

# Wet Canteens and Worrying Mothers: Alcohol, Soldiers and Temperance Groups in the Great War

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*The First World War proved to be a powerful stimulus for the temperance movement in Canada. Temperance advocates argued moral and economic reasons for prohibition: those who failed to abstain from drink were hindering victory; prohibition was patriotic. When canteens serving beer were opened in Canadian training camps in England to limit soldiers' drinking in local villages, temperance groups were outraged. As prohibitionists fought to ban drink, a divisive edge was driven into the gulf between the soldiers in the trenches and the civilians on the home front. The campaign to ban wet canteens demonstrates that each constituency, military and civilian, contained distinct cultures with different perspectives on pleasure and danger.*

*La Première Guerre mondiale a donné un puissant coup de pouce au mouvement pour la tempérance au Canada. Les défenseurs de la tempérance avançaient des raisons morales et économiques pour la prohibition : ceux qui étaient incapables de se retenir de boire nuisaient à la victoire; la prohibition était patriotique. Les groupes de tempérance s'insurgèrent lorsqu'on ouvrit des cantines servant de la bière dans les camps de formation canadiens en Angleterre afin de limiter la consommation d'alcool des soldats dans les villages locaux. Les prohibitionnistes se battant pour faire bannir la consommation d'alcool, cela creusa le gouffre entre les soldats dans les tranchées et les civils sur le front intérieur. La campagne pour bannir les cantines servant de l'alcool démontre que chaque groupe, militaire et civil, avait sa propre culture et des perspectives différentes sur le plaisir et le danger.*

THE GREAT WAR is one of the defining events of the twentieth century, with its butcher's bill of more than nine million battlefield dead, countless others killed through starvation and disease, the dismantling of empires and nations, and a scar on civilization that ran as deep as the trenches and shell holes that pock-marked the Western Front. For Canada, the war marked the transformation from colony to nation, the near renting of that same emerging

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nation in the conscription crisis that alienated French Canadians, labour, and farmers, and the eventual emergence of a country with new income tax legislation, suffrage for women, and a citizenry that had willingly embraced the prohibition of alcohol.

Despite the profusion of Canadian studies of the First World War in the last century, the relationship between the home front and sojourning civilian-soldiers remains largely unexplored in the historiography of the war.<sup>1</sup> The focus of the scholarship has been on either the soldiers in the trenches or the civilians on the home front. The interaction of the two, however, remains largely untilled ground. Although it is often accepted that soldiers' perceptions of patriotism changed as they suffered through the Armageddon of trench warfare, there nonetheless remained a strong connection to those at home. Any reading of the surviving soldiers' discourse — be it in the form of letters, diaries, or memoirs — gives ample evidence to the importance of communication with the home front. While the fighting men were separated by the vast Atlantic Ocean from their families and loved ones, they were continually buoyed and inspired through that tether with their prewar lives. Reinforcing that link were the letters, photographs, and gifts that represented a happier past and, someday, a reunited future. As one soldier penned in his postwar memoirs: “letters are like ghosts of a world abandoned, tiptoeing through the dream of a sleeper.”<sup>2</sup> Another soldier sadly conveyed the importance of those “ghosts”: “The incoming mail is always the event of the day, the men crowding around for their message from home. It is also pathetic to see those who are not lucky, turning away sometimes with tears in their eyes.”<sup>3</sup> Although there was genuine anger at profiteers and journalists who spoke and wrote with sickening optimism only of those who were never within sound of the guns, soldiers relied more heavily on civilian support than is generally advocated.

Notwithstanding the emotional and psychological support soldiers drew from the home front, not all wartime patriotic conduct was appreciated. Most soldiers viewed the instigation of temperance legislation as an unwanted interference. These citizen-soldiers had fought for freedom and were now to return home to a country that denied them one of the few pleasures that they had found overseas. As Lieutenant H. E. Wallace penned in a soldier-run newspaper in February 1919, “many prophesy that ‘the boys’ will fix *that*

1 For inroads into the issue, see Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House of Canada, 1993); Jeff Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada's Great War* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1996); Tim Cook, “‘More as a medicine than a beverage’: ‘Demon Rum’ and the Canadian Trench Soldier in the First World War”, *Canadian Military History*, vol. 9, no. 1 (Winter 2000), pp. 7–22.

2 Coningsby Dawson, *Living Bayonets: A Record of the Last Push* (New York: John Lane Company, 1919), p. 147.

3 Charles Lyon Foster, ed., *Letters From the Front: Being a Record of the Part Played by Officers of the Bank in the Great War, 1914–1919, Volume 1* (n.p. [1920]), p. 49.

when they get home”.<sup>4</sup> Wallace was right. When veterans began to return to Canada in 1919, many saw it as one of their first goals to repeal prohibition, which, according to them, had been misguidedly enacted on their behalf.

More than 400 veterans who marched in protest of a Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) parade in Toronto on April 4, 1919, exhibited a representation of that unrest. The WCTU was one of the most influential temperance organizations before and during the war, although abstinence was only one of its goals for social change. Vocal and manifesting less than endearing sentiments to the white, middle-class women who paraded under the WCTU banners, the veterans disrupted the march and eventually had to be cleared by the police.<sup>5</sup> Many of the women must have been pained by the counter-march: for what had they done during the war except been patriotic, loyal, and supportive? Such ill-feeling from the veterans was an exhibition of the dissociation and unrest experienced by many upon their return to Canada, but it was also a residue of the bitterness from a dispute that had erupted between soldiers and temperance groups over the availability of wet canteens in the training camps of England. A different set of ideals relating to alcohol and conflicting perceptions of patriotism had caused a chasm to develop between soldiers and temperance advocates.

The contested issue of prohibition certainly produced strongly divergent views among soldiers and civilians. Not all civilians thought it necessary to revoke alcohol in the army, but those who did comprised an articulate and powerful lobby group. The prohibition argument played on notions of patriotism and sacrifice. As a result, temperance groups were able to promote provincial legislation to ban alcohol in most provinces by 1917; the army, however, remained “wet”. When temperance groups attempted to extend their “dry” views to the army, most soldiers responded with outrage over the perceived intrusion into their sphere of influence. In the end, the battle over the wet canteens reveals more than simply two conflicting views over prohibition during the Great War: it also provides insight into the gulf between soldiers and citizens and the interaction between those serving overseas and those left behind on the home front.

### **Canada at War**

Accepting Britain’s declaration of war in August 1914 as their own, Canadians greeted the conflict’s arrival with enthusiasm and celebration. Canadians did not stumble into war. They marched proudly, led by the Minister of Militia and Defence, Sam Hughes. Headstrong and supremely confident in his own judgements, Hughes took it upon himself to raise this new Canadian army, throwing the prearranged mobilization plans to the wayside. Thou-

4 National Archives of Canada [hereafter NA], Records of the Department of Militia and Defence [hereafter RG 9], v. 5077, file: The Beaver, To the Editor, “Booze”, *The Beaver* February 15, 1919, p. 10. Emphasis in the original.

5 “WCTU Appeal Now Extends”, *The Globe*, April 5, 1919.

sands volunteered for service, and Hughes was successful in quickly raising a first contingent of 30,000 men. At the same time, as a temperance advocate, the minister banned alcohol from the hastily built Valcartier camp and subsequent training grounds in Canada, declaring that “the women of Canada would know that their sons would be safe from alcohol’s temptation”.<sup>6</sup> Referring to professional soldiers as “bar-room loafers”, he said his volunteers would not be misled in a similar way. Churches and temperance organizations were thrilled; the soldiers were less than pleased.<sup>7</sup>

The First Contingent sent overseas, and the 400,000 more recruits who were to follow in the next four years, were citizen-soldiers. Civilians who put down the pen or plough to pick up the Ross rifle immediately dwarfed Canada’s almost nonexistent professional army. The poor reputation of soldiers in general, who during the nineteenth century were viewed as the “scum of the earth”, changed as these new crusading soldiers — brothers, fathers, and sons — volunteered for war service.

Yet the Great War was a universal effort. For those who could not fight, it was accepted that everything would be done to assist the boys overseas. Novelist and Presbyterian minister G. W. Gordon declared, “Canada is committed to this world conflict to her last man and her last dollar.”<sup>8</sup> The key to this resolution was sacrifice. Whatever the burden, Canadians claimed they were willing to shoulder it for King and Country. As Honourable Secretary H. B. Ames of the Canadian Patriotic Fund expressed, “every loyal citizen should ask himself, ‘Shall I fight or pay?’ If he cannot do the former, he should try to do the latter...”<sup>9</sup> Sacrifice was accepted so readily because all thought the war would be over quickly. When the names of 6,000 casualties filtered back to Canada after the Second Battle of Ypres in April 1915, it was realized that the conflict would indeed be long and costly.<sup>10</sup> Having initiated the crusade, now tempered with blood, those on the home front could do little except to continue their support of the war effort and their men in the field. Part of that sacrifice was alcohol.

### Temperance

The drink debate was not new in Canada. Temperance had gone through

6 Duff Crerar, *Padres in No Man’s Land* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), p. 26. In addition, see Barbara Wilson, *Ontario and the First World War, 1914–1918* (Toronto: The Chaplain Society for the Government of Ontario, University of Toronto Press, 1977), p. xxviii; NA, RG 24, v. 1271, HQ 593–1–52, John Roberts to Sam Hughes, January 8, 1915, and Hughes to Roberts, January 15, 1915.

7 R. G. Haycock, *Sam Hughes: The Public Career of a Controversial Canadian, 1885–1916* (Ottawa: Canadian War Museum, 1986), p. 146.

8 John Herd Thompson, *The Harvests of War: The Prairie West, 1914–1918* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 32.

9 Robert Bray, *The English Canadian Patriotic Response to the Great War* (PhD dissertation, York University, 1977), p. 50.

10 See Daniel Dancocks, *Welcome to Flanders Fields* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1988); for the use of gas, see Tim Cook, *No Place To Run: The Canadian Corps and Gas Warfare in the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1999), chap. 1.

cycles of popularity and denunciation in the nineteenth century, and the federal government, through the *Canada Temperance Act* of 1878, along with several provinces, had invoked local option legislation to allow cities or countries to declare themselves “dry”.<sup>11</sup> By the turn of the century, teetotalers were collectively a vocal group in society that included temperance lodges like the Sons of Temperance, the Independent Order of Good Templars, the influential Women’s and Men’s Christian Associations, the Salvation Army, Young People’s Unions of most Protestant denominations but the Anglicans, and an assortment of women’s groups working toward abolishing alcohol.

The most influential of the women’s temperance groups was the WCTU. Although nondenominational, the WCTU was infused with an evangelical zeal and consciously built alliances with most Protestant churches.<sup>12</sup> From the 1870s onward, the WCTU and other women’s organizations began publicly to expand their social consciousness and activism. In the process, women promoted reform of the family, urban regeneration, public health, suffrage, reform of child and female labour, and the cessation of male violence, all taken up in turn and in combination.<sup>13</sup> However, the banning of “demon drink” was at the root of the WCTU’s public programme, since it and many other groups believed alcohol to be the fundamental source of the social malaise.

One result of this evangelicalism was a desire to save individuals and ultimately society by reinterpreting the code of “responsibility”. It was an exhilarating and empowering experience to redeem oneself, one’s family, and others, with one reformer reporting that the temperance project was “a daily dissipation from which it seemed impossible to tear myself. In the intervals at home I felt, as I can fancy the drinker does at the breaking down of a long spree.”<sup>14</sup> Although the various temperance and women’s groups had different targets and approaches, they all wished eventually to stop the flow of alcohol that, as their literature noted, “turns men into demons, and makes women an easy prey for lust”.<sup>15</sup> Drinking was portrayed in the discourse of

11 Brian Douglas Tennyson, “Sir William Hearst and the Ontario Temperance Act”, *Ontario History*, vol. 55 (1963), no. 4, p. 233; E. C. Drury, *Temperance: The Vital Issue* (n.p., [1923?]), pp. 2–3.

12 Sharon Anne Cook, “Through Sunshine and Shadow”: *The Woman’s Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicalism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874–1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1995), p. 42.

13 Linda Kealey, “Introduction”, in Linda Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s–1920s* (Toronto: Women’s Educational Press, 1979), p. 2; Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1991), pp. 35, 47.

14 Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, “‘John Barley Corn Must Die’: An Introduction to the Social History of Alcohol”, in Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, ed., *Drink In Canada* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), p. 5.

15 Wendy Mitchinson, “The WCTU: ‘For God, Home and Native Land’, a Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism”, in Kealey, ed., *A Not Unreasonable Claim*, p. 151. For contemporary beliefs of abstainers regarding the nasty things that happen to drinkers, see Deets Pickett *et al.*, *Encyclopedia of Temperance Prohibition and Public Morals* (New York: The Methodist Book Concern, 1917).

the period as a degradation arising from lack of self-control, the dodging of responsibility to oneself, family, society, and God, and an act that resulted in heartbreaking self-loathing, failure, poverty, and violence.<sup>16</sup>

The great conflict proved to be a powerful stimulus for the temperance movement, allowing its advocates effectively to argue moral and economic reasons for prohibition. Harnessing the twin motives of patriotism and guilt that characterized the millions who were safe in Canada while their men fought overseas, groups like the YMCA, church organizations, and the WCTU demanded that Canadians make a parallel sacrifice of alcohol for the war effort. As many people saw it, prohibition would be a chance to do something good and strike at the Hun from the home front. The distemper of the times was reflected in one editorial that declared, “anyone who will vote in favor of liquor might as well enlist under the Kaiser as far as patriotism goes”.<sup>17</sup> Of course, anti-drink advocates were delighted to mix the message of temperance with the war effort. They encouraged citizens to do all they could for their country, with “lolly-gagging” in pubs viewed as destructive to the war effort. Those who failed to abstain from drink were hindering victory. Prohibition was patriotic.

With such pressure, provincial politicians were forced to respond. Teetotaler William Hearst, Premier of Ontario, had tried and failed in the past to enact prohibition legislation; when on March 8, 1916, 10,000 men, women, and children marched on Queen’s Park, presenting him with a petition of 825,572 signatures, he realized that the war had provided the right political climate.<sup>18</sup> When this anti-drink fervour was combined with accounts of sacrifices by overseas soldiers, shame brought increasing numbers to the temperance cause, and by 1917 all provinces save Quebec had enacted prohibition legislation. In contrast, for the most part, soldiers overseas were not interested in getting rid of drink. There was a long and close relationship between alcohol and armies.

### **Alcohol and Armies**

Dating back to 1655 when the British captured Port Royal, Jamaica, the Royal Navy had been issuing rum to its sailors. With a long shelf-life, rum was distributed liberally, being one of the few rewards for the much-neglected sailors of the lower deck. And popular it was. One captain reported that most of the time “one third of the ship’s company was more or less intoxicated, or at least muddified [*sic*] and half stupefied”.<sup>19</sup> Even after 1740, when the navy substituted straight rum with grog (a rum drink diluted with water or lime), alcohol remained a prize and incentive for sailors, and eventually also for soldiers.

16 Cook, “*Through Sunshine and Shadow*”, pp. 113, 139.

17 Thompson, *The Harvests of War*, p. 102.

18 Tennyson, “Sir William Hearst and the Ontario Temperance Act”, p. 239.

19 Max Reid, “Rum and the Navy”, in James H. Morrison and James Moreira, eds., *Tempered By Rum: Rum in the History of the Maritime Provinces* (Nova Scotia: Pottersfield Press, 1988), p. 33.

Drawing from the same poor segments of British society as did the navy, the British home army during the Victorian period found itself saddled with drink issues. At the turn of the eighteenth century, enlisted men were issued a daily ration of up to five beers.<sup>20</sup> Despite temperance pressure within and outside the army, alcohol imbibing remained one of the most common social exchanges for the rank and file. With low educational levels, terrible housing, few recreational venues, and abominable food, it is no wonder that many soldiers turned to the bottle. “After all,” one old veteran wrote, “what else was there for the soldier to do but drink? He had a good deal of spare time and practically nothing to do with it, and not being a particularly imaginative fellow, he spent most of this time in the canteen.”<sup>21</sup> Cheap and plentiful alcohol did not come without a cost: more soldiers were charged with drunkenness than with any other offence. It was punished by loss of pay, imprisonment, or flogging. Drunkenness remained the mark of licentious behaviour in the opinion of the army’s detractors. Despite the acknowledged problem, serious consideration was never given to taking away the sailor’s or the soldier’s alcohol.<sup>22</sup> To do so would have been detrimental to morale and would possibly have brought acts of disobedience.

Canadian soldiers were similar to their British cousins in uniform with regard to many issues, including booze. Drinking and socializing were intertwined with Canadian militia units — some even sneered that alcohol was the essential and prime component of the militia’s training regime. It being ingrained in British tradition, there was no hesitation in providing alcohol to Canadian troops who fought under British command in the South African War from 1899 to 1902. When supplies could be found, the Canadians were issued a small quantity consisting of half a gill of rum three times per week, and soldiers were of course able to find other types of alcohol when closer to cities.<sup>23</sup> Thus, when Canadians went overseas in 1914, again to serve under the British, many expected full access to alcohol.

### Wet Canteens

The voyages across the Atlantic Ocean to England during the war were dreadful, with claustrophobic living conditions and the ever-present fear of submarine attacks. Nevertheless, this monotonous trip gave chaplains and teetotaling officers an opportunity to preach the benefits of abstaining from alcohol. Benedict Murdoch, a New Brunswick priest and army chaplain, had

20 Carol M. Whitfield, *Tommy Aitkens: The British Soldier in Canada, 1759–1870* (Ottawa: National Historic Parks and Sites Branch, 1981), p. 43. See the *Queen’s Regulations and Orders for the Army*, 1857, for the issue of “liquor-money” of one penny per day to soldiers.

21 Alan Ramsay Skelley, *The Victorian Army at Home* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1977), p. 144. See also Gwyn Harries-Jenkins, *The Army in Victorian Society* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), pp. 7–8; Edward Spiers, *The Army and Society, 1815–1914* (London: Longman, 1980), p. 41.

22 Mary A. Conley, “‘You Don’t Make a Torpedo Gunner Out of a Drunkard’: Agnes Weston, Temperance, and the British Navy”, *The Northern Mariner*, vol. 9, no. 1 (January 1999), pp. 1–22.

23 Reid, “Rum and the Navy”, p. 36.

witnessed troops stagger into bars and homes on desperate missions to find alcohol in the brief train stops as they moved towards embarkation on the ships, and he recorded that such actions left him “terribly disheartened” but “grateful to God for having chosen me to minister to them. For surely they needed a priest.”<sup>24</sup> By the end of the voyage, Murdoch had convinced 200 soldiers to sign temperance pledge cards. It was clear that some soldiers did indeed listen respectfully to the padres and temperance-minded officers; however, many more merely tolerated them because the alternative meant despised chores or training. Equally important, the rankers, unlike their officers, had no access to alcohol while on board ship. This changed when the First Contingent arrived at Plymouth in October 1914. All soldiers were awarded a week of leave, and many ruined their welcome by overindulging in the potent British beer.<sup>25</sup> “Crude accounts appear in English papers re: Canadians,” wrote a worried Brigadier-General Arthur Currie on October 16. Currie dispatched one of his staff officers to investigate, and the report came back that there were indeed a “great many drunken officers and men” in the city.<sup>26</sup> After the Canadians straggled back to their units, they were deposited on Salisbury Plain.

Following the orders of Sam Hughes — the “Foe of Booze”, as he was known to the soldiers — the Canadian training camp was “dry”, even if the ground was not.<sup>27</sup> After marching and training in driving rain and ankle-deep mud, the soldiers would have to be content with coffee and tea. That arbitrary decision was unacceptable to many of the men, who promptly made their way to nearby villages, converging on the taverns. With locals standing the boys drinks and Canadian soldiers paid significantly better than their British counterparts — they would later be known by Entente troops as the “fuckin’ five bobbers” — an explosive formation was in the making. Soldiers became drunk and disorderly, fighting among themselves and terrorizing the local civilians. One soldier recounted that “our men simply had not known how to drink; they were constantly getting into trouble and excuses had to be made for them all the time”.<sup>28</sup> Private James Gilbert noted that some of his companions were “guilty of the grossest excesses, and the English began to call us a bad lot. Children would run when they saw us coming, and ladies would not associate with us.”<sup>29</sup> Frank Fox, a deeply reli-

24 B. J. Murdoch, *The Red Vineyard* (Iowa: The Torch Press, 1923), pp. 30–32.

25 Desmond Morton, “The Canadian Military Experience in the First World War, 1914–1918”, in R. J. Q. Adams, ed., *The Great War 1914–1918* (London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 81.

26 Daniel G. Dancocks, *Sir Arthur Currie: A Biography* (Toronto: Methuen, 1985), p. 35.

27 Hughes had cabled Kitchener and asked him to order that there should be no wet canteens in the Canadian camp. NA, RG 24, v. 6931, file “canteens”, narrative, p. 1. Quote from Sam H. S. Hughes, “Sir Sam Hughes and the Problem of Imperialism”, Report of Annual Meeting of the Canadian Historian Association 1950, p. 30.

28 George Anderson Wells, *The Fighting Bishop* (Toronto: Cardwell House, 1971), p. 188.

29 *Alberta in the 20th Century: The Great War and its Consequences, Volume IV* (Edmonton: United Western Communications, 1994), p. 21.



gious medical orderly who prayed and sang hymns at night, echoed Gilbert's observation and confessed to his diary: "So badly did they [Canadians] act that passes were withheld. People became rather frightened of them."<sup>30</sup> Little of this aberrant behaviour made its way back to Canada as a result of censorship in both countries, but Divisional Commander Sir Edmund Alderson, a British professional, heard about it from the authorities who demanded that he reign in his unruly colonials.

Responding to the pressure, General Alderson sent a dispatch to the War Office in the last week in October 1914: "I have just arrived back here from Plymouth and find that it is absolutely necessary that there should be canteens for sale of beer in camp. The men, as I anticipated, finding no liquor in camp canteens, go to the neighbouring villages and get bad liquor, and become quarrelsome."<sup>31</sup> Most of the soldiers were pleased with the decision by their commander to revoke the "dry" policy, and "prolonged cheers" greeted the announcement.<sup>32</sup> As Lieutenant Victor Tupper, grandson of Sir Charles, noted in a letter home, "Our commander-in-chief, Major-General Alderson, seems to be a fine fellow; he was won the hearts of all ranks by fighting Sam Hughes and establishing wet canteens. He said, in short, that we had been treated as schoolboys long enough, and that in the future we would be handled like men."<sup>33</sup> Another officer remarked, "[T]he wet canteen is a Godsend and drinking has been reduced to a minimum. A man who is free to buy a mug of beer a couple of times a day does not try to keep a bottle of whiskey in his tent. Drunkenness has been practically stamped out and offences of all sorts have tended to steadily decrease. General Alderson is to be thanked for this."<sup>34</sup> Within a week, beer was being served to the men, although at first the wet canteens did not consist of much; Brigadier-General Arthur Currie, for instance, reported that never had he seen "a dirtier looking or more foul smelling bar room."<sup>35</sup> As more Canadians arrived in the camps in England, however, the wet canteens improved. In fact, the wet canteens contained more than just beer — they provided a dry spot to get out of the rain, tables for writing letters, and even pianos in the more up-scale establishments. William Curtis, a member of the 2nd Battalion and, like Tupper, killed during the war, was one of the few dissenters. "The wet canteens spoil it [the camp] to a certain extent," he wrote home in a letter to his mother. Curtis also observed that, to his surprise, "there sure is a lot of beer drunk every day."<sup>36</sup>

30 NA, MG 30 E565, Frank Benbow Fox papers, transcript of diary, p. 40.

31 NA, MG 27 II-B-9, A. E. Kemp papers, v. 118, file 8, despatch note; R.C. Fetherstonhaugh, *The 13th Battalion Royal Highlanders of Canada, 1914-1919* (Montreal, 1925), p. 22.

32 "Alderson Announces End of Teetotal Rule for Canteens", *Mail and Empire*, October 21, 1914. Clipping found in NA, MG 27, II-D07, v. 17, file 1525.

33 R. H. T., *Victor Gordon Tupper: A Brother's Tribute* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1921), p. 11.

34 NA, MG 30 E8, John Creelman papers, Diary, December 19, 1914.

35 NA, RG 24, v. 6931, file "canteens", Currie to Camp Commandant, West Down South Camp, October 28, 1914.

36 NA, MG 30 E 505, William Howard Curtis papers, letter to mother, December 6, 1914.

There may have been a lot of beer drunk, but at least it was beer and not hard liquor. Tighter restrictions and the lower alcoholic content of beer meant that soldiers indulging in it were more manageable. Moreover, drinking was confined to the camps. As one Overseas Military Forces report noted, "The wet canteens sell only beer, and it is presumed that it was considered that the establishment of regimental canteens would mitigate against the evils which would be associated with the patronage of public houses, which sell hard liquors and were otherwise objectionable."<sup>37</sup> The regulation of drink, by overseeing its issue and level of potency, allowed the military to re-exert control over discipline while keeping soldiers content.

Men had enlisted to fight the Kaiser for a number of reasons, many of which were impulsive or not well thought out. Soldiers stationed in overcrowded camps in England had further time to reconsider the choices they had made. Draconian discipline, mind-numbing boredom, intense training, abusive superiors, and the steady flow of information regarding mounting casualties from the Western Front must have begun to form some doubt in the minds of young men. Buttrressing against these fears and concerns were the positive features of patriotism, new friendships, the need not to be perceived as a shirker, and the ever-present spectre of military law. Nonetheless, there were few "prizes" for the men. Soldiers expected some of the comforts of regular life. Tobacco was cherished, and most smoked incessantly; newspapers and books were passed among a smaller group; cards and dice were popular among more; and, of course, drinking was a common pleasure for men of all ages and social groups.

Although Sam Hughes may have been against alcohol, he quite rightly stayed clear of the wet canteen issue once the British and Canadian generals on the scene decreed that it was necessary for both morale and discipline.<sup>38</sup> To take away the men's beer would force them to smuggle in alcohol, with the added possibility of going "absent without leave" or other forms of disobedience. Also, in the precarious world of army discipline, where soldiers are drilled to accept the notion that they must follow a man with higher rank, even if he be younger, from a lower class, or just plain stupid, it helped to

37 NA MG 27 II-B-9, A. E. Kemp papers, v. 147, file L-4, *Memorandum for the Honourable The Minister on the Subjects: (a) sale of Liquor on board Transports. (b) Wet Canteens in England and France. 18 June 1918* [hereafter Wet Canteen memo].

38 Ralph Allen, *Ordeal By Fire: Canada, 1910-1945* (New York: Doubleday, 1961), p. 67. When the question of rum rations came up in the House of Commons, Sam Hughes responded that, although he was a man of temperance, "when men were standing in trenches up to their waists in water ... I regard it, under these conditions, as a medicine and not as a beverage." During the discussion, however, he was quick to disparage Alderson for instigating the wet canteens and saw it as a "slap" at himself. Alderson's dismissal from command in May 1916 was due to a number of reasons, primarily the fight over the suitability of the Ross rifle and his inability to get along with his subordinate Canadian generals, especially Sir Richard Turner. However, the wet canteen issue was another, if under-explored, issue which first turned Hughes against Alderson. See NA, RG 24, v. 1271, HQ 593-2-34, *Hansard* (unrevised), House of Commons, February 6, 1917, p. 563.

have rewards with which to entice a soldier. The Canadian and British generals were forced to ensure that beer was available — but it would be under their terms and dispensed as a tool to fortify morale.

With the introduction of the wet canteens, the number of alcohol-related incidents sharply dropped. Unfortunately, the anxiety among officials did not. Although serving beer itself was not a major concern, the British and Canadian military authorities were worried about soldiers being victimized by “immoral” women while under the influence of drink. The two vices were thought to go hand in hand — and they usually did. The military tried to dissuade the men from associating with women. Francis Maheux, an Ottawa Valley logger, wrote to his wife that, after listening to his chaplain, he believed that the English women were “snakes from hell with fire in their mouth all over”.<sup>39</sup>

Notwithstanding such warnings, Canadian troops generally disregarded the lectures, as evidenced by the alarming number of cases of venereal disease (VD) in the overseas expeditionary forces. At its highest mark, 28.7 per cent of the men were reported to be infected, and by the end of the war some 15.8 per cent of overseas enlisted men had contracted some form of VD, a proportion almost six times that of British troops.<sup>40</sup> One account in the *Financial Post* forced the government to defend itself in the House of Commons: the article lamented that “Canadian troops in the old country are being debilitated and ruined for useful citizenship by these canteens and the birds of prey who hang around the camps and give the soldiers loathsome diseases.”<sup>41</sup> Idle women with lax morals, when supplied with “heedlessly liberal” separation allowances and access to alcohol within proximity of army camps, would result, as some of the more agitated reformers predicted, in a whole crop of bastard “war babies” and diseased soldiers.<sup>42</sup> The shifting of blame and responsibilities to women for the soldiers’ high rate of disease was similar to the argument employed in justifying the closing of bars and taverns when soldiers were caught dead drunk within.<sup>43</sup> Lloyd George, Minister of Munitions and future British Prime Minister, went so far as to say in March 1915 that the nation was fighting “Germany, Austria and Drink; and as far as I can see the greatest of these deadly foes is Drink.”<sup>44</sup> The Canadi-

39 Morton, *When Your Number's Up*, p. 47.

40 Jay Cassel, *The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada, 1838–1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), p. 123. For the prewar context surrounding sexual education, see Christabelle Sethna, “Men, Sex, and Education: The Ontario WCTU and Children’s Sex Education, 1900–20”, *Ontario History*, vol. 88, no. 3 (September 1996), pp. 185–206.

41 *House of Commons Debates*, April 26, 1917, p. 845.

42 Trevor Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986), pp. 152–163, 162.

43 NA, RG 9 II-B-1, v. 411, file D-35-1, CAS. 4887/32, Headquarters, Canadians, Crowborough, November 28, 1916, Under the defence of the Realm [Act]. See also correspondence in RG 9, II-B-1, v. 499, file L-7-1; Wilson, *The Myriad Faces of War*, pp. 152–163.

44 M. E. Ross, “The Success of Social Reform? The Central Control Board (Liquor Traffic) 1915–21”, in M. R. D. Foot, ed., *War and Society: Historical Essays in Honour and Memory of J. R. Western*,

ans, of course, were not alone in drinking, and there was worry throughout the United Kingdom that soldiers — both Dominion and Imperial — would wreak havoc as they engaged in drunken rampages.

Be it through naivety or dissimulation, in the eyes of the patriotic public, its brave boys were duped by all manner of more experienced and devious exploiters. Civilians in both England and Canada seemed incapable of holding the soldiers culpable for their own actions. Alcohol and women were blamed rather than the men who partook of their favours.<sup>45</sup> The very language employed by these civilian reformers — “our boys” as opposed to “our men” — constructed the view that soldiers in uniform needed to be protected, even if against themselves and their immoral urges. However, the soldiers’ agency in embracing alcohol — and prostitution — proved that they were not the victims envisioned by home-front reformers, and this led to a profound misunderstanding and misreading of the overseas situation.

### Home Front Reaction

In a letter of August 12, 1916, to a friend at home, Sergeant Cecil French of the 46th Battalion wrote that, when his regiment was given word that they were to proceed to France, there was a massive party where all available alcohol was consumed: “a teetotaler, sorry to say, is a curiosity in this army.”<sup>46</sup> Echoing French, Lieutenant-Colonel J. J. Creelman of the Canadian Field Artillery wrote in his diary, “As far as I know there are only two teetotalers in the Brigade, and they are brothers.”<sup>47</sup> Nonetheless, those soldiers who were against alcohol were sometimes outspoken and supplied those on the home front with chilling tales of seeming alcohol abuse. Stuart Thompkins remarked in a letter home to his wife on the absolute bravery of the average infantryman but lamented that, when they went on leave, “Some of these men are devils when they get ... booze.”<sup>48</sup> Very often, such letters were censored, but one letter that made it past the official screening was by a young medical officer corresponding with his father, who later published his son’s correspondence in the *Christian Guardian*. In it his officer-son outlined how alcohol corrupted young men and weakened the war effort. “Let me say in all seriousness that the poor fellows who have soddened themselves with alcohol haven’t an earthly chance on recovering from the ghastly

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1928–1971 (London: Paul Elek, 1973), p. 72. General Haig also believed that drink among civilians (but not soldiers, it should be added) was hurting the war effort, and he suggested shooting a couple of them as an example. Gerard J. DeGroot, *Blighty: British Society in the Era of the Great War* (London: Longman, 1996), p. 75.

45 See NA, RG 9 II-B-1, v. 712, file I-43-2, Copy of Resolution-Meeting of Chaplains, November 2, 1916, for an example.

46 NA, MG 30 E 558, v. 1, file 1, Cecil J. French papers, letter, August 12, 1916.

47 NA, MG 30 E8, John Creelman papers, Diary, May 26, 1916.

48 Stuart Ramsay Thompkins, *A Canadian’s Road to Russia* (Edmonton: University of Alberta Press, 1989), p. 226.

wounds caused by shrapnel; even the fellows who have been fairly temperate have a far harder fight for recovery as against abstainers. I don't know what you're doing in Canada about the drink business, but if you've any influence, for God's sake use it to suppress the cursed liquor traffic during the war."<sup>49</sup>

When it became clear that Alderson had organized wet canteens, temperance groups were outraged. This act was viewed as a betrayal of the war effort and the moral well-being of their men. One anonymous chronicler wrote an article called "Beer Line" that was published in the WCTU's periodical *White Ribbon Tidings*. The author noted with disgust that a beer line of hundreds of men, in single file, went through the canteen, drank their beer, and "as soon as they came out, fell in again at the rear of the queue to make their way in for another quart". The drinking seemed uncontrollable, and it shook prohibitionists on the home front when the article declared, "We did not send our sons over here for this."<sup>50</sup>

For mothers who had been promised that their sons would be safe from moral temptation, these flagrant stories of drinking were deeply disconcerting.<sup>51</sup> Charles Stafford of the 116th Battalion remembered that the only opposition his mother had to his enlistment was the possibility that he could "get in with a drinking bunch".<sup>52</sup> Many other Canadian soldiers had gone to war with promises to their loved ones that they would not drink. The conflict had been envisioned with a sporting metaphor — brave boys marching off to glory, as if off to a football match. They would soon be back from their little adventure with stories to spin and medals to show. The bloodbath of attritional warfare had affected some of the more naïve sporting notions, but, for many on the home front, alcohol was seen as one of the greatest enemies that a young man could encounter. In contrast, for soldiers who were trained every day to kill the enemy at first sight, the comparative evil of drinking alcohol, if it was ever seen as such, began to fade. The bizarre contradiction that soldiers were being made into disciplined fighting machines, but at the same time being dissuaded from drinking alcohol because it might drive them to immoral actions, was not lost on them. The argument was starkly laid out by one of the CEF chaplains: "When we sent our men to slaughter other men, to thrust bayonets into them and to experience all the carnage and devilry of war, don't you imagine it will make spiritual beings out of them because it won't."<sup>53</sup> That was, nonetheless, a difficult message to send home,

49 NA, Records of External Affairs (RG 25), v. 263, file P-3-99, "From the Christian Guardian: A letter received from a father in Victoria BC, whose son is with the medical corps at the front".

50 NA, RG 25, v. 263, file P-3-99, Extract of "Beer Line".

51 J. M. Bliss, "The Methodist Church and World War I", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 49 (September 1968), p. 220.

52 NA, Records of the CBC (RG 41), v. 17, transcript of interview with Charles Stafford, 116th BN, 1/1.

53 David B. Marshall, "Methodism Embattled: A Reconsideration of the Methodist Church and World War I", *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 66, no. 1 (1985), p. 57.

and it was not surprising that few surviving letters note the specific factors that marked the transformation from civilians to soldiers. It was much easier to write of the fine weather and the camaraderie among mates than it was to convey a message of how the war was actually to be won — by killing Germans through sniper sites, high explosive shelling, and suffocating them with poison gas. For soldiers, how was alcohol to compare with the horrors of war?

For their part, temperance advocates worried that young fighting men were at their most vulnerable during their military duty: away from the collective conscience of their families and other loved ones, buoyed by the artificial culture of young men intent on protecting the homeland in the face of bestial evil. Temperance forces could fiercely imagine the peculiar power of alcohol for impressionable youths in such circumstances. With no control over how soldiers were trained and in what campaigns they would eventually be employed, those on the home front at least found it possible, especially with the prewar perceptions regarding the evil of alcohol, to address the temperance issue, as it was within their sphere of influence when military matters were not. When it became clear to those on the home front that not only was alcohol available but also sanctioned by the military through wet canteens in England and daily rum rations in France, temperance groups began a campaign to save the boys overseas.<sup>54</sup>

Groups like the WCTU felt it necessary, after having won some battles at home, to go to war against alcohol in the overseas army. The plan of attack was to target not army administrators but federal politicians, a strategy that had served the WCTU well in the past. Public debates ensued and Canadian Methodist Dr. Samuel D. Chown, who had a son serving overseas, was not alone when he questioned the Army's "moral right" to pollute Canadian boys against their mothers' will.<sup>55</sup> Prohibitionist groups extended their letter-writing campaigns, drew up petitions, and attempted to shame the government into action. In less than six weeks, the Ontario WCTU raised a petition of 66,186 names signed only by worrying mothers.<sup>56</sup> Where unity of cause was seen as a necessary ingredient for victory, the dissent of this large and vocal group was viewed with concern by the federal government.

Pressure was exerted on all members of parliament and all the way up to the Prime Minister. Individual WCTU chapters passed resolutions against wet canteens.<sup>57</sup> On May 31, 1915, a delegation of women met with Borden

54 For the conflict over the rum issue, see Cook, " 'More as a medicine than a beverage' ".

55 Bliss, "The Methodist Church and World War I", p. 225; Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship*, pp. 97–98.

56 *Canadian Baptist*, April 1, 1915, p. 3; Ruth Elizabeth Spence, *Prohibition in Canada* (Toronto: The Ontario Branch of the Dominion Alliance, 1919), p. 71.

57 Archives of Ontario, MU 8439, Minute Book for Windsor WCTU, June 24, 1915; MU 8423, Minute Book for Newmarket Union, September 7, 1915; MU 8406, Report of the 37th Annual Convention of the Ontario WCTU (1914). The author would like to thank Dr. Sharon Cook for sharing these references.

to impress upon him the many dangers of allowing wet canteens in the army. They warned against “young men unaccustomed to the use of intoxicating liquors [who] are exposed through the medium of the wet canteen to a strong temptation [of] which they are often unable to resist”. Borden described them to his overseas minister Sir George Perley as “very earnest in expressing their views” and remarked that they warned: “the knowledge that their sons will be exposed to such temptations deters mothers from permitting them to enlist.”<sup>58</sup> Five days later, Borden sent an accompanying letter to Perley from H. A. Stevens, president of the Ontario WCTU, in which she had reported, “I heard today of a mother in one of our Eastern towns refusing to sign or give her consent to her son’s enlistment because of the stories she had heard from letters, of the drinking in the Canteens.”<sup>59</sup> Borden was distressed and asked Perley to investigate the wet canteen issue.

Having already seen the results of exclusively dry canteens, the military responded by resisting the call for temperance and claiming that the rate of drunkenness was extremely low and that drinking was controlled and necessary for war-fighting.<sup>60</sup> Major-General Samuel B. Steele, the Commander of Shorncliffe and distinguished member of the North West Mounted Police, wrote back to Perley at the Overseas Ministry. Steele noted that, although he had once been in favour of “dry camps”, with the local towns and the ready access to liquor, “Wet Canteens are, in my opinion, a safeguard and a help.” The military saw the wet canteens as a means of controlling intoxication and its troops, while responding to the men’s desire for some type of alcohol. Nonetheless, complaints continued to be lodged with headquarters, and one resident in the village of Saltwood queried if something could be done about “soldiers passing through the village frequently the worse for liquor”. The remarkably staid lady described how a soldier had “forced his way into the house”, and it had taken half an hour before he could be persuaded to leave. Days later, a second soldier tried to enter the unfortunate woman’s home and, finding the door now locked, tried to kick it in. Having failed at that, he stood “on the lawn and cursed for some time”.<sup>61</sup> All of this happened while there was supposedly a nightly patrolling picquet. Nonetheless, these incidents were small in proportion, if the records of complaints received from civilians are any indication. Of course, the incidents listed above involved soldiers who were drinking on their own and not in the controlled wet canteens. “Drunkenness amongst the soldiers in this command is very much less than amongst civilians,” claimed Steele, and “the charges made by the peo-

58 NA, RG 25, v. 263, file P-3-99, Borden to Perley, June 16, 1915.

59 NA, RG 25, v. 263, file P-3-99, Hattie A. Stevens to Borden, June 18, 1915.

60 NA, RG 25, v. 277, file P-8-15, Ashplant to Borden, May 24, 1917; Kemp to Borden, June 14, 1917; Kemp papers, Wet Canteen Memo.

61 NA, RG 9 III, vol. 600, file C-34-2 pt2, Commander of 4th Canadian Infantry Reserve Brigade to Headquarters, Canadian Training Division, Shorncliffe, December 13, 1915.

ple in Canada in regard to drunkenness and the temptations which face the Canadian soldiers in this Country are without foundation.”<sup>62</sup>

The army responded to the political pressure not by closing the wet canteens, but by reducing the hours they were open and by organizing parallel dry canteens.<sup>63</sup> These dry canteens sold magazines, candy, coffee, and cigarettes, and, as one report noted, the army had “spent a great deal of money endeavouring to make the grocery and coffee bars much more attractive by comparison to the beer bar”.<sup>64</sup> On January 1, 1917, the Army Canteen Committee took over the running of all canteens in the United Kingdom. It was estimated that they collectively had sales of between £80 and £100 million a year. More than half of the sales were expenditures on coffee and food rather than alcohol. Profits of more than \$200,000 were eventually awarded to the Canadian government at the close of the war.<sup>65</sup> Even with the success of these camp stores, wet canteens were necessary, and all correspondence from the military in England noted that, without controlled drinking, soldiers would find alcohol one way or another and the result would be far more damaging to discipline, morale, the local population, and the reputation of the Canadian soldier. As the Overseas Minister, George Perley, wrote to Sir George Foster, Borden’s Minister of Trade and Commerce, in May 1917: “While anything which will tend to curb the drink evil is entitled to warm support, the stimulation over here is such that the abolition of the wet canteen would not be desirable.”<sup>66</sup> Despite the pressure applied by temperance advocates, Borden and his ministers were not willing to overturn the decision of their commander at the front and reimpose prohibition in the army camps. The campaign against alcohol and the army did not end there, however.

The issue continued to rankle temperance groups. In the form of lectures, pamphlets, and monographs, abstainers hammered away at the issue. Temperance texts like Vance Thompson’s *Drink and Be Sober* (1917) went so far as to exclaim: “Men with drink in them cannot even fight.... Drink does not give courage ... all it does is to destroy the moral nature in the man.”<sup>67</sup> *The*

62 NA, Sir Richard Turner papers, MG 30 E46, v. 11, file 86, Wet Canteens, Major-General S. B. Steele to OMFC, May 2, 1917. See also NA, RG 24, v. 1271, HQ 593–2–34, Smart to Secretary, Headquarters, Canadians, “Drunkenness”, April 30, 1917.

63 John Patrick Teahan, *Diary Kid*, ed. Grace Keenan Prince (Ottawa: Oberon Press, 1999), p. 19.

64 NA, Kemp papers, Wet Canteen Memo.

65 Lieutenant-Colonel Spencer, a merchant from Medicine Hat who had come overseas with the 175th Battalion, was appointed as the Canadian representative on the Army Canteen Committee. “It is estimated that the turnover of the Canteens in England will vary from 80 to 100 million sterling annually and this affords a most unusual outlet for Canadian supplies, particularly canned goods of all kinds, cheese, bacon, etc.” NA, MG 27, II–B–9, Kemp papers, v. 70, file 12, Perley to Prime Minister, February 5, 1917; Arthur Shadwell, *Drink in 1914–1922: A Lesson in Control* (New York: Longmans, Green and Company, 1923), pp. 3–13.

66 NA, MG 27 II–D–7, v. 17, file 1525, Perley to Foster, May 8, 1917.

67 Vance Thompson, *Drink and Be Sober* (New York: Association Press, 1916), p. 180.



*Fiddlers* by Arthur Mees, the founder of the Books of Knowledge, was so vitriolic in its portrayal of alcoholism and venereal disease among Canadian troops that it was eventually banned in the belief that it would create “disillusionment with England and the cause of the war”. The pages were filled with disturbing and sometimes absurd images like the “Canadian soldier, helplessly drunk, seen at King’s Cross Station tearing, crumpling up, and eating one pound notes”.<sup>68</sup> Despite the ban, the book could be found in Canada and was popular among temperance advocates.

Drink was still portrayed as a symbol of slovenly behaviour, including the probable shirking of duty. This image, however, was difficult to sustain because the men serving overseas were clearly already making a sacrifice. As a result, the argument to ban alcohol was based on assertions that it degraded the fighting skills of the soldiers, as well as leaving them morally disarmed in the face of “preying” women. It was imperative that inexperienced boys not become infected with a taste for alcohol, then return to Canada after the war to sow misery and depravity. These anti-drink groups had some impact on the consciousness of those in power. After 1917, Chief Justice of the Quebec Supreme Court, F.-X. Lemieux, blamed weak recruitment in Quebec on reports of drunkenness in army camps. “Surely such examples were hardly of a nature to place recruiting in a favourable light in the estimate of fathers and mothers of families. Enlistment appeared fraught with danger for the morals of their sons; it seemed to them a school of drunkenness and depravity,” he wrote to Prime Minister Borden in January 1917.<sup>69</sup> At the Ontario Prohibition Convention of March 8, 1917, the WCTU passed a resolution that the Convention “views with extreme regret and genuine concern the use of the wet canteen, the rum ration and the permission [later changed to ‘existence’] of conditions concerning social vice with the gravest possible effect”.<sup>70</sup> More troubling was the letter written by the president of the London (Ontario) WCTU, Jane Ashplant, to Borden on May 24, 1917, stating that her organization had voted unanimously that “conscriptio[n] should not be put in force until the British drink traffic is prohibited and the vicious conditions permitted in English cities are stamped out”.<sup>71</sup> Drink had therefore become an issue that not only threatened to erode morale on the

68 Arthur Mees, *The Fiddlers* (Westonville, Ohio, n.p., n.d. [1918]), p. 37. The prime minister and several senior ministers were disturbed by Mees’s false allegations. See NA, Kemp papers, v. 118, file 8. Quote from David Edward Smith, “Emergency Government in Canada”, *Canadian Historical Review*, vol. 50, no. 4 (December 1969), p. 440.

69 J. L. Granatstein and J. M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscriptio[n] in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977), p. 33. A similar point is raised in J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs: 1915* (Toronto, 1916), pp. 217, 337.

70 J. Castell Hopkins, *The Canadian Annual Review, 1917* (Toronto: The Canadian Annual Review Limited, 1918), p. 512.

71 NA, RG 25, v. 277, file P-8-15, Jane Ashplant to Borden, May 24, 1917. In general, though, most women supported conscriptio[n]. See Bray, *The English Canadian Patriotic Response*, p. 353; Granatstein and Hitsman, *Broken Promises*, p. 75.

home front but also to impinge on the war effort itself. Caught between the two powerful interest groups of the army and temperance advocates, the government, in that best Canadian political tradition, refused to commit itself to an act that would alienate either constituency. The soldiers, on the other hand, responded with vigour.

### **Soldiers' Reactions**

Communal drinking has always brought individuals together. The soldiers enjoyed their beer, and they enjoyed drinking in the company of one another.<sup>72</sup> Alcohol in the training camps helped to make the near unbearable drabness of army life more pleasurable, and it became an important part of their culture. Having willingly given up much of their freedom and identity when they enlisted, many men saw the wet canteens as something the army owed them. It was with real anger, then, that soldiers responded to the temperance advocates on the home front who were trying to deny them their beer.

Aware of the daunting pressure to abolish alcohol in the army, men who joined "the colours" wrote home attempting to convince those on the home front of alcohol's importance. It was a wrenching task for some, especially the padres, many of whom had been at the forefront of the temperance cause before the war. Their calling required their rejection of alcohol, but to fight against it meant losing all influence they might have had with the soldiers.<sup>73</sup> Reverend W. B. Casell, Chaplain of the 18th Reserve Battalion at Kent, declared, "I hate the rancid smell of stale beer that haunts these places [wet canteens], and for them I am no apologist; but you must remember that we are surrounded by innumerable hotels which have no shortage of strong drink, and the canteen is not the worse of the two; indeed, under present conditions something can be said in its favour. But when these have done their work the Canadian soldier is not by any means a moral or a physical wreck through either wine or nicotine."<sup>74</sup> Despite their prewar perceptions, many of the chaplains of the overseas forces came to realize the importance of alcohol in the soldier's life.

Not just the padres, but also the soldiers attempted to convey the necessity of making alcohol available in a regulated setting. One such Canadian, 19-year-old Claude Vivian Williams, a medical student before the war and a winner of the Military Cross at Vimy Ridge, tried to convince his father in a letter: "This war has opened my eyes a great deal about the drink question. Like thousands of others, I am now no longer bigoted against the drink traf-

72 For an examination of this issue, see Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), pp. 79–81, 109.

73 Crerar, *Padres in No Man's Land*, p. 37.

74 NA, Kemp papers, v. 118, file 8, newspaper clipping, March 28, 1917, "Canadian Soldier Behaving Himself". For another example, see Canon Frederick George Scott, *The Great War as I Saw It* (Vancouver: The Clarke & Stuart Co. Limited, 1934), p. 31.

fic if properly controlled. I have seen that done here.”<sup>75</sup> Others were less balanced in their judgements. As one soldier’s newspaper, *The Listening Post*, angrily suggested: “Till they come and share the crapping / At the side of fighting men / They should stop their yapping / Never to commence again.”<sup>76</sup> That sentiment was echoed by Harold Baldwin, who served with the 5th Battalion and lost his leg in the war. In his 1918 memoirs, he seethed with anger towards temperance groups that sought specifically to remove the rum ration for soldiers, but his attack is equally applicable for those who advocated prohibition throughout the army:

Oh you psalm-singers, who raise your hands in horror at the thought of the perdition the boys are bound for, if they should happen to take a nip of rum to keep in little warmth in their poor battered bodies. I wish you could all lie shivering in a hole full of icy liquid, with every nerve in your body quivering with pain, with the harrowing moans of the wounded forever ringing in your ears, with hell’s own din raging all around. Any one of you would need a barrel of it to keep his miserable life in his body.<sup>77</sup>

Soldiers saw the absurdity of being forced to live in vast, impersonal camps, where they were daily trained in methods of killing the enemy, and then have those on the home front implore them to abstain from alcohol.

But prohibition advocates were not acting maliciously in attempting to bring temperance to the army. A contemporary history described the temperance groups as “not always well-informed”.<sup>78</sup> Yet that was not quite right. Rather, the temperance groups understood the issue within their own context. They strongly believed that war might take the soldiers’ bodies, but alcohol should not take their souls. The difference in perception over the value or danger presented by alcohol, then, provides an insight into the dichotomy between the distinct cultures of the home front and the firing line. Although the patriotic home front tried desperately to keep abreast of what was happening in the trenches, the distance alone, when combined with disingenuous letters from soldiers who often depicted the war in “rosy” hues because they did not want to trouble their families or could not find the words to express their suffering, along with stifling censorship, dulled and anesthetized the worst aspects of the war.<sup>79</sup> But this alone cannot fully explain the cleft that developed.

75 NA, MG 30 E 400, Claude Vivian Williams papers.

76 Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship*, p. 144.

77 Harold Baldwin, *Holding the Line* (Chicago: A. C. McClurg, 1918), p. 267.

78 Charles A. H. Raymond, “At Salisbury Plain”, in *Canada in the Great War: Volume II, Days of Preparation* (Toronto: United Publishers of Canada, n.d. [this six volume history was published 1917–1921]), p. 285.

79 For deeper analysis of these issues, see Samuel Hynes, *The Soldiers’ Tale: Bearing Witness to Modern War* (Allen Lake: The Penguin Press, 1997); Keshen *Propaganda and Censorship*. For an opposing view of what those on the home front knew, see Ian H. M. Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001).

Exposed to stories of German atrocities and living through the hyper-patriotism in the first years of the war, those on the home front viewed the war in much the same way from start to finish. Although there was a significant decline in recruits by the summer of 1916, so much so that conscription had to be invoked the next year, very few people ever publicly challenged the fundamental question of whether Canadians should be fighting overseas. In fact, when the casualty lists were published, only a faith in patriotism and perseverance got many through the helpless waiting. At the same time, overseas soldiers were also part of the “hurry up and wait” policy that is prevalent in all armies. For those who went to France, the war would be a long, grinding, attritional conflict. However, with massive casualties occurring from 1915 to 1918, large numbers of replacements were always necessary. New soldiers often spent months in training camps before being sent over to fill the gaping holes in the front-line battalions. While they trained in England, these men refused to live completely Spartan lives. Soldiers might not have embraced alcohol to the full extent envisioned by worrying prohibitionists, but they would surely not stand for non-combatants denying them a pleasure so heavily infused with symbolic significance. The campaign to ban the wet canteen demonstrates that each constituency, military and civilian, contained within it several distinct cultures that were crystallized on questions of pleasure and danger. These included tobacco, and undoubtedly other drug use, the attraction of women, and alcohol. Of this constellation, however, the most contentious and divisive was alcohol.

It is perhaps not surprising, then, that veterans booed and jeered rather than thanked the WCTU as the women marched proudly down those Toronto streets as winter turned to spring in 1919. But it must have been bewildering for those women — and other like-minded reformers — to realize that their patriotism had not only been mocked but also reviled by overseas soldiers. The march brought two small segments of these groups together, many for the first time since the war. While the actions of the veterans did not live up to their portrayal as “returning heroes” and their effectiveness in eventually overturning prohibition legislation is debatable, the counter-march did illustrate their bitter resentment.<sup>80</sup>

During the war, as prohibitionists fought to ban drink, a divisive edge was driven into the gulf between the two cultures — the soldiers in the trenches and the civilians on the home front. The relationship between the two was not one of constant strife, but the wet canteen issue provides a window into the nuanced relationship between soldiers and civilians, with an understanding that there were various levels of patriotism. While all may have been fighting a nearly unlimited war, their hopes and goals were not uniform.

80 Hallowell, *Prohibition in Ontario*, pp. 82-3, 138; Morton and Wright, *Winning the Second Battle*, p. 118; James Gray, *Booze* (Scarborough: Signet Classics, 1974 [original 1972]), p. 178.