifted the "Silver Dart" in flight over the frozen surface of the Bras d'Or Lake at Baddeck Bay, the outbreak of war found Canada without any organized military flying service. After that history-making flight the Militia Council had expressed its intention of doing "everything in its power to facilitate the work of experiments in aerial navigation". As noted in Chapter I (above, p. 13), in August 1909 members of the Militia Council witnessed a number of test flights at Petawawa. But in 1910 the Treasury Board rejected an application by the Department of Militia and Defence for a grant of \$10,000 (a later request for \$5,000 was also turned down) to assist McCurdy and his partner, F.W. Baldwin, "to pursue their studies" in aviation and also train selected army officers to fly. A recommendation to include funds for a similar purpose in the 1911-1912 estimates did not get past the Militia Council. Early in 1912, the Chief of the General Staff, expressing the opinion that a military organization which did "not keep pace with the latest scientific developments must be hopelessly left behind by organizations which are alive to that necessity", sought authority for a start on a modest programme suggested by the War Office in answer to a Canadian request for advice. But the Minister would not approve of any such steps being taken, "neither towards training nor purchase of aeroplanes".⁹³ Government policy remained the same until war came: "No funds available".

On 25 August 1914 Colonel Sam Hughes cabled Lord Kitchener an offer to send aviators with the First Contingent. Kitchener asked for six, but only two

could be provided. They were organized into a short-lived provisional "Canadian Aviation Corps" at Valcartier, and with one aeroplane, purchased in the United States, they accompanied the First Contingent to England. One aviator almost immediately returned to civil life in Canada. The other, Lieutenant W.F. Sharpe, underwent instructional training in France, but was killed on 4 February 1915 while making his first solo flight in England. Their American aircraft never left the ground.⁹⁴ In 1915 the Army Council suggested that Dominion air units be formed, but the Canadian authorities did not then consider a separate programme to be in the best interests of their country or the Empire. It was not until 1918 that the tremendous developments in flight made it apparent that an air force would be essential to Canada's post-war military organization and would also spur the development of commercial aviation. Accordingly steps were taken to create a small air force for overseas and a naval air service for home defence - but not in time for either to become operational.⁹⁵

While Canada had no active air service of her own during the War, she was represented in practically every theatre of operations, even in German East Africa, by pilots, observers and mechanics serving in the Royal Air Force and its naval and military predecessors (above, p. 132,*n.*).⁹⁶ Officers were seconded from the Overseas Military Forces of Canada; other ranks were discharged from the Canadian forces and re-enrolled as British airmen (either as cadets or non-flying personnel); and in many cases cadets were enlisted by the British authorities in Canada, their status being the same as if they had enrolled in the United Kingdom.⁹⁷ Through these channels 22,802 Canadians are known to have entered the British Air Services. Nevertheless, as the number of Canadians in the R.A.F. by November 1918 was only 500 less than this, and fatal officer casualties alone totalled almost a thousand, it is clear that many more must have found their way in by other avenues - direct entry of civilians in the United Kingdom, for example, or transfer from other Imperial forces.⁹⁸

Canadian airmen distinguished themselves most as fighter pilots. Ten of the 27 leading "aces"* in the R.A.F. were Canadians. Each was credited with 30 or more victories, the Canadians having between them accounted for 238 enemy aircraft. Indeed, the third and fifth top aces of the war were Canadians- Major W. A. Bishop with 72 victories, and Major Raymond Collishaw with 60.¹⁰⁰ The highest score of all was Captain Manfred von Richthofen's 80. In second and fourth place stood Lieutenant René Fonck (France) with 75 victories¹⁰¹ and Lieutenant Ernst Udet (Germany) with 62.¹⁰² A British airman, Major Edward Mannock, is widely credited with 73 victories, though the figure given in the announcement of his posthumous Victoria Cross is 50.

Bishop, originally a cavalry officer in the 2nd Canadian Division, began his career as a fighter pilot in March 1917.¹⁰³ He scored perhaps half his victories flying a French Nieuport Scout, which had a top speed of less than a hundred miles an hour and was armed with a single Lewis gun on the top wing. Some British machines of the period were about ten miles an hour faster and had a

* The French term "as" signified five or more aerial victories.⁹⁹

synchronized Vickers fixed more conveniently on the cowl; contemporary German fighters carried two cowl machine-guns.¹⁰⁴ On the morning of 2 June 1917 Captain Bishop attacked a German aerodrome near Cambrai single-handed. When two machines took off in succession to meet the attack, Bishop sent one crashing to the ground, the other into a tree. Two more planes then rose simultaneously. The Canadian shot one down, used up the rest of his ammunition on the other, and then returned to his home field. For this intrepid action Bishop received the Victoria Cross—the first even awarded a Canadian airman.¹⁰⁵

The enemy's practice of improvising massed fighter formations, introduced by von Richthofen at the end of April, continued through the spring and early summer of 1917, when certain groupings became permanent. In the meantime other units besides Richthofen's predominantly red *Jagdstaffel* 11 had adopted garish colour schemes.¹⁰⁶ There were certain obvious advantages to both sides. "I was glad", wrote Bishop in describing an encounter with Richthofen's unit, "the Germans were scarlet and we were silver ... no need to hesitate about firing when the right colour flitted by your nose." Some R.F.C. pilots wanted to paint their own machines, but these "budding notions were frowned upon by the higher officers of the Corps".¹⁰⁷ In that regard the Royal Naval Air Service appears to have been more liberally minded. As a flight lieutenant in one of several naval squadrons then attached to the R.F.C., Raymond Collishaw led an all-Canadian flight of five Sopwith triplanes painted black.¹⁰⁸ From the summer of 1917 onward, the Flying Corps and later the air Force showed a preference for khaki aircraft; personal markings, "gaudy colours on wheels, cowlings, etc.", were forbidden.¹⁰⁹ Nevertheless former naval squadrons of the R.A.F. retained something of their brilliant plumage. A month after the amalgamation we find one such unit still sporting red noses.¹¹⁰

An interim answer to the massing of German fighters, as we have seen, had been to put up more British flights. But while the enemy learned to control still larger formations with less loss of striking power, the British found the necessary number of flights increasingly difficult to handle. Accordingly, early in 1918, British fighter squadrons were gradually converted from primarily administrative into tactical units - still only three flights of five or six aircraft, but designed to fight as a squadron and to work with other squadrons.¹¹¹ In short, the final answer to the "Circus" was something not unlike it. This tendency to imitate each other's tactical organization was paralleled in another field. Although Allied fighter models of 1916 pattern were superior to the early 1917 Albatros in manoeuvrability and climbing power, it was not until the middle of that summer, when the Scout Experimental 5 (one Vickers and one Lewis gun) and the Sopwith Camel (two Vickers) became available in quantity, that British airmen could match the Germans in speed and firepower. The enemy then turned partly from the 125-m.p.h. Albatros D V to the slower but more manoeuvrable Pfalz D 111 biplane and Fokker triplane.¹¹² Early models of the 1918 Fokker biplane were barely faster than the German fighters of the previous spring. What became the standard DVII model (above, p. 421) realized perhaps the happiest combination of speed (125 m.p.h.) and agility, supplemented by easy handling, an exceptional

rate of climb, and the ability to “hang on its propeller” and pepper the underside of an opponent.¹¹³ Its British equivalent in all round fighting performance, the Sopwith Snipe, appeared only in the last few weeks of hostilities, and then not in significant numbers.¹¹⁴

It was in a Snipe that Major W. G. Barker, formerly a machine-gunner in the 1st Canadian Mounted Rifles, fought an heroic single-handed combat against an overwhelming number of enemy scouts in the vicinity of Valenciennes.* On the morning of 27 October 1918 he shot down an enemy two-seater (his 47th victory) at the unusual height of 21,000 feet. He then came under fire from a Fokker DVII “standing on its tail” and was wounded. A spinning fall brought Major Barker into the midst of fifteen Fokkers. He attacked three of these, accounting for at least one. Wounded a second time, he lost consciousness. As he spun down to another enemy formation, Barker rallied and sent one DVII down in flames. He was again wounded, and at 12,000 feet he found himself attacked by two more Fokkers, one of which he shot down at less than ten feet. Eventually he crashed behind his own lines, escaping with a broken nose. Already a three-time winner of the Military Cross, and twice awarded the Distinguished Service Order and the Italian Cross of Valour, Major Barker now received the Empire’s highest decoration.¹¹⁶

Fittingly enough, Canada’s remaining air V.C., 2nd Lieut. A.A. McLeod, represented those who flew the less publicized multi-purpose two-seater aircraft. While carrying out a bombing and strafing mission east of Albert on 27 March 1918, McLeod was attacked by eight Fokker triplanes. The Canadian pilot’s skilful manoeuvring enabled his observer to drive off three triplanes, but a fourth Fokker set the British aircraft on fire. Climbing out on the lower wing, Lieutenant McLeod maintained control of the machine, sideslipping to keep the flames on the other side while his observer carried on the fight. Both men were wounded a number of times before their plane crashed in no man’s land. McLeod dragged his companion away from the burning wreckage, and despite ground fire and his own condition - he was now wounded a sixth time - got him to a place of relative safety. The observer recovered with the loss of a leg, but Lieutenant McLeod died later in hospital of influenza.¹¹⁷

Another high-scoring Canadian ace with the R.A.F. was Major Collishaw. He served as a Squadron Commander with No. 3 Naval Squadron, which was redesignated No. 203 Squadron R.A.F.† when the R.N.A.S. was merged with the Flying Corps at the beginning of April 1918. After hostilities had ceased in the West, Collishaw led an oversize squadron of scouts and

* The commander of the Canadian Corps Heavy Artillery (Lt—Col. A.G.L. McNaughton), who watched this “stimulating incident” from his advanced headquarters between Bellevue and Valenciennes, reported its immense moral effect upon the many thousands of British and Canadian troops who witnessed the spectacle from their positions in the trenches and the support areas. “The hoarse shout, or rather the prolonged roar, which greeted the triumph of the British fighter [it was only learned afterwards that he was a Canadian] , and which echoed across the battle front was never matched . . . on any other occasion.”¹¹⁵

† Always largely Canadian in personnel, at the end of the war all its pilots were Canadians.¹¹⁸

bombers in South Russia. Of his 62 flying officers 53 were Canadians. He subsequently commanded an R.A.F. detachment in Persia. During the summer of 1918 Collishaw and Bishop, both of whom finished the war in the rank of lieutenant colonel, were transferred to London to take part in the organization of the future Canadian Air Force.

Of some 290,000 all ranks in the Royal Air Force at the end of the War, approximately 24 per cent of the officers and six per cent of the other ranks - a total of 6623 officers and 15,679 cadets and men - came from Canada.¹¹⁹ The Book of Remembrance in the Peace Tower at Ottawa records the names of a further 1563 who fell in action, were killed accidentally or died from other causes. Besides the three Victoria Crosses to which we have referred, Canadian airmen were awarded more than 800 decorations.

Newfoundland at War

When the First World war broke out, Newfoundland, the Empire's oldest colony, was quick to respond to the call to arms. Recruiting for foreign service and home defence began on the island within a week. It was natural that many should seek service at sea. Early in September 100 Naval Reservists joined the complement of H.M.C.S. *Niobe*; in all, Newfoundland supplied 1964 Naval Reservists during the War. On land the colony's main military contribution was in infantry and forestry troops.* When the war ended some six thousand officers and men had proceeded overseas or were in training on the island. Other Newfoundlanders served in various arms of the British and Canadian forces.¹²⁰

A Newfoundland detachment of two infantry companies, numbering 537 all ranks, sailed to the United Kingdom in October 1914 with the Canadian Contingent. By the end of the year Newfoundland's offer was increased to that of a full battalion, and between February and April 1915 three drafts of close to 250 men each brought the unit up to strength. Organization was completed in May under the name, the Newfoundland Contingent. Leaving behind a rear party, which was to become a draft-finding unit, the battalion embarked for Gallipoli, via Egypt, in August. On 19 September it landed at Suvla, and was assigned to the 88th Brigade, 29th British Division.¹²¹ As the Newfoundlanders were not involved in any major operations in the Gallipoli theatre, battle losses were not excessive - the unit diary records 87 casualties. Among the wounded was the commanding officer, Lt.-Col. R. de H. Burton, a British regular.¹²² The 29th Division returned to Egypt in January 1916, and two months later sailed for France. There the Newfoundland battalion was to become the 1st Newfoundland Regiment.

On 1 July, the first day of the Somme offensive (above, p. 162), the 29th Division attacked the German line on a two-brigade front near Beaumont Hamel, a village about a mile north-west of the bend in the Ancre. Although the 86th

* In 1917 the Newfoundland Patriotic Association raised a forestry battalion, 500 strong. Composed of trained woodsmen who had either been rejected as medically unfit or were over the age limit for military service, the corps was employed in Scotland until the end of the war, cutting down a forest on the Duke of Atholl's estate near Perth.

Brigade was soon cut to pieces by machine-gunfire, strong parties of the 87th, on its left, were reported to be advancing on the enemy's support line. Misled by such reports, the divisional commander committed his reserve brigade, the 88th. The 1st Newfoundland Regiment was to have attacked in conjunction with the 1st Battalion Essex Regiment on the right, but the "complete congestion of the trenches with the bodies of dead and dying"¹²³, prevented the latter unit from advancing on time. Ordered to carry the first line of enemy trenches the Newfoundlanders assaulted independently at 9:05 a.m. on a 1000-yard front. Because of the small number of gaps in the wire, the men had to bunch; and every gap was covered by machine-guns which the enemy had manned as soon as the artillery barrage slackened. Men dropped, dead or wounded, at every yard. Nevertheless the survivors pressed on towards objectives 650 to 900 yards distant, and a few were reported to have succeeded in hurling their bombs into the enemy's trench, if not actually gaining an entry.¹²⁴ Shortly after 10:00 a.m., by which time the Essex on the right had attacked with no better success, the divisional commander called off further attacks. The Newfoundland Regiment's casualties that day numbered 684, of which 310 were fatal.¹²⁵

Towards mid-October the Regiment was engaged in the Battle of the Transloy Ridges (above, p. 180). On the 12th the unit, now only 385 strong, stormed and held German entrenchments just north of Gueudecourt.¹²⁶ Its next major operation after the Somme came with the Third Army in the First Battle of the Scarpe, in April 1917. On the night of the 13th-14th the 29th Division relieved another British formation astride the Arras-Cambrai road, and the 88th Brigade was ordered to launch an attack east of Monchy-le-Preux, which had been wrested from the Germans on 11 April. Assaulting along with the 1st Battalion Essex Regiment on the morning of the 14th, the Newfoundland Regiment gained its objective, a hill some 1500 yards east of Monchy. But there had been no flanking advance, and the two battalions soon found themselves heavily counter-attacked from three sides by units of the 3rd Bavarian Division. They were overwhelmed by sheer weight of numbers, and only a handful from each battalion managed to get back to Monchy. There the Newfoundland battalion headquarters, led personally by the C.O., Lt.-Col. J. Forbes-Robertson, heroically withstood every German attempt to capture the village. Once again, the Newfoundland Regiment had been virtually cut to pieces. Its casualties that day numbered 17 officers and 468 other ranks.¹²⁷

The Newfoundlanders moved north to Belgium towards the end of June 1917 to take part in Haig's "northern offensive". In the Battle of Langemarck (16 August) the 29th Division attacked as the left flank of the Fifth Army, next to the French First Army. From the Steenbeek the 88th Brigade, operating north of the Ypres-Staden railway, advanced about a thousand yards and made good all its objectives.¹²⁸ The Newfoundland battalion killed a "large number of Germans" and captured four machine-guns, at a cost of 103 casualties. Less successful and almost twice as costly a battle for the Newfoundlanders was Poelcappelle, on 9 October. The Regiment again took all its objectives astride the Staden railway, but counter-attacks nullified much of the gains.¹²⁹

Returning to France in mid-October, the Newfoundlanders rejoined General Byng's Third Army for the offensive against Cambrai. It was the 88th Brigade which on 20 November seized the bridgehead at Masnières through which the Canadian Cavalry Brigade attempted to exploit (above, p. 336). Stopped by the strong defences of the Masnières-Beaurevoir Line the Newfoundland battalion dug in, suffering 248 casualties in the first two days.¹³⁰ For eleven days the 29th Division held its vulnerable salient about Masnières, withstanding frequent German counter-attacks, before it was ordered to withdraw on 4 December. Recognition of the "magnificent and resolute determination" shown by the Newfoundlanders in these operations came in the following February, when His Majesty the King granted the title of "Royal" to the Newfoundland Regiment. The granting of such an honour during hostilities was unique in the First World War.¹³¹ At the time of the first German offensive in 1918 the 1st Royal Newfoundland Regiment was billeted in Flanders, it did not come under attack in March but was involved in some heavy defensive fighting in the Battles of the Lys in mid-April.¹³²

At the beginning of May the Newfoundlanders severed their long connection with the 29th Division, and until mid-September served as G.H.Q. troops, providing guards and work parties. They did not rejoin the 88th Brigade but were assigned to the 28th Brigade of the 9th (Scottish) Division, which on 20 September took over trenches in front of Ypres. The Regiment now numbered about 650 all ranks, half of them reinforcements who had yet to see action. Towards the end of the month the British Second Army and Belgian forces on its left mounted the first of a series of attacks towards the Lys.¹³³ In six days the 9th Division broke through the German Flanders Position and advanced almost ten miles.¹³⁴

After a delay in the offensive while supply services were reorganized, the Second Army surged forward again on 14 October. On that day 94 machine guns and eight field guns fell into Newfoundland hands.¹³⁵ Four of the field guns were accounted for by one platoon. The capture owed much to the heroism of seventeen-year-old Private Thomas Ricketts, who with his section commander outflanked the hostile battery, having braved heavy machine-gun fire in order to bring up more ammunition for the Lewis gun which he was manning. He was awarded the Victoria Cross—the youngest winner of the honour from this side of the Atlantic.¹³⁶ An advance of nearly seven miles in two days brought the 9th Division to the Lys north of Courtrai, and on 17 October the 28th Brigade crossed the river.¹³⁷ The Regiment was in reserve during the crossing but had some hard fighting as the advance continued. On 27 October, as the Second Army closed up to the Scheldt on a narrowing front, the 9th Division was relieved, and the Newfoundlanders were withdrawn to billets for much-deserved rest, "No parade", reads the entry for 11 November in the unit diary, "owing [to] Germans signing Armistice."

The Newfoundlanders' long service overseas had taken a heavy toll. Of some six thousand who had joined the regiment or served with other British

forces, 3720 were killed, wounded or captured. In addition 179 Newfoundland sailors had been lost at sea. It was a contribution to victory of which Newfoundland might be justly proud.

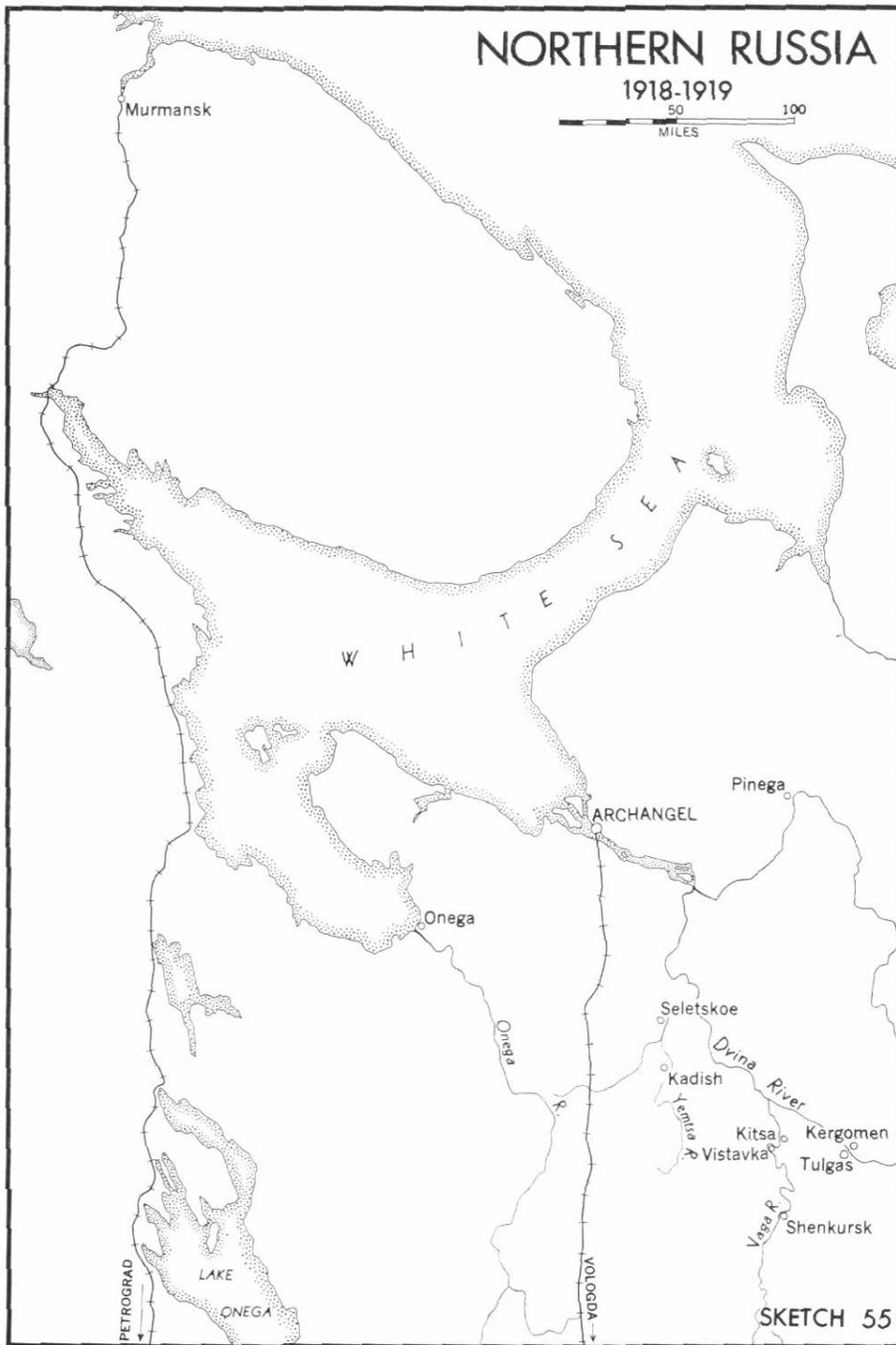
Canadians in Northern Russia

The remaining two sections of this chapter deal with Canadian participation in military undertakings which continued long after the Armistice,

While their comrades in the United Kingdom were enjoying their final leave before embarking for home, Canadian contingents were still serving in widely separated theatres in Europe and Asia. The employment of these forces, with the sanction of the Canadian Government, had come as a result of the situation which developed in Russia after the Bolshevik Revolution. As we shall see, Allied intervention in Northern Russia first took the form of what has been described as “a hasty improvisation ... to prevent the Germans from winning the war in France”;¹³⁸ later, after Brest-Litovsk, operations were part of an attempt to hold off Bolshevik attacks until White Russian forces could be built up sufficiently to stand alone.

When the Russian Revolution broke out early in 1917, and for some time afterwards, the Western Allies had entertained hopes that Russia could be kept in the war against the Central Powers. By the end of the year, however, any such prospects were rapidly disappearing, and these vanished on 3 March 1918 when the Bolsheviks, who had overthrown Kerensky's Socialist Government in the previous November, signed the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany and Austria. With their commitments in the east thus materially reduced, the Germans could now transfer large bodies of troops to the Western Front. Furthermore, a German Army of 55,000 men under General von den Goltz was in Finland ostensibly to counteract Bolshevik troops which had invaded that country in January 1918. This German force seemed to be in a position to seize the ice-free port of Murmansk, out of which during 1917 a small British squadron had been operating against enemy submarines. Conversion of this port into a base for U-boats would create a serious threat to British shipping.¹³⁹

Primarily in order to forestall this possibility Great Britain, at the invitation of the Soviet Government, landed a force of 150 marines at Murmansk in April 1918, and 370 more in May. The question of Allied intervention in Northern Russia had been placed before the Supreme War Council at Versailles. The internal political and military situation in Russia was still chaotic, and the Western Powers could not make up their minds to which side they should direct their negotiations. A large Czech corps was then half way across Siberia working towards Vladivostok. Composed of Czechs from Russia and Czech and Slovak deserters from the Austrian armies, it was the only large military group in Russia which was still a disciplined unit. It had grown from some 30,000 strong to more than twice that figure. Might not an Allied landing in Northern Russia encourage this corps to turn back and reopen hostilities on the Eastern Front? Furthermore,



large dumps of military equipment supplied by the Allies for Russia's use when she was still in the war were reported to be at the White Sea port of Archangel, in imminent danger of falling into German hands. Accordingly, on 3 June the Supreme war Council sanctioned the dispatch under British command of expeditions to Murmansk and Archangel, 370 miles to the south-east.¹⁴⁰

The Murmansk force, bearing the code-name "Syren", commanded by Major-General C.M. Maynard, consisted of 600 British infantry, a machine-gun company, and a half-company of Royal Engineers. The intended role at Archangel was to muster anti-Bolshevik forces into trained formations, and to this task was assigned a British Mission ("Elope") not to exceed 500 all ranks, under Major General F.C. Poole. Both forces reached Murmansk on 23 June escorted by an Allied naval squadron; and since Archangel was then in Bolshevik hands, the "Elope" Mission landed with "Syren". On 31 July a naval force carrying British and French troops attacked Archangel, and with the aid of an anti-Bolshevik uprising, captured the town. This made it possible to transfer the "Elope" party to Archangel during August. Within two months a large area of Northern Russia had been freed of Bolsheviks, and land communications were restored with General Maynard's force along the Murmansk-Petrograd (later Leningrad) Railway. The military objectives, both at Murmansk and Archangel, had been achieved with few casualties.¹⁴¹ By this time, however, events following the Brest-Litovsk treaty had radically changed the political picture. At first the harsh terms of the pact had shocked the Bolsheviks into seeking Allied aid. But no real support was forth-coming, and soon the Reds were frowning upon any intervention which might precipitate further German incursions, in May 1918 the inauguration of formal German- Soviet relations removed the German threat to the new regime in Russia. The Bolsheviks now decided to resist further Allied landings, and after the capture of Archangel any semi-official relations that had existed between Great Britain and the Soviet Government came to an abrupt end.¹⁴²

In mid-May, when the composition of the "Elope" Mission was first considered, the War Office had suggested a Canadian contribution of five officers and eleven N.C.Os., none of whom needed to be fit for general service.¹⁴³ On 27 May the Overseas Minister, Sir Edward Kemp, gave Canadian concurrence. The required personnel were obtained from units stationed in England, and sailed with the force in June.¹⁴⁴

When in July 1918 the question of reinforcing the "Syren" force arose, Canada was asked if she could provide an infantry battalion, since troops with experience of a rigorous climate were required. Unlike the suggestion for a Canadian contribution to "Elope", this request was for men who were fit for general service; but because of the urgent need which then existed for Canadian reinforcements in the western theatre, the invitation was declined.¹⁴⁵

On 30 July the War Office made a further request for eighteen Canadian officers and 70 N.C.Os., to be included in a special mobile force which was being formed in the Murmansk area from Allied contingents and local levies. There was a requirement for infantry, machine-gun and artillery personnel, first to serve

as instructors, and later for regimental or administrative duties in the units to be raised. This time the Canadian Government agreed. On 17 September 92 officers and N.C.Os,—all volunteers—commanded by Lt.-Col. J. E. Leckie, sailed from Leith, Scotland, for Murmansk.¹⁴⁶

One more request came for Canadian troops to serve in Northern Russia, On 3 August Canada was asked to provide two field artillery batteries for the Allied contingents in Archangel. Again the Canadian Government concurred, and the 16th Brigade, C.F.A., consisting of the 67th and 68th Batteries under the command of Lt.-Col. C.H.L. Sharman, was formed of volunteers from the Canadian Reserve Artillery and left Dundee for Archangel on 20 September. The strength of the Brigade was eighteen officers and 469 other ranks, almost all of whom had seen service on the Western Front.¹⁴⁷

Both at Murmansk and Archangel the Allied forces were by now of very mixed composition. Contingents were drawn from Britain, the United States, Italy, France and Canada. In both areas these troops were joined by anti-Bolshevik Russians, and at Murmansk, Finns and Karelians worked with the Allies, as did a group of Serbians who had fought their way north from Odessa. The size of the locally recruited Russian forces fluctuated considerably as there were many defections, but the total Allied strength at Murmansk and Archangel never exceeded 35,000 men. In all Canada contributed to this theatre just under 600 officers and other ranks.¹⁴⁹

Lack of space precludes a full account of operations in both the Murmansk and Archangel theatres. Because of the small number of Canadians at Murmansk, our account of the North Russian operations will deal principally with the latter theatre. The Canadian field brigade reached Archangel on 1 October and disembarked two days later. Major-General W.E. Ironside, who was to succeed General Poole, arrived in the same convoy. Although the local population was apathetic and evinced no desire to fight, Ironside found that Allied troops had pursued the Bolsheviks after their expulsion from Archangel far enough “to make elbow-room for the enlistment of as many Russians as possible during the winter”. In the face of stiffening Bolshevik resistance, Poole’s force was consolidating for defence.¹⁵⁰ Five Allied columns had been pushed into the interior of the country. One had reached a point a hundred miles along the Vologda Railway, which ran due south from Archangel. Another was

* The size of the various contributions by nationalities was estimated in December 1918 to be as follows:¹⁴⁸

	<u>Murmansk</u>	<u>Archangel</u>
British and Canadian	6832	6293
American	—	5302
French	731	1686
Italian	1251	—
Serbian	1220	—
Russian and other locally raised troops	<u>4441</u>	<u>2715</u>
TOTALS	<u>14,475</u>	<u>15,996</u>

upstream of the confluence of the Dvina and Vaga Rivers, south-east of Archangel, with forces on both these waterways. Progress of this column, which had advanced about 260 miles from Archangel, had been aided by a monitor of the Royal Navy. Despite the growing distance between these two main columns (which consisted of British, French, American and Russian troops), both were under the single command of a British officer, Brig.-Gen. R. G. Finlayson. Two smaller columns protected the flanks of the column on the railway, one on the Yemtsa River to the east and the other at Onega on the White Sea to the west. A fifth small column was at Pinega, sixty miles east of Archangel.¹⁵¹

There was no continuous front; in fact the Vologda railway column was operating on a front of little more than a thousand yards. Communications between the isolated columns were extremely difficult, for the forest-covered ground was swampy in early and late summer and under deep snow in the winter. Except for the column on the railway, all supplies had to be brought forward by water and cart. The troops lived uncomfortably in blockhouses protected by barbed wire, and the effect which the approaching Arctic winter would have on men and weapons was unpredictable. One thing was certain - with ice shutting off Archangel from the rest of Europe all winter, for several months the force would have to subsist on what it had been able to accumulate while the rivers were still open.¹⁵²

On assuming command on 14 October General Ironside placed the two main columns under separate commanders, and attempted to raise additional troops locally. In an effort to recruit more Russians, he visited the jails of Archangel during October and began to expand into a battalion a company of the Slavo-British Allied Legion under Captain R.C. Dyer, one of the Canadian instructors. This unit was later known as the "Dyer Battalion" in honour of its commander, who subsequently died as a result of exposure on the Dvina front.¹⁵³

The 16th Brigade C.F.A. was temporarily divided. Three officers and 26 men joined the Vologda railway column, to man an armoured train. The balance of the brigade, consisting of the 67th Battery and a portion of the 68th, ascended the Dvina by barge as far as the junction with the Vaga River. The 68th Battery was not complete, having left the guns of one section at Dundee; and now a party was detached to Seletski in support of American infantry operating on the Yemtsa River, between the River Dvina and the railway. This group did not rejoin the brigade until December, and one section was left in the Seletski area until April. The 67th Battery was detailed to the Dvina River, and the truncated 68th Battery went to Shenkursk, the most southerly defended town on the Vaga. Lt.-Col. Sharman was appointed C.R.A. of the Dvina Force, which comprised groups on both rivers.¹⁵⁴

Forces on the Dvina and the Vaga were badly outnumbered. Mid-October found the 67th Battery deployed with one section on the left bank of the Dvina in the village of Tulgas, and one on the opposite bank at Kergomen. The total strength of the group of which they formed a part was between 900 and 1000. The Canadian gunners were manning six 18-pounder field guns and one

naval 5.1-inch gun mounted on an old iron barge. Opposing these were a score or more of armed craft, including several gunboats mounting 6-inch and 4.1-inch naval guns, three batteries of field guns, and approximately 3500 Bolshevik troops. Worse than the disparity in numbers was the fact that the Canadians were hopelessly outranged. Their naval gun kept the enemy at a respectful distance until 20 October, when its barge was sunk by a Bolshevik naval gun. Thereafter the enemy craft were able to approach and shell the Canadians, while remaining well out of range of the 18-pounders. Even the Bolshevik field guns outdistanced the Canadian guns. The appearance of river ice on 24 October forced the enemy to withdraw his boats and gave some respite until 10 November, when mild weather again permitted gunboats to come into action. It was a prelude to a Bolshevik attack on Tulgas the next day.¹⁵⁵

Although 11 November 1918 brought a cessation of hostilities on the Western Front, for the Canadian artillerymen on the Dvina River the date marked the beginning of a period of bitter fighting. At daybreak the Bolsheviks opened their bombardment, following it at eight o'clock with a frontal infantry attack. The guns of the Canadian battery's right section immediately went into action in support of the infantry. An hour later, some 600 Bolsheviks pushed through the woods in the rear of the Canadian guns, and were only discovered by the section's drivers when 200 yards distant. Having temporarily checked the advance by rifle fire, the drivers fell back to the gun-pits. Their action gave warning to the gun crews, who ran one gun out of its pit, reversed it, and opened up on the enemy. A platoon of the Royal Scots was sent to assist the gunners, and throughout the remaining hours of daylight the little force held the enemy at bay. Late in the afternoon, when dusk permitted a second gun to be reversed, the enemy withdrew into the woods, leaving behind 60 dead and wounded. Two Canadians and ten Royal Scots had been killed.

The bravery and determination shown by the Canadians that day in saving their guns earned them a Military Cross, three Distinguished Conduct Medals and three Military Medals. Attempts to capture Tulgas continued until 15 November, when the enemy, admitting failure, retired to his previous positions.¹⁵⁶ Protecting their gun positions with defensive wire, the battery settled in for the winter. The arrival in January of a section of 4.5-inch howitzers and of two 60-pounders on 3 April at last put the Bolsheviks within range.¹⁵⁷

Meanwhile, the Seletski detachment of the 68th Battery had seen constant action, though there were no major operations until 30 December. On that date two companies of the 339th U.S. Infantry Regiment, supported by a company of the French Foreign Legion, drove the Bolsheviks out of Kadish, a town at the river-crossing on the Yemtsa River about twenty miles above Seletski. When the Bolsheviks counter-attacked in force next day, two sections of the Canadian detachment were instrumental in driving off the enemy.¹⁵⁸ Early in January the Canadian gunners who had been manning the armoured train with the Vologda railway column moved over to the River Vaga to rejoin the 68th Battery at Shenkursk,¹⁵⁹

The Bolsheviks now decided to launch a general offensive to drive the Allies out of Archangel, and on 19 January a strong force attacked American and Russian troops at Shenkursk. The enemy was in greatly superior strength, and on the 25th, when the town was practically surrounded, the garrison retreated to a new defensive position at Kitsa, thirty miles to the north. The long march down the Vaga was a stiff ordeal for the Canadian battery, but they brought their guns through safely.¹⁶⁰

The enemy did not follow up the capture of Shenkursk. There is evidence that his success had raised his morale to a high level, while that of the Allies was correspondingly lowered.¹⁶¹ The force at Kitsa had not much to cheer about. The cold was intense; the Arctic nights were depressingly long, with twenty hours of darkness out of each twenty-four. Above all the troops were dispirited by the seeming purposelessness of their mission in Northern Russia. With the signing of the Armistice on 11 November the original aims of the expedition had disappeared - the Allied operations had become only a phase of the Russian Civil War. There were clamorous outcries in the British press for the soldiers' return. Yet by the middle of January General Ironside had received no clear orders.¹⁶² The Interventionist Powers had no agreed policy on the Russian Civil War, but on 4 March the British war Cabinet decided to press the Allied Representatives to agree to the early evacuation of Northern Russia.¹⁶³ A general review of the situation which the War Office sent Ironside at the end of April 1919 still left him without definite instructions, but made it clear that his main objective was to be "a peaceful evacuation of all Allied forces before the coming winter".¹⁶⁴

Meanwhile, the uncertainty and futility of their situation led to disaffection among the Allied troops. On 26 February, a British battalion sent from Murmansk to reinforce Ironside's force refused to proceed to the front. The trouble was quickly suppressed, and the battalion marched the same day;¹⁶⁵ but at the beginning of March a company of French Colonials made a similar refusal.* A further incident occurred at the end of the month when an American company disobeyed orders to return to its forward position.¹⁶⁷

During February neither the 67th nor the 68th Battery was involved in any serious engagement. After the loss of Shenkursk, Kitsa had become the Allied advance post on the River Vaga. On 1 March, the 68th fought well in the defence of Vistavka, an outpost of Kitsa, and on the 9th the same battery helped repulse a stronger Bolshevik attack. The Seletski detachment rejoined this battery during April. In March, the 67th Battery, still in position at Tulgas and Kergomen on the Dvina, handed over the Tulgas side of the River to a White Russian battery which had been in training with the force. On 25 April, however, the Russian infantry defending Tulgas mutinied, killing seven of their officers, and surrendered their positions to the Bolsheviks. It was a source of great satisfaction to the 67th Battery that the Russian battery which it had "mothered" did not join

* In a letter to the C.G.S. in April 1919, Colonel Sharman reported that one section of the Canadian Artillery Brigade had temporarily refused to obey orders. No details were given, and the War Diaries of Brigade Headquarters and the 67th and 68th Batteries for the period are missing.¹⁶⁶

the mutineers, but came over to the Canadians, bringing its guns with it. Nevertheless the loss of Tulgas, only 2500 yards away and on higher ground, made the Canadian position at Kergomen most precarious. The enemy used every means, including his river flotilla, to capture the place, but the clearing of the ice enabled two British gunboats mounting 6-inch guns to arrive from Archangel. Joint efforts by land and water forced the Bolsheviks back, and Tulgas was recaptured on 18 May.¹⁶⁸

On that same day Sir Robert Borden addressed the British Secretary of State for War, Mr. Winston Churchill, insisting that the Canadians should be withdrawn from Northern Russia without delay. Two previous requests in March had elicited the information that this would not be possible before the early summer because of ice. In his letter of 18 May, the Canadian Prime Minister pointed out that the port of Archangel was now open to navigation and emphasized that “the demobilization of the Canadian Corps and the withdrawal of Canadian troops from Siberia [below, p. 522] render any further continuance of our forces at Archangel absolutely impracticable”.¹⁶⁹ The Canadian request brought prompt action. At the end of May and early in June a relieving British force of two brigades, each with a battery of howitzers, arrived from England. The 16th Field Brigade held a farewell parade at Archangel on 11 June, when a number of Russian military decorations were awarded to officers and men; it embarked the same day for England. By September 1919 all the remaining Canadians at Murmansk and Archangel had been evacuated.¹⁷⁰

The Canadians left Russia with a tribute from General Ironside that “over and over again the C.F.A. had saved the force from destruction”. In the course of the campaign the Canadian casualties had been comparatively light—eight killed and sixteen wounded.¹⁷¹ The remaining intervention forces did not linger long after the Canadians had gone; by 12 October all British troops were out of Northern Russia.¹⁷²

Intervention in Siberia

The area about the White Sea was not the only sphere of Allied intervention in Russia. We have already noted (above, p. 494) the part played by British and other forces in the Trans-Caucasus region; and in December 1918 French troops landed at Odessa and moved into the Crimea and the Ukraine.¹⁷³ Before the war against the Central Powers ended, Allied contingents had entered Siberia. More than 4000 Canadians represented the Dominion in this venture, which kept them on active service until the summer of 1919.

To account for the presence of Canadians in Siberia it is necessary to trace briefly the course of events after the Bolshevik Revolution. The signing of the treaty of Brest-Litovsk, which followed the suspension of hostilities between Russia and Germany, had the effect of throwing Russia open to German domination. Grain from the Ukraine, oil and minerals from the Caucasus and the Caspian were now within the grasp of the Germans. With these resources, and by

penetrating into Siberia, they hoped to circumvent the Allied blockade of their country; moreover the capture of the port of Vladivostok would give them very considerable military stores which had been supplied for Russian use against the Central Powers, and which, it was reported, were still stock-piled there. These were disturbing prospects for the Allies, who had, above all, to reckon with the wholesale transfer of German forces from the Eastern to the Western Front at a time when the weight of the American entry into the war had not been appreciably felt.¹⁷⁴

On the other hand the Allies had some grounds for optimism on the Russian scene. The truce and peace treaty had produced widespread unfavourable reaction in Russia; the Cossacks on the Don had raised counter-revolutionary standards, and the mass of the Siberian people, who were generally content with their ordered existence under the old regime, had little leaning towards the Bolshevik system. As we have seen, Murmansk and Archangel were open to Allied shipping, and in the Caucasus movements were afoot to bar entry by the Central Powers to the Caspian. Finally, the pro-Allied Czech Corps, widely dispersed, lay along the line of the middle Volga and at Vladivostok, though the country between was still in Bolshevik hands,

The plain task of the Allies was to reconstitute the Eastern Front and to withhold Russian supplies from Germany. The Military Representatives of the Supreme war Council accordingly recommended as early as 23 December 1917 that all national troops in Russia who were determined to continue the war should be fully supported.

There were two approaches through which the Supreme war Council might supply help to anti-Bolshevik forces in Russia - the northern ports of Russia in Europe, and across the eastern frontiers of Siberia. The latter seemed to offer the better opportunity, especially as Japan, an Allied power and the only one with troops available for intervention in force, was close at hand, ready and willing to oppose incursions by the Central Powers into Eastern Russia. There was the risk, however, that a Japanese invasion might unite the mass of the Russian people with the Bolsheviks, causing them to throw in their lot openly with the enemy.¹⁷⁵ For this reason, it was deemed essential that intervention should be by more than one of the Allied Powers.

When in December 1917 Japan and the United States were asked for their views, Japan favoured intervention (but without American participation). President Wilson opposed any action, either jointly with Japan, or by the Japanese alone. Months passed with the issue undecided, until the Bolsheviks, at German instigation, sought to disarm the Czechs in Russia. The Czechs, who had been guaranteed safe passage through Russia, resisted this attempted treachery with violent counter-attacks. By 6 June 1918 they were in possession of the Trans-Siberian Railway from a hundred miles west of the Ural Mountains eastward to Krasnoyarsk in central Siberia-a distance of more than 1500 miles. On the 28th one of their detachments seized Vladivostok, and by 13 July the advance of their main force towards the Pacific had reached Irkutsk, beside Lake

Baikal.¹⁷⁶ No link had yet been established between Irkutsk and Vladivostok.

On 2 July 1918 a further appeal to President Wilson by the Supreme war Council was successful. The President, apprehensive that the victorious Czechs were in imminent danger of being annihilated by hordes of German and Austrian former prisoners of war whom the Bolsheviks had set free, proposed the dispatch of an international force “to restore and preserve the communications of the Czechs”. Three days later the United States announced its decision for a limited intervention in Siberia. It was finally agreed that Britain and the United States should each send 7000 troops, and that Japan should provide a force* capable of effectively aiding the Czech Corps then at Irkutsk.¹⁷⁸

A week after the American announcement the War Office asked the Canadian Prime Minister if Canadian troops could be made available for service in Siberia. It had learned, unofficially, that two battalions of discharged soldiers could be raised in Canada -a procedure quite in keeping with the Allied policy of not diverting “any appreciable body of troops from the Western Front”.¹⁷⁹ Sir Robert Borden, who was in London at the time, examined the suggestion and, for reasons not wholly military, found himself favourably disposed to the dispatch of a small Canadian force to Siberia. “Intimate relations with that rapidly developing country”, he wrote, “will be a great advantage to Canada in the future. Other nations will make very vigorous and determined efforts to obtain a foothold and our interposition with a small military force would tend to bring Canada into favourable notice by the strongest elements in that great community.”¹⁸⁰

Accordingly, on 12 July the C.G.S. in Ottawa was directed to organize a brigade headquarters, two battalions of infantry, a battery of field artillery, a machine-gun company, and certain other troops. In Siberia a British battalion was to join this force, and come under Canadian command.¹⁸¹ The contingent, including the British unit, would be known as the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force, and would represent the British Empire among the Allied military expeditions operating in Siberia.¹⁸² The Cabinet approved the idea in principle, and on 12 August a Privy Council instruction¹⁸³ was signed authorizing the dispatch of the troops.¹ The month’s delay between the British request and final Canadian acceptance had made the War Office impatient; but its attempt to expedite the matter through the Governor General brought an angry cable from Borden, “No reply shall be sent to the British Government’s message except through me.”¹⁸⁵

* In the end the Japanese landed more than 70,000 men, justifying this by claiming that the Americans had exceeded their assigned total through the addition of some 2,000 administrative troops.¹⁷⁷

† The approved contingent, nearly 5000 strong, consisted of Headquarters Canadian Expeditionary Force (Siberia), H.Q. 16th Infantry Brigade, a base headquarters, and the following major units: “B” Squadron R.N.W.M.P. (Cavalry), 85th Battery C.F.A., 16th Field Company C.E., 6th Signal Company, 259th and 260th Infantry Battalions, 20th Machine Gun Company, No. 1 Company Divisional Train, No. 16 Field Ambulance, No. 11 Stationary Hospital, No. 9 Ordnance Detachment.¹⁸⁴

It had been hoped that sufficient men could be raised by voluntary enlistment, but when this was not found possible some personnel drafted under the Military Service Act had to be employed.¹⁸⁶ During the late summer and early autumn the Canadian Brigade was concentrated on the West Coast in readiness for dispatch to Vladivostok,¹⁸⁷ but it was not until 11 October that an advance party of 680 all ranks sailed from Vancouver with the force commander, Major-General J. H. Elmsley, a former commander of the 8th Canadian Infantry Brigade in France.¹⁸⁸ The Canadian troops were to be under the over-all control of the Allied Commander-in-Chief, the Japanese General Otani. General Elmsley, however, had the right to appeal to the War Office against any order which in his opinion might imperil the safety of his force. He was authorized to correspond directly with Canada without reference to the War Office or any outside body; no appeal could be decided against him without the approval of the Canadian Government.¹⁸⁹

While the Canadians were on their way to Siberia, Allied intervention there was actively proceeding. A British battalion from Hong Kong had advanced inland with French and Italian units to the vicinity of Omsk, where they were acting as a stabilizing influence on the anti-Bolshevik forces in Western Siberia. The Americans, arriving from the Philippines, were still near the coast, engaged in guarding military stores and forwarding supplies to the Czechs. The Japanese had advanced to Lake Baikal, but refused to have anything to do with operations farther west.¹⁹⁰ What was to be the Canadian role? Borden held the sound opinion that the disposition and employment of troops should be left to Elmsley's judgement,¹⁹¹ but on 11 November, before further Canadian troops could be sent, the General Armistice was signed. In its wake a wave of opposition to further participation in Russian affairs swept across Canada.

"All our colleagues", Sir Thomas White, the Acting Prime Minister, wrote to Borden in the United Kingdom, "are of opinion that public opinion here will not sustain us in continuing to send troops many of whom are draftees under Military Service Act and Order in Council now that the war is ended." He pressed for a return to Canada of all the Canadian forces in Siberia as soon as the situation permitted.¹⁹² Indeed, with the collapse of Germany, every military argument for intervention had disappeared. Yet in the face of militant Bolshevism, anti-Bolshevik armies and administrations which had grown up under the shelter of Allied forces required support and protection.

Borden's reply was made on 20 November. He had ascertained that the War Office did not intend to commit British or Canadian forces in an offensive campaign. Nevertheless, it was believed that their presence in Siberia would have an important stabilizing influence and help to prevent the country from lapsing into anarchy; for this reason the British were adding another battalion to the one already sent. Furthermore they would assist in training the White armies of the new anti-Bolshevik Government which had been set up at Omsk under Admiral A.V. Kolchak. Experience seemed to have shown that Russian troops would

“melt away” without the moral support of an Allied contingent, no matter how small.¹⁹³ Borden therefore favoured the retention of Canadian troops in Siberia until the spring. He further recommended that “the additional forces originally arranged for should proceed to Siberia for the purposes indicated, as well as for economic considerations which are manifest”.¹⁹⁴

But the Canadian Cabinet again demurred. Many members were opposed to any continuation of the venture; and in any case it was not practicable to send only volunteers, as this would involve breaking up units ready to sail.¹⁹⁵ Yet Borden had given the British Government a definite undertaking, and he declared that Canada’s “position and prestige would be singularly impaired by deliberate withdrawal from definite arrangement under these conditions”. Nevertheless, he left the decision to the Privy Council,¹⁹⁶ which considered it on the 27th. On that day Borden advised the Acting Prime Minister that he had discussed the whole question at the War Office. The British attitude was reasonable. If the force must be withdrawn, it was hoped that General Elmsley, his staff, and fifty or a hundred instructors, would be permitted to remain. The question was now up to Council to decide, which it did in favour of proceeding with the expedition as originally planned, save that personnel would be permitted to return to Canada within one year of the signing of the Armistice. The matter, White advised Borden, was now closed.¹⁹⁷

It was not long before the Cabinet had serious second thoughts about this decision. It was concerned that a possible clash of interests between the Americans and Japanese might lead to trouble. In such a case Canadian sentiment would almost certainly align itself with the United States, while Britain, bound by Anglo-Japanese Alliance, would be in the opposite camp and might request Canadian neutrality. The War Office was therefore notified that the Dominion Government would not permit its troops “to engage in military operations, nor, without its express consent, to move up country”, pending clarification of British policy. Unless their mission were made clear, it might be necessary to withdraw the Canadians altogether.¹⁹⁸ Borden was justifiably exasperated at this vacillation. He explained to White that some few days earlier the British had practically understood that Canadians would be withdrawn, and then had come Council’s decision to proceed. He went on to say that Council was armed with details of political and economic conditions. They were aware of the military situation. They, then, should judge, and with that he virtually washed his hands of the matter.¹⁹⁹ Meanwhile the War Office had lost patience and directed a forthright reply to the C.G.S., General Gwatkin. Because of the Canadian Government’s latest restrictions the War Office felt obliged to recommend to the war Cabinet that the two British battalions should be withdrawn to Vladivostok and that the Canadians who had already sailed for the Far East should be returned to Canada. Those en route might be recalled by wireless, and no more should be sent.²⁰⁰ Nevertheless, no immediate steps were taken by Ottawa to bring back the 1100 Canadians who had reached Siberia, nor were the ships carrying the 2700 men who formed the bulk of the force recalled.²⁰¹

The restrictions imposed by Ottawa placed Major-General Elmsley in a most embarrassing position. He protested vigorously against any Canadian withdrawal.²⁰² Hamstrung as he was, there was little for him to do with his troops, whose oft-expressed sentiment was "Home or Fight!" The head of the British Military Mission in Siberia, Major-General Alfred Knox, was anxious to have the Canadians at Omsk, where they would help form "a tangible Allied force at the front".²⁰³ This move Elmsley could in nowise make; and there were heated exchanges between the two generals. "If they [the Canadians]"; wrote Knox on 27 December, "only think of playing the American-Japanese sitting game in the Far East, I honestly don't see much use in their coming at all."²⁰⁴

And so the Canadian Siberian Expeditionary Force was held at Vladivostok, where officers and men were quartered in Russian barracks some twelve miles from the harbour. A small staff of eight officers and 47 other ranks was sent to Omsk to administer the two British battalions there.²⁰⁵ The troops found the climate at Vladivostok pleasant enough -much like that of Eastern Canada. But the city itself, with its normal population of 40,000 almost quadrupled by refugees of many nationalities, was a centre of corruption and vice. There was little to do except routine training; though voluntary auxiliary services working with the Canadian Red Cross and the Y.M.C.A. provided some amenities. There were occasional football games with the crews of British naval vessels in port, and baseball games with the Americans.²⁰⁶ The sole operational task given the Canadians came in April 1919, when General Otani called for a small Allied column to suppress an insurgent Bolshevik force in a village some thirty miles north of Vladivostok. General Elmsley sent a company of the 259th Battalion as the Canadian contribution, but by the time the force was ready to attack, the Bolsheviks had retired. When the Canadians got back to Vladivostok without having fired a shot, their disappointment was somewhat alleviated by the issue to them, on Otani's instruction, of 96 bottles of wine, 18 bottles of whiskey and three casks of saké.²⁰⁷

By the end of 1918 it had become obvious to Sir Robert Borden that Canada was unlikely to reap any economic advantages from intervention in Siberia. Accordingly, as a way out of the impasse in which the Allies found themselves, he suggested at a meeting of the imperial war Cabinet on 30 December that an international conference be held to arbitrate the Russian Civil War.²⁰⁸ This proposal came to nothing, for the White Russians, refusing "to confer on an equal basis with traitors, murderers and robbers".²⁰⁹ indignantly rejected the invitation to attend. At the end of January the Canadian Government decided to demobilize the troops awaiting shipment in British Columbia, and early in February Borden informed Lloyd George of his intention to recall the Canadians from Siberia about April. He reiterated his determination to do this when the Russian situation was discussed at the Peace Conference between 13 and 17 February, despite the urgings of Lord Balfour and Mr. Churchill, who foresaw disastrous consequences resulting from any general Allied withdrawal.²¹⁰

But Sir Robert remained firm, and the British Government had no alternative but to acquiesce in the Canadian decision.²¹¹

The first Canadian party to leave Vladivostok embarked on 21 April 1919, and the last sailed on 5 June.²¹² As the organized body of troops withdrew, Churchill made one final appeal for Canadian volunteers "to co-operate with the volunteer detachments which compose our various missions to the loyal Russian armies".²¹³ A few volunteers from Canadian units in Siberia did remain with the British force, but by the autumn of 1919 the British contingent of approximately 2000 men, having lost Canadian administrative support, was withdrawn.²¹⁴

In spite of the Allied intervention, the actual fighting in Russia was left to the Russians. During the spring of 1919 White Russian armies under Admiral Kolchak and General Denikin achieved a series of successes; in May Lenin was forced to tell his Revolutionary Military Council, "if we don't conquer the Urals before winter I think the destruction of the Revolution is inevitable."²¹⁵ By the end of June less than one-sixth of Russia remained in Bolshevik hands. But that was the zenith of White Russian achievements, in July they lost the Urals to the Bolsheviks, and in October an advance on Moscow was halted 250 miles from the capital. During the following winter the Bolsheviks drove Kolchak's forces from one stronghold after another. In March 1920 British warships covered the evacuation of troops to the Crimea, the only territory still in White Russian hands. As it became clear that the anti-Bolshevik cause was doomed, all the Allied contingents withdrew from Siberia except the Japanese, who remained in Vladivostok and the adjacent coastal area for two more years. The Czechs were safely evacuated and crossed Canada en route to Europe in June 1920.²¹⁶

As an aggressive enterprise, the intervention in Siberia must be regarded as a complete failure. No armed help had been given to the anti-Bolshevik forces - in fact when the White Russians were making their best showing, the Canadian contingent was being withdrawn. Allied policy was singularly lacking in effectiveness and no concerted measures materialized. Yet it is possible to claim certain far-reaching indirect results. Intervention had delayed for many months the ultimate Bolshevik victory. Preoccupation with the internal struggle prevented the diversion of men and munitions to foment political, social and economic disorders in countries outside of Russia. Thus there was time for Finland, the Baltic States and Poland to establish their independence. The frontier of Bolshevism was held from advancing westward until after the Second World War.